

AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

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The increasing prevalence of marital breakdown in the United States has been met by the proliferation of premarital counseling programs in professional counseling centers and churches. As increasing masses of couples turn to premarital counseling to prevent future interpersonal problems, and as communities and churches across the United States deem it necessary to require them to do so, the rhetoric of premarital counseling, I argue, is becoming a significant force in constructing contemporary meanings of marriage.

Utilizing rhetorical criticism as a new method for examining premarital counseling, this study addresses two key issues: a) the images of marriage constructed in these programs; and b) the process by which these images are created. An extensive analysis of two national programs,

messages embodied in their counseling materials, themes, symbols, and clusters of terms that facilitate persuasion and epistemic functions. Applying a Burkean dramatic perspective, I contend that a more complete understanding of premarital counseling is advanced if such discourse is treated as "drama" and the participants in such discourse as "symbol-using animals." The dramatic analysis of both programs reveals that a "rhetoric of rebirth" best explains the process of persuasion that occurs in these programs.

This research is an example of how premarital counseling programs can be analyzed from a fresh perspective--namely, premarital counseling as rhetoric. Such analysis ultimately leads to a new way of explaining how these programs attempt to modify couples' beliefs and actions. The last chapter summarizes the thesis, discusses the ethics of rhetoric in programs, as well as the limitations and contributions of the study and implications for future research.

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Prepare Before You Say "I Do": The Rhetorical Construction
of Marriage in Premarital Counseling Programs

by

Jun Young

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To my friends from Biola and beyond.

And finally, to engaged couples everywhere who seek to enrich their relationship through premarital preparation.

Good luck! I mean that.

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DEDICATION

To Amy, my lovely bride; and to our ever-faithful
Bridegroom.

PREPARE BEFORE YOU SAY "I DO": THE RHETORICAL CONSTRUCTION
OF MARRIAGE IN PREMARITAL COUNSELING PROGRAMS

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

During the last 30 years the art of rhetorical criticism has experienced an evolution marked by broad interests and pluralistic perspectives. Brock, Scott, and Chesebro (1990) observed:

For some, rhetorical criticism is undertaken to manage societal interactions more effectively, for others rhetorical criticism promotes individual understandings, while some undertake critical analyses of rhetoric to reveal the dynamic processes of society itself. Another group hopes that rhetorical analyses will reveal the influence of society itself as a socializing agency while others quite clearly believe that rhetorical criticism can create new political alignments within our social systems. (p. 17)

Though approaches to rhetorical criticism continue to expand, a basic goal seems to endure: to call attention to a phenomenon, interpret it, and judge it so that we can learn from it (Brock, Chesebro, & Scott, 1990). As rhetorical criticism becomes a diverse enterprise of analyzing human interaction, research in the field finds rhetorical transactions in a wide range of pragmatic artifacts such as television shows, textbooks, newspaper advice columns, advertisements, music, humor, legal and medical documents, academic disciplines, social movements,

and computer-mediated communication.¹ This growth in the scope and nature of rhetorical criticism leads not only to the continued development of rhetorical theory but also to a better understanding of the artifacts of analysis (Nothstine, Blair, & Copeland, 1994, pp. 55-56). Toward such ends, this thesis examines an uncharted context for criticism: premarital counseling programs (PCPs).

The Practice of Premarital Counseling

The institution of marriage, to some extent, is shaped by the social milieu of the times. Contributing to this process, contemporary family therapists and researchers assess social trends in marital problems to discover the most effective methods for helping individual couples. Generally, marriage counseling focuses on a specific dysfunction that has already plagued the relationship and attempts to aid the couple manage such problems. The practice of premarital counseling, though also remedial in certain aspects, reflects more the assumption that marital dysfunction can be predicted and prevented before it occurs (Fowers, Montel, & Olson, 1996). Consequently, this type of counseling deals with relatively "healthy" couples and is designed "primarily as an experience to enhance and

¹ Such studies are included in recent anthologies of rhetorical criticism and rhetorical theory texts such as: Burghardt (1995); Brock, Scott, & Chesebro (1990); Campbell (1996); Foss, Foss, & Trapp (1991); Golden, Berquist, & Coleman (1992); Nothstine, Blair, & Copeland (1994); Rybacki & Rybacki (1991)

enrich growing relationships and secondly to treat pathological ones" (Stahmann & Hiebert, 1980, p. 11).

In Premarital Counseling: A Manual for Ministers, one of the first books on the topic, J. Kenneth Morris (1960) described premarital counseling as:

. . . that form of counseling which centers around the interpersonal relationship of a man and a woman, helps them evaluate their relationship in view of their approaching marriage and acquaints them with the ways by which they may build a happy and successful marriage, or, in the light of evaluation of their relationship, results in their deciding against marriage. (p.15)

Today's premarital counselors discuss a wide variety of issues such as wedding preparation, expectations for marriage, sex, communication styles, gender/sex roles, finances, and family background (Stahmann & Hiebert, 1980; Wright, 1992). Aims of premarital counseling include improving dyadic communication and constructive conflict resolution skills, increasing self-disclosure and couple intimacy, and developing other skills deemed to be necessary in a successful marital relationship.

Although individual premarital counseling programs vary greatly, Stahmann and Hiebert (1980, pp. 33-43) describe numerous elements common to most PCPs:

- 1) the provider(s)--a counselor or a married couple who leads, guides, or instructs engaged couples

- 2) the clients--engaged couples
- 3) the sessions--specified and structured meetings between the counselor and clients
- 4) goals--expressed or unexpressed expectations of the counselor and clients
- 5) printed materials--books, pamphlets, tests, exercises, and other materials

Because individual churches, professional practitioners, and physicians create their own PCPs, no exhaustive national inventory of all the programs is available to date. However, the following programs market to a national population: Christian Marriage Enrichment, Growth Together, Couple Skills, Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program (PREP), and Training in Marriage Enrichment.

During the last two decades the practice of premarital counseling has received much attention from religious organizations. For instance, in his 1981 letter on the family, Pope John Paul II urged churches to "promote better and more intensive programs of marriage preparation in order to eliminate as far as possible the difficulties couples find themselves in" (as cited in Lawler, 1995, p. 12). Likewise, the National Council on Families in America challenged all religious organizations to "establish and strengthen premarital counseling" (as cited in Lawler, 1995, p. 12). Currently, many churches and synagogues strongly urge their engaged members to seek marriage preparation; some make counseling mandatory. In fact,

several communities in California, Alaska, Florida, Connecticut, and Alabama have installed "community marriage policies"--a pledge among churches to require engaged couples to attend extensive premarital counseling. As part of this pledge, churches also refrain from marrying couples who have been turned down by another church in the area (Johnson, 1995, pp. 35-36; McManus, 1994, pp. 53-54; Wright, 1992, pp. 24-25). These communities hope that such a focus on premarital counseling can "enable every church to become known as a 'marriage saver' rather than as a 'wedding factory'" (McManus, 1995, p. 53).

Premarital counseling also receives acclaim from academia and the civil arena. Seen primarily as a preventive strategy to decrease marital dissolution and dissatisfaction (Markman, Renick, Floyd, Stanley, & Clements, 1993), some scholars go so far as to insist that marriage preparation also can reduce future chances of domestic violence (Lawler, 1995; Markman, Renick, Floyd, Stanley, & Clements, 1993). Furthermore, in 1970, California became the first state in the United States to require premarital counseling for couples applying for marriage licenses where either partner is under 18 years of age (Elkin, 1977). The Superior courts of other cities in the U.S. have also implemented such a requirement. Emphasizing the pragmatic social significance of PCPs, Dr. David H. Olson (1983), a pioneer in the study of premarital intervention, made the following recommendations:

1) Premarital preparation should be seen as a national priority to help marriage get off to a good start. The prevention of divorce begins with providing good premarital preparation.

2) Premarital couples should be encouraged to begin the process of preparation and dealing with relationship issues at least one [emphasis in original] year before marriage.

3) Premarital couples and their parents should be encouraged to spend as much money, time, and energy in preparing for the marriage relationship as they do for the wedding ceremony. This will help ensure that they see marriage as an important investment and as a process that continues for the life of the individuals.

4) Research should be continued to find the most effective types of premarital preparation programs. It would be useful to assess the relative advantages of various types of programs to determine when each can be most appropriately and effectively offered.

5) Lay couples should be encouraged to become actively involved with premarital couples and to work with them through their first year of married life. (p.74)

Today, experts in the field of marriage and family life believe premarital counseling is crucial to the marriage (Boisvert, Ladouceur, Beaudry, Freeston, Turgeon, Tardif, Roussy, & Loranger, 1995; Fowers, Montel, & Olson, 1996; Holman, Larson, & Harmer, 1994; Markman, Renick, Floyd, Stanley, & Clements, 1993; Wright, 1992). In as much as premarital counseling continues to have pragmatic social value, further research in the area remains justified.

A Rationale for a Rhetorical Approach

Walter Fisher (1970) describes rhetoric as "discourse expressing a theme or thesis, an inference or judgment, which is to be preferred above any other proposition of proposal that relates to its subject matter" (p. 131). In this way, "rhetorical discourse is advisory; it says how one should think, feel, and act in a given case where certainty cannot be achieved" (p.131). Premarital counseling, in that it advises couples and in many cases attempts to modify couples' behavior and beliefs about marriage, can certainly be classified as rhetorical communication. This brand of rhetoric attempts to connect with audiences (clients) by constructing, what Fisher calls, "images"--especially images of marriage. Though not polemic in nature, such rhetoric, Fisher explains, can be powerful for "images always reflect how one ought to behave in regard to their subject matter" (p. 131). Images are value-laden and ethically-prone. They tell us what is right, who to believe, and how to act. Thus, examining them may illuminate the ideologies, morals, and worldviews of the people who create and promote such images.

The practice of premarital counseling belongs under a wider category of psychological or psychotherapeutic services, and as such, encompasses a form of discourse that seeks to transform human perceptions of self and society. Makay (1980) explains:

A society becomes increasingly psychologically oriented through the efforts of humans seeking solace and some sort of salvation, the scholar of rhetoric has a rich area in which to increase her or his understanding of the process of human communication and the theory of rhetoric. (p. 184)

Premarital counseling, to the extent that it has become a place where couples seek "solace and some sort of salvation," warrants a critical examination from rhetorical scholars interested in advancing a more complete understanding of premarital counseling and the art of rhetoric in general.

However, researchers have yet to examine the rhetoric of premarital counseling. A review of germane literature from 1950 to the present, reveals that most studies regarding PCPs focus primarily on establishing and validating the structure and approach of new or revised premarital programs, assessing the effectiveness of existing programs, and surveying clients' perceptions of programs. I propose a rhetorical analysis of PCPs is an endeavor that will provide a more complete understanding of the practice of premarital counseling. First, a rhetorical approach can illuminate the means by which rhetors induce cooperation. Second, a rhetorical approach enables a critical analysis of the printed materials utilized in premarital counseling. Finally, rhetorical criticism can provide a more complete examination of premarital

counseling as a rhetorical situation that fits into a larger socio-cultural system.

A Focus on Means

Previous research concentrates empirical inquiry on whether the means of PCPs accomplish the desired ends (e.g. whether a program actually improves a marital relationship). However, little attention has been given to the consequences of these means by which PCPs attain their ends (i.e. strategies and underlying normative assumptions embedded in the program). This lack hinders a more complete understanding of PCPs. Scholars from various fields have recently emphasized the need for more critical evaluations of theoretical assumptions of therapy and counseling services (Dilworth-Anderson, Burton, Johnson, 1993; Dilworth-Anderson, Burton, & Turner, 1993; Jones, 1995; Segal, 1995). Such scholars question the appropriate applicability of prescriptive approaches of counseling to women and minority groups. In fact, investigations have already delved into the means of other therapeutic and counseling contexts such as marriage and family counseling (Hare-Mustin, 1986). However, even these types of means-centered research still neglect the rhetorical aspect of counseling.

Brock, Chesebro, and Scott (1990) explained that "criticism contains a judgmental dimension. In some way or

another, implicitly or explicitly, the critic says that the rhetoric, product, or process, is well done or ill. Accordingly, a dimension of the criticism is evaluation" (p. 16). Whereas current approaches to research in this field tend to focus on the validity and reliability of specific programs, a rhetorical examination of PCPs provides grounds whereby judgments about the practice of premarital counseling can be made.

Discourse Analysis

A focus on means suggests the need for a critical analysis of the discourse produced in PCPs; after all, premarital counseling induces cooperation from couples primarily through the use of language. An underlying assumption of PCPs is that certain relationship characteristics and interactional skills are important for the engaged couple (Bagarozzi & Rauen, 1981). Emerging from this assumption--whether explicitly or not--are the programs' meanings about various aspects of marriage. For example, PCPs teach couples how to achieve a "successful marriage." Thus a primary aim of premarital counseling is to convince couples that the program's meanings (in this case the meaning of a "successful marriage" and how to acquire it) are valid and imperative. An evaluation of these meanings can be carried out in two ways: (a) by transcribing and analyzing the actual interpersonal

communication between counselor and clients (Sharf, 1976)²; and (b) by examining the discourse found in program manuals and other materials.

I have chosen the latter option for this thesis for a number of reasons. First, program materials are easier to access than counseling transcriptions, thus making the research more feasible. Furthermore, the rhetoric of these materials has been unexplored. As such, this study attempts to fill a gap in the current body of knowledge about premarital counseling and various aspects of the rhetoric of counseling materials. Second, transcripts may be limiting in that the communication documented in them reflect primarily the communication style of individual counselors. Manuals and other PCP materials symbolize a more enduring, uniform set of messages assumed to reflect the counselors' general assumptions about marriage. These materials remain relatively consistent--that is the same materials are used for a wide range of couples. In this way PCP materials, to some degree, may transcend individual characteristics of counselors to provide a symbolic slice of the rhetoric of premarital counseling. Finally, some PCP materials reach a larger audience than individual counselors. For example, the PREPARE program has been used to help over 400,000 couples since 1979 (Olson, 1993). Unlike the practice of most individual counselors, packaged

² Sharf (1976) analyzes the rhetoric of communication in marriage counseling.

PCP programs potentially shape the relationships of a multitude of couples. Thus the rhetoric of premarital counseling can be identified by examining the messages embedded in the materials used in these programs (i.e. books, program manuals, exercises, questionnaires, videos, etc.) and how investigating such discourse affects a couple's interpersonal relationship.

The power of written discourse to affect interpersonal relationships has been explored by several communication scholars. Koester (1982) analyzed the rhetoric of popular self-help books giving advice to businesswomen. She explained that such books are persuasive in that they attempt to convince women as to what strategies and skills they need to achieve success in the business area. Employing a fantasy theme analysis, she examined meanings constructed in these books and evaluated the practicality and logic of the such meanings. Hubbard (1985) examined romance novels in a similar fashion.

Along the same lines, Kidd's (1975) research examined the rhetoric of advice in popular magazines including Redbook, Reader's Digest, Seventeen, and Saturday Evening Post. Kidd evaluated how articles giving advice about human relationships provided for "an understanding of the world, motivation for behavior, and most importantly, cues for meaning to be given to various verbal and nonverbal interaction" (p. 31). Although these articles were not "verification of the beliefs of the readers," Kidd asserts

that "they can be presumed both to reflect and to inspire attitudes" as well as indicate the "popular mood" of the times (p. 32).

Similar to these various types of popular literature, premarital counseling materials are rhetorical in nature in that they symbolize and promote certain images of marriage. However, PCP materials stand out as particularly interesting artifacts in that they have unique rhetorical dimensions that set them apart from other literature that give advice about relationships:

1. PCP materials are targeted specifically to engaged couples, who according to Boike (1977) and Blumberg (1992), are in a crisis of transitions. That is, this stage in the life cycle is marked by uncertainty as both partners must redefine their roles as a married couple. Also, the couples may have doubts about their readiness for marriage. Such transitions are often marked with cognitive disruption and necessitate a "healthy crisis resolution." During this state of disequilibrium, Boike asserts, premarital couples are more receptive to counseling or instruction. Thus engaged individuals are more susceptible to influence by outside forces, especially premarital counseling programs.

2. Unlike magazines, newspaper advice columns, or self-help books, PCP materials are increasingly becoming required reading, particularly for premarital couples who desire a religious ceremony. As such, couples may feel coerced into partaking in the rhetoric.

3. Rarely do PCPs allow couples to have these counseling materials without proper guidance from a counselor--usually a professional therapist or pastoral counselor. Thus the rhetoric of counseling materials is connected to the power of the counselors who administer them. Furthermore, such materials are used in a counseling setting in which counselors use these materials partly as a guide to see if couples are "healthy" or not. A primary aim of these materials is to test couples' skills, predict marital satisfaction, and prevent marital breakdown. Whereas individuals may read other types of literature for entertainment or self-enrichment, premarital couples may deem the PCP materials as an important ritual in preparing for marriage. Such materials are so important, in fact, that they are part of "counseling."

Premarital Counseling as Social Rhetoric

A final rationale for utilizing rhetorical criticism in this study of premarital counseling deals with the social element of rhetoric. As discussed above, a rhetorical analysis of premarital counseling will enable me to analyze the discourse of PCP materials to examine the means by which these programs induce cooperation from couples. Apart from rhetorical means, this study is also concerned with the social definitions embedded in PCPs.³

³ "Social definitions," as I use the term here, alludes to the tendency of rhetorical discourse to provide tokens of

Rybacki and Rybacki (1991) liken rhetorical acts to "time capsules":

Much can be discovered about a society or cultural era by studying its communication artifacts...By studying rhetorical activity, we learn what issues were significant to a society, who was important enough to have discussed and debated them, and what forces shaped society. By discovering who controlled the issues, we learn who had the ability to affect social change and perceived reality. We can also ascertain what the society perceived to be "truth." (p. 9)

Because rhetoric, to some degree, reveals what society lauds and condemns, the social element of rhetoric becomes critical for a complete analysis of rhetorical artifacts. In this study, I propose that a rhetorical criticism of premarital counseling materials will provide glimpses of how groups in society define the concept of "marriage."⁴

Campbell (1996) explains that rhetoric is a social phenomenon in that it requires an audience:

Because rhetoric is addressed to others, it gives reasons; and because it is social and public, it uses as reasons the values accepted and affirmed by a subculture or culture. In this way,

values and ideologies upheld in society or a cultural group. For more detailed discussions on this topic see Borhmann (1972), Campbell (1996, p. 7-8), Black (1970), and Weaver (1985).

⁴ These "groups" in society may constitute a wide and diverse population, including the counselors who administer the programs, couples who serves as consumers, various religious and academic organizations who create and evaluate the programs, the county and state agencies who promote legislation to require certain couples to participate in PCPs, and media who acknowledge the value of PCPs.

rhetoric is tied to social values, and rhetors' statements will reflect the social norms of particular groups, times, and places. (p. 10)

Rybacki and Rybacki (1991) argue toward a similar conclusion: "Because its purpose is instrumental, a rhetorical act requires an audience of people who are capable of choosing to make the change in belief or behavior the rhetor seeks. It is this social quality of rhetorical activity that makes it susceptible to influence by cultural norms" (p.3). Some may insist that these rhetorical theorists had a more public discourse in mind (e.g. a speech or essay directed toward a large public audience).⁵ However, when they claim that rhetoric is social because it is "addressed to an audience," these theorists do not limit the notion of "audience" to a large group or mass. Though the rhetoric of premarital counseling is usually addressed to two people or a small group, it is, nonetheless, a social phenomenon. To persuade his/her audience (premarital couples), the rhetor (premarital counselor) still uses symbols and strategies that are constrained by social norms and values. As such, premarital counseling evinces important aspects of the social characteristic of rhetoric.

⁵ Premarital counseling as a rhetorical artifact clearly deviates from what some may call "traditional rhetoric." That is, whereas rhetorical analyses usually focus more on "public" discourse, the premarital counseling situation involves a more private, small group or interpersonal meeting.

The rhetoric of premarital counseling, as discussed earlier, has emerged as a response to what several groups in society believe is a social dilemma--marital breakdown. Though the premarital counseling session is a small group phenomenon, clearly, from a wider perspective PCPs address a social issue to solve a social dilemma. That is, although a program's discourse may reach its audience at a rate of two people at a time, therapeutic or counseling communication ultimately reflects counselors' attempts to validate the values they want the larger society to accept and promote (Vaughn & Burgoon, 1975). Moreover, much like discourse delivered to a large audience, PCP materials are strategically created to appeal to specific groups and to meet particular needs. For example, PCPs have been produced to help student couples (D'Auggelli, Deyss, Guerney, Hershenburg, & Sborofsky, 1974), religious couples (Wright, 1992), and couples where one or both partners are minors (see Elkin 1977).

If PCPs do reflect "the social norms of particular groups, times, and places," analyzing PCPs may prove to be a fruitful endeavor. It seems rational then to examine the practice of premarital counseling and its relationship to the larger socio-cultural system. However, empirical analyses of premarital counseling often do not take such systems into account. Such scientific research is primarily concerned with the relationship between quantifiable variables that occur in premarital counseling.

This approach, though valuable, is limiting if taken as the only method of analysis. The art of rhetorical criticism allows for more flexibility in this matter because it does not claim to be an empirically scientific endeavor. Thus symbolic variables such as the effects of socio-cultural milieu can be included in the evaluation more feasibly. As further explicated below, this thesis treats premarital counseling as a rhetorical response to a critical exigence.

Premarital Counseling as Rhetorical Situation

Foss, Foss, & Trapp (1991) asserted that "people engage in rhetorical action when they use symbols for the purpose of communicating with one another" (p. 16). In this sense a rhetorical aspect can be found in most (if not all) instances of human interaction. One important objective of a rhetorical critic, then, is to justify the significance of the rhetorical phenomenon s/he proposes to study. Lloyd F. Bitzer (1978/1995) provided a standard by which critics can judge whether given circumstances are actually rhetorical situations. He delineated rhetoric from other types of discourse by stating that:

. . . a work of rhetoric is pragmatic; it comes into existence for the sake of something beyond itself; it functions ultimately to produce action or change in the world; it performs some task. In short, rhetoric is a mode of altering reality, not by the direct application of energy to objects, but by the creation of discourse which changes reality through the mediation of thought and action. (p. 60)

From this perspective premarital counseling "functions to produce action or change in the world" by the "creation of discourse." More specifically, the practice of premarital counseling is prevalent because of the social dilemma of marital distress and dissolution. As such, premarital counseling is a form of discourse that functions to "change the world" by the creation of therapeutic rhetoric intended to decrease the propensity of divorce in this country.

Moreover, premarital counseling also attempts to change the "personal world" of couples by addressing their individual exigences (see Makay, 1980). That is PCPs function to prepare engaged couples for marriage through instructional or therapeutic discourse. In each counseling session, the counselor, using standardized procedures and materials, attempts to induce changes in the premarital relationship (e.g. the couple's expectations, communication tactics, marital goals, etc.). Though the context of premarital counseling differs from a public address (to which Bitzer's theory is usually applied), the tenets of Bitzer's concept do not preclude less traditional forms of rhetoric. Phillips and Metzger (1976), Sharf (1976), and Makay (1980) all have made cogent arguments toward the application of this rhetorical theory to non-public, interpersonal interaction such as close friendships, marital counseling, and psychotherapy. Bitzer (1978/1995) himself alludes to the diverse applicability of his theory, explaining that in some cases the rhetorical situation may

involve self-persuasion (p. 62). As the other aspects of Bitzer's theory is discussed, it will become even more evident that the premarital counseling situation is quite compatible with Bitzer's view of rhetoric.

Bitzer (1978/1995) further asserted that rhetoric emerges from a rhetorical situation which consists of three elements: exigence, audience, and constraints. Exigence is "an imperfection marked by urgency; it is a defect, an obstacle, something waiting to be done, a thing which is other than it should be" (p. 62). Although a given context may have numerous exigences, a rhetorical exigence must be "capable of positive modification" through discourse (p. 62). As such, exigences that cannot be modified or that can be modified without discourse are not rhetorical. Such rhetorical discourse must be directed toward an audience "consisting of persons who are capable of being influenced by discourse and of being mediators of change" (p.62). The final element of the rhetorical situation is a set of constraints "made up of persons, events, objects and relations which are parts of the situation because they have the power to constrain decision and action needed to modify the exigence" (p. 63). Constraints can be inherent in the situation or created by the discourse of the rhetor. If premarital counseling is to be viewed as a rhetorical situation, these three elements must be further discussed.

Exigence

The exigence in this situation can be viewed from two overlapping perspectives. From an interpersonal viewpoint, the exigence be described as the particular problems couples believe premarital counseling can solve. Such exigences can involve the various interpersonal and personal tasks, demands, and dilemmas that beset the premarital stage in a relationship. Markman, Floyd, Stanley, and Lewis (as cited in Blumberg, 1992, p. 17) describe the multiple tasks of a transition to marriage:

1. To develop and engage in constructive communication and conflict resolution skills
2. To develop realistic, constructive, compatible attitudes and expectations regarding relationship and marriage.
3. To develop behavioral-interaction patterns that satisfy the emotional and psychological needs of each partner
4. To move towards the partner (and possible away from the family of origin) as a primary source of gratification and anxiety reduction
5. To develop constructive mechanisms for regulating closeness and dependency within the relationship
6. To develop constructive mechanisms for regulating the pace and path of change or adaptability within the relationship

Given that premarital couples have such varied issues to address during their transition to marriage, premarital counseling serves to help manage such issues.

From a more holistic standpoint, the exigence can be described as the current propensity of divorce and marital

dissatisfaction in this country. In 1992, the U.S. Census reported that the United States had the highest divorce rate in the world. Even though marital breakdown is a stark reality that affects all classes of people and results in high emotional, financial, and social costs (Larson & Holman, 1994), the popularity of marriage endures. In fact, 90%-95% of the United States' population marry at least once, and most who then get divorced remarry (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1992). As a response to this pragmatic social dilemma, premarital counseling has become a popular preventive method for decreasing marital dissatisfaction and divorce (Fowers, Montel, & Olson, 1996; Stanley, Markman, St. Peters and Leber, 1995; Wright, 1992).

Rutledge (1966) was one of the first to suggest premarital counseling as a form of divorce prevention. He concluded that couples who take part in PCPs become more aware of symptomatic problems that lead to relationship breakdown and therefore, may have a better chance to remedy these problems. Similarly, Fowers & Olson (1986) explain that because marriages that are troubled within the first 3 years are likely to contain warning signs during the premarital stage, premarital counselors can watch for these seeds of dysfunction and offer prescriptive solutions. More recent studies lead toward similar conclusions (Fowers, Montel, & Olson, 1996; Stanley, Markman, Peters, & Leber, 1995). PCPs also have positive effects on marital

satisfaction (Giblin, Sprenkle, & Sheehan, 1985; Hahlweg & Markman, 1988; Markman, 1980; Olson, 1983). From this perspective, premarital counseling serves to teach couples the cognitive, emotional, and interactional skills that seem to enhance a marital relationship.

Divorce statistics have become common knowledge. Some sources report as many as 52% of first marriages end in divorce (Stanley, Markman, St. Peters, & Leber, 1995; U.S. Census, 1992). Furthermore, the prevalent image of marriage, transmitted through the media, has become one that is marked with distress (Wright, 1992). This view of marriage may or may not be accurate; however, in this case, as long as couples and counselors believe such an image of marriage, the exigence has rhetorical power. Thus, this exigence overlaps with the interpersonal exigence discussed earlier in that couples, bombarded with these divorce statistics, may fear their own marital demise. If high divorce rates and marital distress are the "imperfection marked by urgency," the "defect," the "obstacle," then proponents of premarital counseling must believe that the discourse in premarital counseling can positively modify the exigence of marital dissatisfaction and divorce.

Audience

The discourse of premarital counseling programs are directed toward an audience of engaged couples who are

"capable of being influenced by discourse and of being mediators of change." Typically, clients of PCPs are young engaged couples between 18-25 years old (Ramsden & Jensen, 1983; Silliman & Schumm, 1989). Young couples consider engagement as the last trial period before marriage, utilizing it to assess compatibility (Burgess, 1953; Olson, 1983; Wright, 1992). The premarital stage serves as the couple's final chance to retreat because breaking the engagement is far less distressing than cancelling a marriage (Larson & Holman, 1994). In fact, 35-45 percent of all engagements in the United States are terminated (Wright, 1992). Premarital counseling may aid in this final evaluation process, helping couples to decide whether or not their relationship is, from an "expert's" point-of-view, strong enough to withstand the test of time. Counselors, certainly have the power to create the rhetorical discourse to affect the engaged couples who participate as clients; and in fact, the counselor's goal may be to lower the divorce rate or prevent marital distress by either instructing couples how to become better partners or persuading problem couples to terminate the engagement. However, couples have the primary control over their future relationship; whether or not they will become part of the divorce statistics or remain in dissatisfying marriages is strictly their business.

Constraints

The final element of premarital counseling as a rhetorical situation is a set of constraints--aspects or characteristics of the rhetor, audience, message, or context that "confines, restricts, forces, or compels" (Rybacki & Rybacki, 1991, p.27). Constraints shape the discourse, sometimes aiding or hindering the rhetor from persuading the audience. For example, in a PCP administered in a church setting, religious principles certainly constrain the rhetoric, giving it a form and foundation which makes it different from PCPs directed toward a general audience.

Perhaps the most overriding constraints of the rhetoric of PCPs are those brought about by the forms, rules, and process called forth by the ritual of premarital counseling. "Premarital counseling" as context greatly shapes the rhetorical strategies of PCPs. Indeed, what sets this type of communication event apart from other interpersonal and small group situations are the various assumptions and expectations that premarital counseling entails. Two factors inherent in this discourse warrant further discussion:

First, premarital counseling is "premarital." That is, it deals with engaged couples who are at a stage in their lives where behavior modification may be more feasible. "The transition to marriage," Blumberg explains,

"is a time of change for couples. One advantage of interviewing in any transitional phase is that interactional changes are expected as rewards and costs change with the shifting situation...Transitional phases already contain developmental tasks which require successful resolution in order to complete the transition" (1992, p. 17). Moreover, this "premarital" aspect of premarital counseling helps to shape its rhetoric in that counselors (rhetors) must address topics and utilize approaches most appropriate for premarital relationships. For example, unlike marriage counselors who have specific relationship problems on which to focus therapy, premarital counselors may not have such problems and must turn to instructional or relationship assessment tactics.

This rhetorical situation is further constrained by sociocultural stereotypes associated with "counseling." That is, the discourse is constrained by the grammar, scope, and foci of the practice of counseling. Both counselors (rhetors) and their relationships with couples (audience) must uphold certain characteristics. The counselor must maintain the professional nature of his/her discourse. S/he has certain obligations to the clients such as remaining impartial, fair, and in control of the situation. Unlike a public speaker, the premarital counselor deals with a small group setting for which discourse is personal and specific. Furthermore, the relationship between counselor and counselees can be

categorized under what Vaugh and Burgoon (1975) call "helping relationships" in which "the role of the professional helper is one vested with considerable status, authority, and power," while the role of client, in contrast, is marked with "subservience, weakness, and impotence" (p. 263). Such stereotypical roles may play an important role in constraining the discourse that pervades the premarital counseling situation.

Another important set of constraints in premarital counseling consists of factors that limit the couple from being influenced. The goal of the rhetorical response in this situation is to persuade couples to modify specific characteristics that may be destructive to the relationship. Inherent in this aim is the assumption that through discourse, counselors can influence couples to change variables (e.g. behavior, attitudes, etc.) that may lead to divorce. However, some couples may prove to be less capable or equipped to be successful agents of change. Furthermore, the premarital counseling program itself and the counselors who administer them also become constraints if they do not provide discourse powerful enough to induce cooperation from couples. Because divorce and marital distress can be attributed to numerous variables, possible constraints that may hinder the positive modification of the exigence vary greatly. However, research has targeted these three possible constraints:

1. The quality of the relationship. Clearly, some couples will be more prone to divorce and marital distress than others. Fowers, Montel, & Olson (1996) in identifying four couple types--vitalized, harmonious, traditional, and conflicted--argued that conflicted couples are most likely to separate or divorce (p.103). Because conflicted couples exhibit extremely dysfunctional relationship characteristics, premarital counseling may not be the appropriate setting to help such couples change such characteristics. In such cases the premarital counseling may still prove to be an effective response to the situation if the counselor can convince the couple not to marry and thus not add to the divorce rate. In either case the quality of the relationship acts as a constraint in the rhetorical situation.

2. A couple's perception of the counseling. How couples perceive premarital counseling can certainly affect their perceived ability and motivation to change the exigence. Stucky, et al. (1986) concluded that couples who believe their counseling is voluntary tend to perceive the counseling as more effective. Buckner and Salts (1985) suggested that couples' disappointment in premarital counseling generally stems from the program's failure to provide what couples truly desire. Clients have certain expectations of PCPs. Silliman and Schumm (1989) reported that young adults are interested in both interactive skills, such as listening and conflict resolution, and

specific issues, such as parenting and money management. A study of Canadian young adults (Boisvert, Ladouceur, Beaudry, Freeston, Turgeon, Tardif, Roussy, & Loranger, 1995) revealed that topics in parenting skills, communication and sexuality are of high interest. If such expectations are not met, couples' perceptions of the program may become more negative, and as such, these attitudes become rhetorical constraints.

Also, the program's duration greatly affects perception; the more sessions a couple attends the more effective they perceive the program to be (Stucky, et al., 1986; Wright, 1992). Researchers have estimated that up to 29 percent of newly-wed couples believe premarital counseling has greatly helped their marriage (Stucky, Eggeman, Eggeman, Moxley, & Schumm, 1986; Wright, 1992).

3. The Program. A program's structure, approach, and content may function as constraints if they hinder a couple's decision or action to modify a change in the exigence. For example, several researchers have suggested that focusing on the individual couple, as opposed to group therapy, is the best approach to PCPs (Buckner & Salts, 1985; Giblin, Sprenkle, & Sheehan, 1985; Olson, 1983). Buckner and Salts explained that during these intimate sessions the counselor has a better opportunity to evaluate relationship dynamics and address issues specific to the couple. Conversely, Rolfe (1975) emphasized a group counseling approach, arguing that groups provide a couple

with wider perspectives and experiences from other couples, and helps couples feel less intimidated by the counselor. Moreover, the number of sessions couples attend has a positive effect on the couples' perceptions of the PCP's efficacy (Wright, 1992). A program's content also serves as a constraint; as mentioned earlier some topics of discussion are more successful in influencing couples.

This examination of premarital counseling through Bitzer's (1978/1995) perspective, albeit brief, provides reasonable grounds for the significance of premarital counseling as a rhetorical event. PCPs emerge as a response to a currently powerful rhetorical exigence of divorce and marital distress. As such, materials used in these programs reflect what counselors and program writers deem as an appropriate response to the exigence. Programs materials actively utilize rhetorical strategies to produce change in the couples' relationship. More specifically, programs ultimately attempt to persuade couples toward two possible modifications: 1) to improve their relationship in such a way as to decrease possibilities of future marital dysfunction; or 2) to terminate the relationship.

Manuals and other materials used in PCPs provide practical access to the ideologies to which PCPs adhere. As will be discussed later, PCPs vary in their theoretical assumptions and approaches to counseling. For instance, Talking and Listening Together (Miller, Miller, Nunnally, & Wackman, 1991), a workbook used in the Couple Communication

program, highlights communication skills as the key to a successful marriage and therefore, uses focuses on measuring couples' communication competence and teaching productive communication skills. Before You Say "I Do" (Roberts & Wright, 1978), a manual used in various churches, holds that a personal relationship with God is the most important foundation for marriage and focuses on Scriptural citations. As seen in these two examples, the materials each PCP uses reflects what the program believes is the pathway to a successful marital relationship. The following literature review further delves into the theoretical assumptions and approaches of premarital counseling as a whole by tracing the origins and current trends.

The Nature of Premarital Counseling: History, Approaches, and Structure

To offer a deeper analysis of premarital counseling, its origin, nature, scope and place in the socio-historical milieu, the following discussion will center on the history, theoretical approaches, and prevalent structures of PCPs.

Historical Origin of PCPs

Most PCPs are facilitated by physicians, clergy, and professional health workers (Wright, 1992). As such, these three groups play key roles in the history of PCPs. Premarital counseling as a valued service was first mentioned in a 1928 issue The American Journal of Obstetrics and Gynecology (Wright, 1992). Until the mid-1950s, most of the literature concerned physicians and the premarital physical examination. During the physical examination, physicians offered advice about marriage to the individual partners. However, this counseling was informal, loosely-structured, and sporadic. In 1932, the Merrill-Palmer Institute introduced the first premarital education program (Bagarozzi & Rauen, 1981).

Prior to World War II, premarital counseling conducted by professionals was relatively uncommon because the discipline of psychology focused on individual, intrapsychic orientation (Stahmann & Hiebert, 1980, p.7). That is, the conventional theoretical orientation held that problems in the marriage was a result of a psychosis in one of the individuals. Thus, counseling both partners was seen as unnecessary. The 1940s and 1950s marked the emergence of an interactional perspective to psychology and psychotherapy which considered the relationships between individuals in assessing their mental health (Stahmann & Hiebert, 1980:8). In regards to premarital relationships,

"marital and family therapists began to look at the relationship as having an existence prior to the wedding. All this of course, set the stage for the increasing interest of later marital and family therapists in premarital counseling" (Stahmann & Hiebert, 1980:8).

Christian churches also began treating premarital counseling as a pastoral ministry, basing much of their approach on these new psychological developments:

The pioneering clergy who had much to do with the initiation of the pastoral counseling movement were indebted, theoretically speaking, to psychoanalytic thought. . . [which]. . . has its origins in the medical model and in a pathological framework. Pastoral counseling, therefore, developed a heavy bias toward the pathological orientation and the medical model. (Stahmann, & Hiebert, 1980: 9)

The purpose of such religious premarital counseling was to "screen," the couple, giving a new dimension to pastoral ministry: "Now the task was not simply to rehearse the wedding and instruct the couple about the Christian nature of marriage, but also to examine the emotional and psychological readiness of the couple for marriage" (Stahmann, Hiebert, 1980:9).

General Aims and Approaches

In the early 1940's, the Philadelphia Marriage Council developed one of the first standardized premarital counseling programs, dedicated to two goals: (a) to help

couples address interpersonal difficulties they were experiencing at the time; and (b) to educate and inform premarital couples about married life (Bagarozzi & Rauen, 1981). Programs that have proliferated over several decades since this early program have retained and extended these goals.

Fowers and Olson (1986) suggest that PCPs' are so important because of their therapeutic aim. Counselors from this perspective discuss conflict areas in the premarital relationship so that such problem areas can be managed. Because marriages that are troubled within the first 3 years are likely to contain warning signs during the premarital stage, premarital counselors can watch for these seeds of dysfunction and offer prescriptive solutions (Fowers & Olson, 1986). Furthermore, research has consistently demonstrated that problems couples have during engagement are carried over into marriage (Olson, 1983). During the premarital stage couples are more likely to learn positive communication and problem solving skills than when their problems have become more serious (Olson, 1983). Thus, strongly connected to this therapeutic approach is the belief that PCPs are divorce prevention programs.⁶

⁶ Several reasons have been offered for the high rate of divorce in the United States. Wright (1992) suggested that lack of commitment causes the erosion of the marriage, and premarital counseling, therefore, can help couples understand the types of commitments involved in a marital agreement. Hareven (1982) explained a different view that

Advocating a behavioral approach, Blumberg (1991) demonstrated that skills training premarital programs are "more effective in both dealing with current areas of concern and in preventing longer-term declines in relationship satisfaction" (p. 2). Behavioral Premarital Intervention (BPI) is grounded on the four basic components of Behavioral Marital Therapy (BMT) which includes "behavioral assessment, techniques to increase reciprocal exchange of positive behaviors (behavior exchange), communication skills training, and problem-solving techniques" (p. 7). This approach is most appropriate for non-distressed couples in that it focuses on teaching couples particular skills which researchers believe will help decrease the length and severity of relationship problems (p. 16).

Wright (1992) proposed that the vital goal of PCPs is to provide the couple with necessary information about married life. Other researchers (Boisvert, Ladouceur, Beaudry, Freeston, Turgeon, Tardif, Roussy, & Loranger, 1995) agree with this instructional method, suggesting that PCPs aid couples in the adaptation process from being

increase in divorce statistics is not a sign of family breakdown, but more an effect of higher expectations for what a marriage ought to be. Olson (1983) proposed that most premarital couples are very idealistic about their relationship. Similarly, Larson (1988, 1992) suggested that couples have too high and unrealistic expectations for the marriage partner. According to this theory premarital counseling serves as an inventory and evaluation of conflicting expectations which forecast marital distress (1992).

single to being married. As such, premarital counseling is not for psychologically unhealthy couples but for relatively stable individuals who are ignorant, misinformed, and unprepared. The program's primary goal is to enhance the couple's relationship and interactional skills by providing couple's with pertinent information about marital issues, including sexuality and marital sex (Wright, 1992), money management (Rolfe, 1975), and various contraception methods (Buckner & Salts, 1985).

Furthermore, premarital counseling should not only provide information but also correct the couple's misconceptions about marriage (Larson, 1988; Wright, 1992). Larson (1992) concluded that changing unrealistic beliefs alleviates much anxiety and frustration. Advocates of this perspective identify couples as being on an "engagement high." That is, because engaged couples are caught up in the excitement of the wedding and engagement itself, they tend to be more idealistic in their perceptions of the problematic elements of the relationship. Thus, the mission of PCPs should entail teaching couples more "realistic" views of marriage.

An increasingly popular theme in many premarital counseling curricula today is communication competence. Markman (1981) concluded that poor communication skills are effective predictive factors of marital dissolution. Furthermore, couples have described communication as the most frequent problem in marriage (Boisvert, Ladouceur, Beaudry, Freeston, Turgeon, Tardif, Roussy, & Loranger,

1995). Consequently, many if not most of PCPs (Buckner & Salts, 1985; Fowers & Olson, 1986; James, 1994; Meadows & Taplin, 1970; Morris, 1960; Nickols, Fournier, & Nickols, 1986; Rolfe, 1975; Rutledge, 1966; Wright, 1992) have treated communication competence as an integral part of the curriculum, focusing on such critical issues as conflict, communication styles, and listening.⁷ Currently lacking is research evaluating how effective PCPs are in teaching communication skills.

A final general aim of PCPs is to evaluate the relationship to see whether the couple should get married (Olson, 1983; Wright, 1992). Buckner and Salts (1985) explained that during these counseling sessions couples

⁷ Several PCPs (Buckner & Salts, 1985; Meadows & Taplin, 1970; Nickols, Fournier, & Nickols, 1986; Wright, 1981) have been structured around couples' interaction during the session. In these programs a typical session teaching communication involved a discussion of each partner's communication style as well as the counselor's views about the communication and its importance in a marriage relationship.

A mental health program entitled "Program for Relationship Improvement by Maximizing Empathy and Self-Disclosure" consisted of supervised practice of interpersonal skills, particularly empathic understanding, acceptance of others' feelings, and openness and honesty about one's personal feelings (D'Augelli, Deyss, Guerney, Hershenberg, & Sborofsky, 1974).

Buckner and Salts's (1985) "Premarital Assessment Program" included a session during which couples share successful and unsuccessful communication experiences with their partner. In this program the couple also discusses their conflict resolution techniques. The couple is asked to resolve an argument during the session. The counselor then assesses the couple's problem solving skills, focusing on such issues as verbal-nonverbal congruency, openness and clarity in giving and receiving information, and power and control issues. The counselor ultimately decides whether the couple requires further training in communication and conflict resolution.

examine their relationship "in order to reevaluate and confirm that indeed this is the person they want to marry" (p. 513). This view emphasizes the need to learn about the other partner, whereas Wright, (1992) argued that "the essential element is not so much finding the right person as it is becoming the right person" (p. 19). Either approach executes the aim of this perspective--to elicit a response from the both partners regarding the appropriateness of the marriage. Also inherent in this purpose is a verbal or written evaluation from the counselor which helps the couple discover relationship deficiencies they might want to change. The counselor presents his or her perception of the relationship's strengths and weaknesses, offering possible remedies for change and a final assessment of future marital success (Buckner & Salts, 1985).

Structures of PCPs

Varying perspectives about the purpose of PCPs lead to the multiplicity of approaches for constructing an effective program. Although comprehensive national statistics are not available, Olson (1983) estimated percentage of couples who receive various types of programs. Based on his vast experience with the practice of premarital counseling, he concluded that in general, most premarital couples receive inadequate or ineffective

help in preparing for their marriage relationship (see Table 1).

Kinds of Premarital Programs	Estimated Percentage of Couples
No premarital program or service	30
Dialogue with clergy (1-2 sessions) and no premarital inventory ⁸	25
Large group lectures (several sessions)	20
Small group couple dialogues	14
Dialogue with clergy and a premarital inventory	10
Premarital counseling and/or structured communication-skill-building programs (several sessions)	1

Table 1. Services and Programs Offered to Premarital Couples (Olson, 1983)

Several researchers have suggested that focusing on the individual couple, as opposed to group therapy, is the best approach to PCPs (Buckner & Salts, 1985; Giblin, Sprenkle, & Sheehan, 1985; Olson, 1983). Buckner and Salts

⁸ A premarital inventory may include tests which measure premarital predictors of marital success such as a couple's similarities and differences. Some inventories also survey the couple's perceptions of marriage and expectations of the marriage partner.

explained that during these intimate sessions the counselor has a better opportunity to evaluate relationship dynamics and address issues specific to the couple. Conversely, Rolfe (1975) emphasized a group therapy program, which he believes, provides a couple with wider perspectives and experiences from other couples.

The average number of premarital counseling sessions is three (Wright, 1992) though some PCPs have as many as 10 meetings with a total of 16-20 hours of counseling time (Bagarozzi & Rauen, 1981). Wright (1992) explained that the number of sessions couples attend tends to have a positive affect on the couples' perception of the PCP's efficacy. Buckner and Salts' (1985) Premarital Assessment Program (PAP), outlined in Table 2, includes six 2-hour sessions. Unique in this program is a meeting with the couple's parents. Buckner and Salts explained that "the goals of the parent meeting are to see the family systems in action, to help the couple see their parents in a changing role, and to possibly resolve some previous problem" (p. 517).

Fowers and Olson (1986) and Larson, Holman, Klein, Busby, Stahman, and Peterson (1995) emphasized the importance of valid and reliable premarital instruments to identify problematic factors in a relationship and predict marital quality and stability. Many PCPs today (Buckner & Salts, 1985; Nickols, Fournier, & Nickols,

Session	Topics of Discussion
Introduction:	Dating history of the couple and some parent information
Session I	Goals of PAP, premarital tests
Session II	Family, children, finances, friends, recreation
Session III	Parents' meeting ⁹
Session IV	Communication and conflict resolution
Session V	Values and sexuality

Table 2. Outline of Premarital Assessment Program (PAP) (Buckner & Salts, 1985)

1986; Rolfe, 1975; Wright, 1992) include some type of premarital instrument. In a meta-analytic study which reviewed premarital predictors of marital quality and stability of the past 50 years, Larson and Holman (1994) described three areas that predict marital success-- background and contextual factors, individual traits and behaviors, and couple interactional processes. Fournier, Olson, and Druckman's (1983) PREPARE, one of the most widely-used premarital assessment questionnaires, provides individual and couple scores for three categories: (a) intrapersonal issues (e.g. personality, religious orientation, expectations, etc.); (b) interpersonal issues (e.g. communication, marital cohesion, equalitarian roles, and conflict resolution, etc.); (c) external issues (e.g.

⁹ This session involves a meeting with the couple and the couple's parents.

relative, children, work, money, etc.). Couple agreement and disagreement scores are compared with the norm and evaluated for strengths and possible problematic qualities.

Wright (1992) suggests that "the local church or those who have some type of Christian ministry are in the best position to provide premarital counseling" (p. 37), and indeed, most premarital counseling programs are administered through religious organizations (Johnson, 1995; Olson, 1983; Wright, 1992). Premarital counseling with a minister is often a prerequisite for couples who desire to have their wedding ceremony at a church (Wright, 1992). Olson (1983) critiqued the effectiveness of such programs, noting that clergy often feel inadequately trained and have insufficient time to work effectively with these couples before marriage. Furthermore, religiously based PCPs can be problematic when counselors shape the session around religious values with which couples may not necessarily agree (Boisvert, Ladouceur, Beaudry, Freeston, Turgeon, Tardif, Roussy, & Loranger, 1995). For example, members of clergy often tend to emphasize spiritual development and neglect important topics of sexuality (Boisvert, et al., 1995). However, Taylor (1965) stated that all counselors, religious or not, are likely to project their own values onto the clients. Buckner and Salts (1985) suggested that premarital counseling should be a joint effort between the counselor and the couple. Therefore, the couple learns not only from the counselor's

instruction but also from their own interaction during the sessions.

Olson (1983) proposed that lay couples can provide excellent premarital counseling for several reasons. First, these couples can use their own experiences to share both joys and frustrations of marriage with new couples. Second, these couples can serve as role models for new couples throughout the first years of marriage. Finally, these couples usually have more time and energy than active clergy.

Previous Research

The body of research focusing on PCPs is primarily sustained by scholars in the fields of psychology, theology, human development and family sciences, and marriage and family counseling. Research in the area focus on evaluations of (a) program structure and content, and (b) specific premarital assessment questionnaires.¹⁰ Published rhetorical analyses of premarital counseling are non-existent; however, as will be discussed later in this section, marital counseling has been treated as a rhetorical phenomenon.

¹⁰ Premarital assessment questionnaires are usually incorporated as part of the curriculum in PCPs. Counselors use these tests to measure the couples' personality characteristics, backgrounds, and interactional processes to forecast marital quality and stability (Larson & Holman, 1994). See Larson, Holman, Klein, Busby, Stahmann, & Peterson (1995) for a recent study comparing leading questionnaires used today.

Evaluation of Programs

General appraisals of the practice of premarital counseling have focused on efficacy, approach, common problems, and strategies for improvement (Bader et al., 1980; Bagarozzi & Rauen, 1981; Ball & Henning, 1981; Schumm & Denton, 1979). More recent evaluations of programs focus mainly on efficacy. Several dissertations (Babb, 1991; Blumberg, 1991; Davis, 1992; James, 1994; Parish, 1989) have evaluated the validity and usefulness of specific premarital preparation programs. Larson (1988) suggested that completion of a premarital education course results in an increase in students' perceived readiness for marriage. Likewise, Giblin, Sprenkle, and Sheehan (1985) found "enrichment programs," a type of PCP, to be effective in teaching couples how to build a strong and satisfying marriage. Furthermore, Nickols, Fournier, and Nickols (1986) found that both couples who marry and couples who canceled the engagement find premarital counseling to be beneficial.

Markman, Renick, Floyd, Stanley, & Clements (1993) described the results of a 4- and 5-year follow-up study evaluating the effects of an early marital distress prevention program (PREP) based on a behavioral marital therapy approach, focusing on effective communication and conflict management skills. The authors discovered that

after 5 years, couples who went through the program had higher levels of positive communication skills, lower levels of negative communication skills, and lower levels of marital violence.

Lawler's (1995) national study done at the Center for Marriage and Family at Creighton University surveyed a proportional random sample of approximately 40,000 couples who participated in a marriage preparation program between 1987 and 1993. Lawler's (1995, pp. 12-14) conclusions include:

- 1) the majority of individuals view their experience as valuable;
- 2) the perceived value of marriage preparation declines over time;
- 3) marriage preparation is perceived as valuable when administered by a team;
- 4) the intensity of a program is connected to its perceived value;
- 5) the perceived value of program directly correlated to prior expectations.

Premarital Assessment Questionnaires

Other studies relating to premarital counseling evaluate the efficacy of premarital assessment questionnaires (PAQs). These questionnaires are scientific instruments that measure certain characteristics about the

premarital couple and its individual partners. Premarital counselors utilize various types of questionnaires which focus on certain issues such as communication (Williams, Jurich, & Denton, 1995), temperament (Taylor & Morrison, 1984), personality (Hammer, 1987), and marital role expectations (Dunn, 1979). Other PAQs cover multiple areas. For example, PREPARE evaluates family history, realistic expectations, financial management, personality issues, leisure activities, equalitarian roles, communication, sexual relationship, religious orientation, conflict resolution, children and marriage, and idealistic distortion (Olson, Fournier, & Druckman, 1986). The PREP-M instrument focuses on the five areas: couple unity, personal readiness, partner readiness, couple readiness, background and home environment.

The primary purpose of these PAQs is to enhance the premarital counseling process by providing both the couple and the counselor more information about the relationship. Holman, Larson, and Harmer (1994) explain: "With any preventive approach, an assessment instrument is useful for critically examining relationships providing information about the couple's strengths and potential problem areas" (p. 46).

In a typical premarital counseling program, once couples have completed the questionnaire, a counselor will then discuss various methods whereby couples can begin to improve their relationship and prevent future problems (see

Nickols, Fournier, & Nickols, 1986; Renick, Blumberg, & Markman, 1992; Wright, 1992). As a "diagnosis" tool for the assessment of the "health" of a couple, premarital inventories have become a celebrated scientific approach to predicting certain marital outcomes in hopes of ultimately preventing marital dissolution (see Johnson, 1995; Larson, Holman, Klein, Busby, Stahmann, & Peterson (1995); McManus, 1994; Olson, 1983; Wright, 1992).

Larson, Holman, Klein, Busby, Stahmann, & Peterson (1995) evaluated the efficacy of popular PAQs used in premarital education and counseling (PREPARE, FOCCUS, PREP-M, CDEM, and PMIP). The criteria for the evaluation included: specificity to premarital couples, applicability, interpretability, reliability, validity and relevance of information gathered. PREPARE and FOCCUS were noted as most psychometrically sound and appropriate for premarital counseling.

As discussed above most studies on premarital counseling have focused on the efficacy of a program or a premarital assessment questionnaire (Bargarozzi & Rauen, 1981; Buckner & Salts, 1985; D'Augelis, Deyss, Guerney, Herchenberg, & Sborofsky, 1974; Ginsberg & Vogelsong, 1977; Guerney & Maxson, 1990; Markman, Floyd, Rolfe, 1975; Stanley, & Jamieson, 1984; Markman, Floyd, Stanley & Storaasli, 1988; Meadows & Taplin, 1970; Olson 1983; Ridley, Avery, Harrell, Leslie, & Dent, 1981; Stahmann & Hiebert, 1980; Wright, 1992). As of yet, premarital

counseling has not been evaluated from a rhetorical perspective. This study hopes to fill this gap.

The Rhetoric of Counseling and Psychotherapy

As of yet, the rhetoric of premarital counseling has never been evaluated extensively. However, several studies have considered the rhetorical nature of psychotherapy and other types of counseling (Fritsch, 1991; Hugenberg, 1981; Rosenfield, Hayes, & Frenz, 1976; Makay, 1980; Sharf, 1976).¹¹ Three scholars in particular provide strong foundation for the framework for this study.

Makay (1980) compared the process of psychotherapy with the Christian doctrine of salvation. He claimed that in both cases, a rhetor (clergy or counselor) uses suasive communication to penetrate the mindsets of individuals needing relief from inner turmoil. Whereas Christianity offers a spiritual salvation, Makay suggested that psychotherapy provides a "rhetoric for secular grace" (p. 184). Thus, he argued that "psychotherapy is conceptually consonant with the broad scope of rhetoric our literature provides" (p. 187).

Makay (1980) framed the psychotherapy setting within Bitzer's concept of "rhetorical situation." Viewing the therapist as the "primary rhetor" and clients as

¹¹ Though psychotherapy and premarital counseling are not necessarily synonymous, the similarities between both warrant further consideration of how other research has viewed the rhetorical dimensions of psychotherapy.

"audience," he theorized that "the interpersonal rhetoric of psychotherapy (and healing religion) exists because of a rhetorical situation the sufferer faces" (p. 188).

Specifically, the discourse of therapists is a response to the personal exigence of clients. Makay identified three specific rhetorical strategies which therapists use to influence clients:

1. Strategy A: The client is to internalize affectively and cognitively directive and non-directive messages in ways which significantly alter primitive beliefs.
2. Strategy B: The client must identify, confront, and understand affective behaviors which influence the cognitive processing and somatic response resulting in neurotic (or other pathological) internal/external activity.
3. Strategy C: The client must positively act upon inferential statements agreed upon with the therapist and resulting response to Strategies A and B. [emphases in original] (p. 193).

Makay derived these strategies from extensive reading in the subject and personal interviews with therapists.

Messner (1996) examined the rhetoric of codependency-related, self-help literature, particularly the works of Melody Beattie, a best-selling author of religious self-help books. Messner explained Beattie's brand of codependency therapy in terms of Kenneth Burke's dramatisitic

concepts of "rebirth." That is, self-help books urge readers to rid themselves of "pollution" which stems from familial dysfunctions and personal struggles. "Toward this end, Beattie devotes herself to two rhetorical goals: (a) fostering codependents' recognition of their 'pollution' and (b) inspiring codependents' desire for recovery" (p. 105). Messner's study provides precedence for treating the discourse in counseling or "helping" materials as "symbolic act" through a dramatistic analysis.

Also, viewing psychotherapy as a rhetorical response to clients' personal exigence, Sharf (1976) analyzed the communication between counselors and clients, using transcripts of four consecutive marriage counseling sessions. Sharf focused on the rhetorical power of the counselor as a rhetor, arguing that "communicative intervention by a counselor is expected to make a difference in the established relationship patterns of a couple. . . [and] so viewed, rhetoric and counseling are concurrent and overlapping occurrences" (p. 20). Sharf's approach was unique because she attempted to merge aspects of rhetorical criticism with applied psychology. Her rhetorical artifact for criticism differed from more traditional choices in that she examined a non-public, transactional, interpersonal discourse. Among her conclusions about the counselor as rhetor are: 1) counselor's communication tend to be strategic and "appears to be motivated by a tendency toward goal-seeking;" 2)

counselors tend "to provide claims and conclusions to the arguments developed within the sessions;" 3) "the strategy of the successful marriage counselor tends to include an ongoing series of adaptations to counter-rhetoric being generated by the clients;" and 4) counselors tend "to employ language that will engage the involvement of the clients" (pp. 336-366).

Sharf concluded that counselors possess and exert power in a counseling session, controlling the situation with specific rhetorical tactics. For instance, she observed that marital counselors deploy a "rhetoric of relationships":

Clients were likely to focus [on] particular kinds of subject matter, such as sex, money, and child-rearing. Counselors, on the other hand, tend to meta-communicate. That is, they create an awareness of how [emphasis in original] the spouse are dealing with whatever is the problem at hand. For instance, Counselor C pointed out the continual power struggle in which Client-Couple III were engaged and Counselor D reiterated that H-IV played the "bad boy" role with his wife, business partner, and father. In so doing, the counselor changes the level of the client(s)' concern from the very concrete to the more abstract, and alters the focus of the discourse from issues of content to issues of relationships. (p. 344)

Utilizing tactics such as the "rhetoric of relationships," marital counselors necessarily construct meanings about the nature of relationships. Extending Sharf's study this thesis focuses on the meanings constructed when premarital counselors employ such rhetorical tactics.

The Construction of Meaning in PCPs

Brock, Chesebro, and Scott (1990) assert that the aim of the rhetorical critic is to describe, interpret, and evaluate discourse (p. 16). In doing so, a critic must focus on a specific dimension in the rhetoric:

The critics attention is drawn to a certain phenomenon. Yet the critic's perception is not universally shared. In part, the function of the rhetorical critic is to indicate, to point out, to draw attention of others to, a particular case or type of symbolic inducement. Since the critic is not working with something that is solely physical, she or he must reveal whatever is the critic's object of attention. (Brock, Chesebro, & Scott, 1990, p. 15-16)

As discussed earlier, the meanings created in PCPs are the central focus of this thesis.

Stahmann and Hiebert's (1980) description of one of the goals of premarital counseling is telling:

Clarification of Self. [emphasis in original] The premarital counseling process is a process that involves the establishing of the "I" position of each partner. As the sessions progress, the process is designed to help sketch out each person's thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and fantasies. By the Time the sessions have come to a close, the identity of each person as a distinct being will have become clearer. (p. 41)

Thus, premarital counseling phenomena becomes a practice in identity and role construction, guided by the counselor's discourse.

LaRossa & Reitzes (1993) explain that people experience four role development stages: "1) the anticipatory stage, covering the period to incumbency, where general features of the role may be learned; 2) the formal stage, where the person has entered the position and is learning the formal role meaning; 3) the informal stage, which entails the learning of unofficial or informal role meanings; and 4) the personal stage, where the individual modifies the role to fit self-standards and there is a merger of self and role meanings" (p. 149). Premarital counseling has the greatest effect on the first "anticipatory" stage during which couples are still learning what it means to be married. During these counseling sessions engaged couples undergo training and socialization, with counselors showing them what "marriage" is and who "married people" are (e.g. the concepts of "husband" and "wife").

Such concern with meaning and roles stems from symbolic interaction theory which has spurred growing interest from various disciplines in the construction of meaning in human interaction.¹² In family-related studies sociologists Berger and Kellner (1964), influenced by the theoretical perspectives of Weber and Mead, established a theoretical framework for the construction of reality in marriage, arguing that married couples reorganize their

¹² LaRossa & Reitzes (1993) provide a detailed overview of symbolic interaction theory.

norms and values to create a shared conceptualization of the world: "Marriage in our society is a dramatic [emphasis in original] act in which two strangers come together and redefine themselves" (p. 53). This thesis extends Berger and Kellner's theory by claiming that this construction occurs rhetorically. That is, the emergence of such "shared conceptualization of the world" is constituted by discourse between couples as well as rhetoric that occurs with others.

Berger and Kellner (1964) also posited that even before the act of marriage actually occurs, "the drama of the act is internally anticipated and socially legitimated long before it takes place" (pp. 53-54). Perhaps this "drama" of anticipation and legitimization becomes more intensified during the premarital stage and especially during engagement. Though Berger and Kellner's framework adequately describes the process of reality construction in marriage, they seem to leave the premarital stage of the relationship undeveloped. Framing the phenomenon of meaning-creation from a symbolic interaction perspective, emphasizes the emergence of roles and identity in PCPs.

Rhetorical theorists have also recognized the constructed nature of human's identities. Weaver (1983) explains, "rhetoric at its truest seeks to perfect men [and women] by showing them better versions of themselves" (p. 25). The transition to marriage in our society marks a key point when individuals must become aware of their change of

identities. Brock, Chesebro, and Scott (1990) explain that similar to "fine arts," "practical arts" such as the "art of marriage" are "human relationships in which we find ourselves involved, [and] although unique as particular occurrences, [they] partake of traditions, of institutions, of plans; they are in short, human constructions" (p. 11). Such a view asserts that social constructs, such as marriages, are shaped by rhetorical forces (e.g. individual partners, larger family networks, or society in general). As such, meanings of marriage do not just exist, but they are constructed and constantly revised. More importantly, such construction occurs through the manipulation of symbols (i.e. language).

Also important to this discussion of the construction of marriage is Burke's (1966a, 1966b) dramatisitic approach to rhetoric which claims that at the core of humanness is the ability to create, use, and misuse symbols. Indeed, what sets humans apart from animals is their dependence on symbolic acts; whereas, animals merely exist in nature, humans must participate in social dramas such as rituals, rules, ceremonies, ideologies, etc. Consequently, society is created and maintained through symbols, which humans use to control behavior. Perhaps the most powerful symbols humans use is language. Burke (1969b) asserts that rhetoric is fundamentally "rooted in an essential function of language itself...the use of language as a symbolic means of inducing cooperation in beings that by nature

respond to symbols." (p. 43). From a Burkean perspective the language used in premarital counseling can be examined as an agent of influence that strategically aims to shape the meaning of marriage. Framing premarital counseling as a meaning-construction phenomenon assumes that PCPs have certain meanings of what marriage is supposed to be. As such, the rhetoric in premarital counseling serves to validate and transmit these meanings to induce cooperation from couples.

Robert L. Scott's (1967) assertions about the nature of rhetoric provide another aspect meaning-construction in PCPs. Specifically, Scott argues that rhetoric has an epistemic function. Scott (1967) views truth as contingent, not "fixed and final but as something to be created moment by moment in the circumstances" (p. 17). As such, "truth can arise only from cooperative critical inquiry" (p. 14). Rhetoric, then, is not merely an art that gives validity to truth, but a process that inherently shapes and constitutes knowledge. Some counselors, especially those from a Rogerian perspective, would refuse the term, "rhetorical," because they see their programs as more "guidance" than "persuasion." The claim is that these programs do not promote specific agendas but rather enable the couple to discover, reflect, and discuss their own views. However, given Scott's claims, this process of discovering, reflecting and discussing is rhetorical in that it can shape the way couples come to know what is true

about the concept of marriage (i.e. that marriage entails reflection and discussion). When premarital counseling programs address topics such as sex-roles, financial management, and the structure and dynamics of the relationship, the discourse in the programs necessarily constructs knowledge. That is, the process or strategies by which programs attempt to transmit their messages create knowledge for couples. Thus discussing the epistemological function of rhetoric in premarital counseling can further illuminate rhetorical creation of marriage in PCPs.

Implementation

Sharf's (1976) extensive analysis of the rhetoric of marital counseling provides a strong starting-point in determining the implementation strategies for this study. However, I will attempt to extend Sharf's (1976) work in three ways:

1. This study involves primarily the creation of meaning in premarital counseling rather than power. This approach builds on Sharf's premise that counselors have and exert power during counseling sessions but examines specifically the nature, shape, scope, and consequence of the meanings created by the rhetoric of premarital counseling.

2. This study examines premarital instead of marital counseling. Premarital counseling is unique in that it

deals with couples who are often naive about the meaning of marriage. In fact, as discussed earlier, because the premarital stage is marked by urgency and a crisis of transitions, many couples attend premarital counseling to alleviate fears and doubts about their decision to marry, and to learn how to become effective marital partners. The rhetoric of such programs, created to help couples prepare for marriage, is an intriguing place for meaning-creation.

3. This study entails an examination of materials produced by counseling programs. Sharf (1976) identified several disadvantages to applying rhetorical criticism to actual transcripts of face-to-face communication in marriage counseling. Not only were transcriptions of counseling discourse relatively difficult to acquire, but also, used as artifacts, these transcriptions were difficult to analyze because the discourse was disjointed, sporadic, on-going, and transactional. As I proposed earlier, a more practical and perhaps more appropriate access to the rhetoric of counseling is the discourse of PCP materials. Premarital counseling programs provide highly structured literature, utilized by professional counselors, physicians, and pastoral counselors. An analyses of these materials can provide a glimpse into the meanings created by PCPs, especially in the way they create meanings about marriage.

Conclusion

Premarital counseling represents a contemporary cultural trend that attempts to combat the propensity of marital breakdown in this country by addressing couples' future relationship during the premarital stage. As a rhetorical phenomenon, premarital counseling is a rhetorical response to the exigence of marital breakdown, currently plaguing a multitude of marriages in the United States. Moreover, premarital counseling also serves as a rhetorical response to the personal exigences particular to each couple that participates in a program. Given what we know of premarital counseling from this chapter, we would not be exaggerating by saying that premarital counseling is at a pivotal place in society with the opportunity to change the course of humans' lives in a tremendous way. As such, this thesis treats premarital counseling as a potent rhetorical phenomena which warrants criticism. Specifically, this study employs a rhetorical criticism to PCPs (i.e. program literature, session structure, exercises, lesson plans, and other material produced by programs), in an attempt to identify, examine, and evaluate the rhetorical construction of the concept of marriage in premarital counseling programs.

CHAPTER II: METHODOLOGY

This thesis deviates methodologically from most research on PCPs primarily because the aim of the present study diverts from social scientific research. The majority of research concerned with PCPs, conducted primarily by scholars in the fields of psychology and family studies, attempts to defend the efficacy and validity of counseling approaches and tools by testing couples' skills before and after premarital intervention or by evaluating couples' responses to the program (see Buckner & Salts, 1985; Giblin, Sprenkle, & Sheehan, 1985; Markman, Floyd, Stanley, & Storaasli, 1988; Holman, Larson, & Harmer, 1994; Markman, Renick, Floyd, Stanley, & Clements, 1993; Nickols, Fournier, & Nickols, 1986; Renick, Blumberg, & Markman, 1992; Ridley & Sladeczek, 1992). Whereas a more scientific perspective is concerned with discovering the variables that contribute to marital discord and validating the most appropriate approach to helping couples achieve marital success, a rhetorical perspective is concerned with the process by which these programs use symbolic means "to induce cooperation from their audience" (Burke, 1969b). Thus, this research departs from efficacy inquiries and instead, treats the content of PCPs--the messages embedded in the materials utilized in counseling sessions--as powerful rhetorical devices that shape couples' realities about marriage. In

effect, I am asking the questions: Regardless of whether or not PCPs are actually effective, what is it that they attempt to do effectively? And how do they go about this attempt? These questions lead to a message-centered rhetorical analysis of premarital counseling materials.

Although several studies have treated counseling as a rhetorical phenomena (Fritsch, 1991; Hugenberg, 1981; Rosenfield, Hayes, & Frenz, 1976, Sharf, 1976), as of yet, research that considers the rhetorical aspect of premarital counseling is non-existent. As discussed briefly in the previous chapter, premarital counseling occurs at a critical moment in a couple's relationship. It is during this time that partners have decided to enter into what is called "marriage"--a social construct defined by certain norms for behavior and roles. With the assumption that many couples have damaging interpersonal habits (Larson, & Holman, 1994; Markman & Hahlweg, 1993) and unrealistic beliefs about marriage and marital roles (Larson, 1992), PCPs attempt to modify a couple's behavior and beliefs. In doing so, PCPs, through therapeutic or educational discourse, create for the couple an image of what a "good marriage" should be. The premarital counseling situation, then, is an intriguing place to observe what I hypothesize is the "rhetorical construction of marriage"--the creation of meaning about marriage through the use of discourse.

Utilizing the art of rhetorical criticism, this analysis will examine two national premarital counseling

programs in wide use today: Before You Say I Do and PREPARE. As will be discussed later in this chapter, these programs are examples of typical and popular PCPs. As such, though conclusions about these two programs cannot be applied to all PCPs, this analysis can advance a clearer understanding of the rhetoric of premarital counseling as exemplified in these two programs. Specifically, the analysis will delve into the rhetorical strategies each of these programs, focusing particularly on the creation of "marriage." To describe in greater detail the methodology for this research, I will first, identify, explicate, and defend the rhetorical framework for analysis. Then I will establish a criteria for selecting the programs for the analysis, and finally, I will provide a brief description of the artifacts at the center of this analysis.

A Rhetorical Framework

Kenneth Burke's dramatistic approach to rhetoric undergirds the rhetorical framework for this study. Through Burke's conceptualizations of substance and language as symbolic action, the rhetoric of PCPs will be brought to bare. Also, two other perspectives of rhetoric, generic and traditional, serve to embellish Burke's method by providing a way to approach the unique artifacts for this study. Ultimately, aspects of these perspectives converge to provide a method of analysis which will help

illuminate the rhetorical construction of marriage in the premarital counseling programs examined in this thesis.

A generic perspective points to a way of approaching the rhetoric of premarital counseling as genre. A genre criticism, Campbell and Jamieson (1990) explain:

does not seek detailed recreation of the original encounter between author and audience; rather it seeks to recreate the symbolic context in which the act emerged so that criticism can teach us about the nature of human communicative response and about ways in which rhetoric is shaped by prior rhetoric, by verbal conventions in a culture, and by past formulations of ideas and issues. (, p. 342)

Borrowing from this perspective, this study is not concerned with recreating the "original" counselor-client encounter. Instead, this study identifies PCP materials as reflections of the "symbolic context" in which the act of counseling emerges. Though the messages in particular PCPs are greatly affected by the individual counselors that administer the program, I propose that there are general characteristics germane to programs that transcend counselors, approaches to counseling, and counseling setting--a genre of premarital counseling. Whereas marriage counselors usually deal with marital problems specific to a particular couple, premarital counseling is a more general preventive approach, focused on evaluating the relationship. As such, premarital counseling relies more on structured program materials which can be utilized for almost any couple. Although premarital counselors may

still vary the design of the program to fit particular couple needs, more popular PCPs have "standardized procedures and intervention techniques. . . employed and followed systematically during the premarital counseling process" (Bagarozzi & Rauen, 1981, p. 14). Thus one way to extract the general characteristics about a specific program is to examine the materials used in that program.

A traditional perspective of rhetoric establishes the basic nature of the rhetorical act from a neo-Aristotelian framework. According to Karlyn Kohrs Campbell's description of the rhetorical act (1966)¹³, in asserting that the construction of marriage occurs rhetorically, several assumptions regarding PCPs as rhetorical phenomenon must follow: First, the rhetorical act is "an intentional, created, polished attempt" (p. 9). The producers of PCP materials put together the elements of a program in a strategic attempt to modify couples' behavior, beliefs, and attitude. For example, they select which issues to focus on during the sessions and which counseling techniques to employ. Thus a program reflects what the producers believe are the best ways to persuade couples as well as the best way to view marriage.

¹³ Campbell delineated general instances of rhetoric from what she terms, a rhetorical act. Though similar to Bitzer's (1978/1995) rhetorical situation, Campbell's description of rhetorical acts is a more extensive treatment of significant rhetorical phenomena that are worthy of critical analysis.

Second, rhetorical acts are attempts "to overcome the obstacles in a given situation with a specific audience on a given issue to achieve a particular end" (Campbell, 1996, p. 9). As such, in program materials, we should be able to extract what the producers perceive as the obstacles that need to be overcome, who they believe is the audience for the rhetoric, and the ends or goals the producers desire to achieve. Such information is certainly important in discovering the meanings of marriage created in these programs.

Third, the rhetorical act is also social in that rhetors use "as reasons the values accepted and affirmed by a subculture or culture" (p.7). In this way, the messages found in the rhetorical act reflect the norms and/or ideologies of the particular groups to which the rhetor and her/his intended audience belong. Thus PCP materials should reflect not only their producers' view of marriage, but also provide a basic understanding of the values of the groups to which the producers adhere. This aspect of rhetoric becomes particularly important when discussing how contemporary PCPs help to shape a social definition of "marriage."

Campbell (1996) explained that the rhetorical critic is concerned with "all the ways in which symbols can be used to teach, delight, and to move" (p.19). She identified seven elements in rhetorical acts:

1. Purpose: the conclusion argued (thesis) and the response desired by the rhetor
2. Audience: the rhetor's target, the listeners or readers selected by the act; the audience's role or the created audience
3. Persona: the role(s) adopted by the persuader in making the argument (such as teacher, preacher, reporter, prophet, and the like)
4. Tone: the rhetor's attitude toward the subject (detached, emotional, satirical, and so forth) and toward the audience (personal/impersonal, authoritative/egalitarian/suppliant, and so on.)
5. Structure: the way the materials are organized to gain attention, develop a case, and provide emphasis.
6. Supporting materials: different kinds of evidence for the argument
7. Strategies: adaptation of all of the above, including language, appeals, and argument, to shape the materials to overcome the obstacles the rhetor faces (the rhetorical problem) (p. 24)

In any rhetorical act, the first six of these elements interplay as they combine to shape the rhetorical strategies embedded in the discourse.

Though generic and traditional perspectives of rhetoric help to enhance the analysis, the primary perspective and methodology utilized in this study is Burke's dramatistic theories of rhetoric. Disillusioned by the positivistic view of social science, Burke offers dramatism as a systematic approach to examining the multiple facets of human relations. "Dramatism is a study of 'action' as opposed to 'motion'" (Foss, Foss, & Trapp, 1991, p. 181). It is concerned with treating humans as "active" beings instead of merely animals in motion driven by the forces of biological elements. Claiming that people react symbolically to their environment, Burke argues that human interaction, as manifested in the interplay of language, is a "drama." "Dramatism," Burke (1968/1992) explains "is a method of analysis and a corresponding critique of terminology designed to show that the most direct route to the study of human relations and human motives is via a methodical inquiry into cycles of clusters of terms and their functions (p. 235). These "clusters of terms" become very important to a dramatistic analysis for they are the places where drama occurs. That is, a dramatistic lens views language not merely as means to convey information, but "modes of action"--what Burke calls "symbolic action" (Burke, 1966). Because words are more than just inconsequential utterings, but "symbolic acts" that reflect rules, ethics, and even the motives of the speaker, significant terms in rhetorical artifacts become

quite telling. By treating "clusters of terms" as "action" the critic is able to analyze the many ways humans manipulate and respond to symbols.¹⁴ Burke's method of analysis may be labeled as "statistical" in that it asks the critic to collect lists of repeated terms and significant structures present in a given artifact (Rueckert, 1963). Addressing these "clusters of terms" the critic constructs an argument which explains how these key terms connect and interact to fuel the drama. In the end, dramatistic analysis should lead the critic to the core of the rhetor's motive--specifically, how she or he intends to persuade her or his audience.¹⁵

As a critic applies Burke's dramatism, the concept of substance must be discussed. Substance, according to Burke, is the philosophical foundation of the message in a rhetorical act" (Brock, 1990, p. 190). Premarital counseling inherently deals with philosophical states in that it attempts to shape a couple's epistemological and ontological stance. Specifically, PCPs advice, teach, and persuade couples what the realities of marriage are, who couples are, and who they should become. Burke's five

¹⁴ Some examples of the ways humans manipulate language include "naming, argumentation, narration, definition, description, repetition, use of figurative language, patterns of organization, and any device of adornment" (Rybacki & Rybacki, 1991, p. 71).

¹⁵ For instance Burke used dramatism to examine Mein Kampf to delve into the motives of Adolf Hitler (see "The Rhetoric of Hitler's Battle" in Burke. K. (1973). The philosophy of literary form: Studies in symbolic action (3rd ed.). Berkeley: University of California Press.)

elements of drama or the "Pentad"--act, agent, agency, scene, and purpose--can be utilized to interpret and explain the "drama" of life: (1969a, p. xv).¹⁶ Simply stated, a critic in examining a rhetorical phenomenon asks five questions: "what was done (act), when or where it was done (scene), who did it (agent), how he did it (agency), and why (purpose)" (Burke, 1969a, p. xv). The critic then examines the discourse, searching for Burke's seven interlocked moments of the drama of human relations: hierarchy, the negative, guilt or pollution, purification, victimage, mortification, and redemption. Dramatism, "as a theory of language," Rueckert (1963) explains, "attempts to isolate and study the essence of language and, by systematically examining the uses to which [an individual] puts it, to isolate and study the essence of [humans] and the drama of human relations. One of the main conclusions reached is that...[a person] necessarily views everything through a 'fog of symbols'" (p. 161). By identifying and examining repeating "clusters of terms," in the discourse in premarital counseling materials, Burke's theories will help explain how the rhetorical construction of marriage occurs in PCPs.

¹⁶ For an extended discussion of the pentad see Rueckert (1963, pp. 73-83); Foss, Foss, & Trapp (1991, pp. 184-188); Rybacki & Rybacki (1991, pp. 76-79);

Criteria for Program Selection

Because of the vast array of premarital programs available today, the process of selecting specific programs for this study was an arduous task. My intent was to choose materials that would allow me access to the discourse which sets premarital counseling apart from other types of counseling. I was particularly interested in programs that were "socially" successful. That is, instead of its scientific validity and recorded success in actually reducing marital discord, I was more concerned with how well a program has endured in the market. I propose that the extent to which a program has gained popularity reflects the extent to which society has accepted the meanings created by that program. So for this study what society believes will work is of greater significance than what actually works. As such, to help facilitate my search for artifacts for analysis, I established the following criteria for programs most appropriate for this study:

1. The program must be designed primarily or exclusively for counseling premarital couples. Some programs are used in both marital and premarital counseling such as Couples Communication (Miller, Miller, Nunnally, and Wackman, 1991). However, it has been argued that premarital counseling has distinct theoretical assumptions, approaches, and goals, and therefore, cannot be viewed as merely a branch of marriage counseling (Bagarozzi & Rauen,

1981; Olson, 1983; Stahmann & Hiebert, 1980). Because this thesis is concerned with the rhetoric of premarital counseling, program materials strategically produced for premarital couples are the most appropriate artifacts for analysis.

2. The program must have a wide audience. A multitude of programs exist in various forms, some created by individual counselors and used solely by that specific counselor, while others published and distributed nationally. To add to the generalizability of this analysis, the program selected should be those that have the opportunity and ability to influence a large number of couples. It can be assumed that the popularity of such programs reflects, to some extent, the degree to which groups of people view the program as an appropriate response to the rhetorical exigence. PCPs produced and administered by individual churches or small denominations as well as unique PCPs used in counseling centers do not have access to a wide population, and as such, do not meet this criteria.¹⁷

3. The program must include enough materials available for an extensive analysis. Materials can include couples' manuals, questionnaires, audio and video tapes,

¹⁷ Wright describes several individual church programs in his book, Premarital Counseling Handbook (1992, pp.26-36).

photographs, charts, instructor's manuals, board games, exercises, activities, etc.

4. Finally, the program's structure and approach should be greatly dependent on the materials it uses. This criteria increases the probability that a program's meanings of marriage can be extracted from its counseling materials. An example of PCPs that do not fulfill this criteria are amorphous programs in churches and private counseling offices which place little attention to materials and depend instead on the individual counselors to shape the sessions according to the particular couple.

Programs for Analysis

After perusing numerous programs as described in pamphlets and academic journals, two programs emerged as the most appropriate for this study: H. Norman Wright's premarital counseling program (Wright, 1992) and the PREPARE program (Olson, Fournier, & Druckman, 1986; Olson, 1993). Both these programs fit the criteria set forth above.

Wright's program was one of the first highly structured programs developed specifically for premarital couples. The program combines family and relationship theory with non-denominational Christian principles. Because the manual does not take a specific denominational stance, it is used widely in various denominations and is

available in Christian bookstores throughout the country. The manual is also used in Wright's Christian counseling center in Tustin, California.

The choice to use a religious PCP is a justifiable one. Although numerous secular programs exist, because most couples who receive premarital counseling do so from Christian churches. As the most common place for weddings, churches have the unique opportunity to shape social realities regarding marriage.¹⁸ Consequently, most premarital counseling is administered by religious counselors (e.g. pastoral counseling, lay-couple counseling, religious counseling centers, etc.) (Stanley, Markman, St. Peters, & Leber, 1995). Thus a "typical" premarital counseling program is one produced for a religious setting. Furthermore, Blumberg (1992) argues that premarital counseling in religious institutions is a prime area of research because such programs have yet to be systematically examined. Thus Wright's premarital counseling program is a salient artifact for analysis

The program has a rich collection of materials available for analysis, and acquiring such materials was an easy task because Wright's books and manual are available

¹⁸ In 1986, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (I-69) reported that more than 60% of weddings are held in a religious setting (Vital statistics of the United States 1986: Volume III-Marriage and Divorce. Hyattsville, Maryland, National Center for Health Statistics, 1990). Almost 80% of couples are married in religious ceremonies today (Wright, 1992).

to the general public, usually through Christian bookstores. Wright has written over 50 books, several of which apply to the development of marital and premarital couples. His book, The Premarital Counseling Handbook (1980, 1992), was one of the first comprehensive Christian counseling manuals that covered the theoretical, empirical, and theological aspects of premarital counseling in churches, and is still widely recognized today (Larson, Holman, Klein, Busby, Stahmann, & Peterson, 1995). In his handbook, Wright lays the structure of his program, suggesting that couples be given several of his books as part of the program, including Before You Say "I DO": A Marriage Preparation Manual for Couples and So You're Getting Married. The manual serves as the main instructional material for the couple and provides structure for the counseling sessions. As such, in this analysis the manual, will be treated as the primary artifact and So You're Getting Married and The Premarital Counseling Handbook as secondary artifacts.

Before You Say "I Do" consists of various chapters covering topics such as the goals, communication, roles, and finances. Each chapter includes text, open-ended questions, exercises, and surveys through which a couple works together. The manual also sets the standards of a "good" marriage for the sessions, highlighting the characteristics and skills couples need to achieve such a marriage. Moreover, there are several tests and surveys in

the manual that measure the quality of the couple's relationship.

An intriguing aspect of the manual is its endurance in the market. Since 1978 the manual has been reprinted 32 times at the rate of 20,000 copies per year, and according to its publishers, the demand for the text remains consistent (S. Burke, personal communication, May 15, 1996)¹⁹. Whereas other published manuals go through constant revisions, the structure and content of the manual has changed little over the last 18 years, making the manual one of the oldest of its kind. This thesis may provide some insights into what has made Wright's program so successful that its rhetoric, fashioned nearly two decades ago, still appeals to couples today.

PREPARE, a non-religious program developed specifically for premarital counseling, is one of the most widely used PCPs, in the United States (Larson, Holman, Klein, Busby, Stahmann, & Peterson, 1995). Since 1979, nearly 500,000 couples have gone through the program, and currently, 20,000 counselors and clergy use the program for counseling premarital couples (Olson, 1993; PREPARE/ENRICH, 1992). The major component of the program is an empirically validated premarital assessment questionnaire (also called a premarital inventory). The program also includes a family history assessment sheet, a conflict

¹⁹ Burke is an employee at Harvest House, the publishing company that owns the copyrights to Before You Say "I Do".

management exercise, and couple discussion topics. PREPARE is used in both religious and non-religious premarital counseling settings, and is lauded by both groups. The premarital inventory has been the subject numerous academic journal articles, and in fact, is one of the most studied premarital inventories today. A recent journal describes the inventory as one of the "most psychometrically sound instruments" appropriate for premarital counseling (Larson, et. al., 1995, p. 251). PREPARE also from Christian counselors and writers. For instance, McManus praises the inventory for providing "a virtual X-ray of the relationship, with strengths clearly outlined as well as areas of conflict" (1994, p. 52).

Acquiring materials to represent the rhetoric of PREPARE was challenging because PREPARE/ENRICH, Inc., the company that produces PREPARE, limits the availability of materials to "persons with clinical or pastoral training in marriage and counseling" (Fournier, Olson, & Druckman, 1983, p. 248). However, I was able to acquire Building a Strong Marriage, the manual given to couples as part of the program. Also, PREPARE/ENRICH has given me permission to study the program utilizing a condensed sample version of the inventory as well as other literature that clarify the purpose and structure of the program (PREPARE/ENRICH, 1992; PREPARE/ENRICH, 1986; Olson, n.d.; PREPARE/ENRICH, personal communication, May 17, 1996).

Conclusion

Utilizing rhetorical criticism as a new method for examining PCPs, this study will address two key issues in the rhetoric of premarital counseling: a) the process by which construction of marriage occurs; and b) the characteristics of marriage embedded in program materials. To accomplish this task, I will focus on two national PCPs, Before You Say I Do and PREPARE; and the messages embodied in their counseling materials, themes, symbols, and clusters of terms that facilitate persuasion. Chapter 3 will examine Before You Say "I Do", and Chapter 4 will analyze PREPARE. Each analysis will examine four aspects of each program's rhetoric: contextual constraints, rhetorical structure, rhetorical strategies, and the meanings of marriage.

The two programs chosen for this analysis deploy different rhetorical strategies--one appeals to religious principles and the other to science. As such, comparing these two different programs advances a more developed understanding of the varying strategies premarital counseling programs utilize to maximize their productivity and achieve their goals. Finally, this analysis will consider the social definitions of marriage in this modern era constructed through the discourse produced by the differing and sometimes overlapping frameworks of religious and secular premarital counseling programs.

CHAPTER III

BEFORE YOU SAY "I DO": THE RHETORIC OF REBIRTH IN RELIGIOUS
PREMARITAL COUNSELING

This chapter examines H. Norman Wright's religious premarital counseling program, for which the manual, Before You Say "I Do" (BYSID), serves as the main text. The analysis is divided into three phases. First, I identify the contextual constraints that shape the program, particularly the religious context in which the program is administered. Second, I examine the structure of arguments that characterize and empower the program, focusing on the manual's use of invitation, inquiry, and discussion. Finally, using Burke's rhetorical theories, I treat the discourse in the program as symbolic action and evaluate the drama which sets the stage for a rhetoric of rebirth and ultimately, the rhetorical construction of marriage in BYSID.

The Church Setting as Contextual Constraint

When executing a contextual analysis of the unique rhetoric of premarital counseling, historical or temporal context becomes irrelevant simply because each counseling situation may be different from the next. The critic must focus instead on the significant circumstances which surround and shape the program's discourse. In Burke's

terminology, such qualities may be called the scene which, in dramatic terms, "contains" the act. Burke asserts that "one could not deduce the details of the action from the details of the setting, but one could deduce the quality of the action from the quality of the setting" (1969a, p. 7).²⁰ In BYSID, the religious quality of the counseling scene becomes the most important contextual constraint.

BYSID is targeted for and used primarily in Christian churches (Wright, 1992). As such, its discourse is shaped by the goals, norms, and processes of the Christian premarital counseling setting. In his widely recognized book, The Premarital Counseling Handbook (Wright, 1992), which is used by clergy as a basic instruction manual for counseling, Wright provides glimpses of what a church premarital counseling context entails.

First, church counseling involves religious definitions of marriage. Wright (1992, p.99) quotes Wayne Oates who describes the Christian church's position on marriage: "Marriage under the auspices of the church is an institution ordained of God, blessed by Christ's presence, and subject to the instruction of the Holy Spirit." Such a view of the nature of marriage certainly constrains the rhetoric of BYSID in that BYSID's discourse must not deter

²⁰ Burke (1969a) adds: "From the motivational point of view, there is implicit in the quality of a scene the quality of the action that is to take place within it. This would be another way of saying that the act will be consistent with the scene (p. 7).

from the implications of this Christian perspective. In this way, the church setting builds boundaries for the rhetoric of BYSID. Ultimately, as will be discussed later in the chapter, the concept of a "Christian Marriage" is an important element in the rhetoric of BYSID.

Second, the goals of counseling may differ from other counseling situations. Like other types of PCPs, church counseling serves to "make an impact upon marriage and divorce today" (Wright, 1992, p. 8). However, there are added goals in this context. Wright describes the task of the pastoral counselor as more than merely performing weddings, but also nurturing "marriages so that they will become fulfilling and permanent and reflect the presence of Jesus Christ" (p. 21). To Wright, "good counseling is a ministry"--a service which glorifies God by "helping couples move toward marriages that honor God and one another (p. 33). Wright explains that the spiritual growth of each partner is a high ranking priority in premarital counseling in churches: "This is a time for each person to evaluate his or her commitment to Jesus Christ individually and as a couple" (p.84).

Not only does the scene "contain" the act, it also contains the agents--those who participate in the act (Burke, 1969a, p.3). The religious overtones of this particular communication context bestows both the counselor and couples with certain qualities. For instance, counselors in this context are also clergy, endowed with

certain rights and responsibilities and expected to follow the guidelines delineated by certain denominations and the Christian church in general. In some cases the counselor may also be the clergy who will officiate the wedding ceremony. Couples enter the situation knowing that the counselor will be touching on spiritual matters. Couples become situated in the context as "counselees," who are less informed about the tenets of a Christian marriage as the counselor. As such, the couple is expected to be open to the leading of the pastor or priest, as a flock of sheep are to a shepherd. Unlike other counseling circumstances, a church setting asks of these players more than just the relationship characteristics of counselor-client. For instance, in many cases, the couples are members of the church and will continue to have a relationship with their pastoral counselor even after their engagement.

As demanded by the context, the frame of reference Wright and his associates have regarding marriage and premarital counseling is characterized by Christian principles and ideals. Consequently, the discourse they produce is saturated in Christian terminology. It would not be surprising if religious rituals such as prayer, confession, and worship emerge in the counseling agenda. As such, this contextual constraint shapes the discourse of BYSID and provides boundaries for elements of its rhetoric.

Furthermore, the religious context which undergirds BYSID's rhetorical acts offers a rhetoric that differs from

other counseling practices. Whereas Kenneth Burke (1966) dichotomizes psychoanalysis and religion by describing the former "as a simple technique of non-religious conversion" (p. 125), BYSID seems to unite the two practices, offering counseling services through religious conversion and reaffirmation. As such, the context of religious counseling marks an intriguing intersection between therapeutic and religious rhetoric. Having identified the church setting as the major contextual constraint for the rhetoric of BYSID, we move now to a discussion of the program's main strategies of delivery.

Invitation, Inquiry, and Discussion as Argument

Before You Say "I Do" represents the program's extensive attempt to help couples prepare for marriage. The manual is the main text for the program and includes the topics of discussion for the actual premarital counseling sessions. The manual is divided into 12 chapters, each dedicated to a specific issue of marriage. Also, representative of the program's rhetoric are two texts, So You're Getting Married and Premarital Counseling Handbook, both written by H. Norman Wright. The first book is required reading material for couples during the program, whereas the second book is an instructional manual for counselors. Though these two books will be used to

clarify BYSID's rhetoric, the main focus of this analysis is manual.

The construction of marriage in BYSID begins with the selection of twelve topics (see Table 3). The authors describe the manual as a "creative resource for premarital preparation and enrichment." Couples are promised a "wealth of practical ideas for building a firm foundation for their future together." Given that the manual's purpose is to "prepare" and "build a foundation" for couples, highlighting these twelve issues establishes the content and boundaries for the meaning of marriage. The selection of these topics imply that preparing adequately for marriage requires couples to discuss these particular issues. Thus, couples who had not thought about these topics before are introduced to a new perspective on marriage and marital preparation. Further, couples are told what is vital to a successful marriage, what causes marital distress, and ultimately, what marriage is. For example, from these chapters we begin to glean a perspective on marriage that involves goal-planning, need-fulfillment, uniqueness, and acceptance.

Each chapter opens with introductory sentences that present the main issue of the chapter. What follows are varied sets of questions, quotes²¹, discussion/activities,

²¹ The authors of BYSID provide numerous quotes throughout the manual. These excerpts, usually written by other Christian writers, comment on the nature of the "Christian marriage," relationships in general, and other topics related to each chapter in the manual. In certain cases

Chapter	Topic
1	What is Marriage?
2	Uniqueness and Acceptance in Marriage
3	Love as a Basis for Marriage
4	What Do You Expect from Marriage?
5	Goals in Marriage?
6	Fulfilling Needs in Marriage?
7	Roles, Responsibilities and Decision Making
8	In-Laws or Outlaws--It's Your Choice
9	Communication
10	Conflict (or "Sound the Battle Cry!")
11	Finances
12	Sex

Table 3. Chapters in Before You Say "I Do" (Roberts & Wright, 1978)

and Biblical citations, all of which become critical elements in the program's rhetorical strategy. Typical of workbooks, most of the content of the manual are questions which both partners are requested to answer before they proceed to the next section. As such, most of the time spent working through the program is spent answering

these quotes are used to reflect the opinions of the authors, but in instances the couples are given a number of different quotes and instructed to discuss which view they take.

questions, sharing answers, and discussing the issues covered by the material.

Also, the program requires couples to use a Bible along side the manual; throughout each chapter are Biblical citations (e.g. Genesis 2:18-25) for which the couple must find the corresponding texts. Throughout the manual BYSID utilizes three strategies to facilitate the creation of meaning: invitation, inquiry, and discussion.

BYSID refrains from polemic argumentation but instead invites the couple to co-create meaning. Diverting from traditional rhetorical form in which the rhetor asserts and the audience attends, this invitational technique, marked by an attempt to induce couples to participate, places the audience in a non-traditional role--that of co-speaker. Much of the meaning-creation that occurs in the program is dependent on the extent to which couples actually accept the program's invitation to participate. The strength of this invitational technique is its use of an covert method of persuasion which empowers the audience by making them feel involved in the process, while at the same time still promoting BYSID's specific agenda.²² For example, in introducing the various activities in the manual, BYSID, rather than just telling couples what to do, invites the couple, using of words such as "we," "us," and "let's":

²² For an excellent discussion on this type of rhetoric see Foss, S.K., & Griffin, C.L. (1995). Beyond persuasion: A proposal for an invitational rhetoric. Communication Monographs, 62, 2-17.

Let's briefly talk about disappointment. We all experience disappointment because some of our expectations, hopes, and dreams are not realized. List three of the most disappointing experiences of you life and then indicate what you did or how you handled the disappointment. (Roberts & Wright, 1978, p.23)

Here the couple is empowered by being asked to participate, but BYSID clearly promotes the importance of discussing expectations.

This invitational technique endows couples with the power to choose, enabling them to co-create meanings of marriage. In discussing what marriage is, BYSID states:

Read the following quotations. After you have read each of them indicate which portions you agree with and which portions you disagree with. (Roberts & Wright, 1978, p. 4)

What follows is a list of quotations from various sources, describing what marriage is. One quotation portrays marriage as a "covenant more solemn, more binding, more permanent than any legal contract." Other quotes define marriage as "a relationship between man and woman inspired by God" and "a system by means of which persons who are sinful and contentious are so caught up by a dream and a purpose bigger than themselves." Though couples are given choices, their choice is still limited. For instance, in the quotations above a Christian theme appears in some form in each of the quotations. Thus, the program ultimately promotes an image of marriage as Christian. In the end, BYSID sets the boundaries of the couples choices, and as

such, it maintains most of the control in the situation. However, in not forcing a set definition of marriage, BYSID gives the appearance that the couple is in control--that they construct marriage themselves.

An offshoot of the invitation strategy, inquiry is another tactic which BYSID uses frequently throughout the program. Characteristic of a typical workbook, BYSID is full of questions for couples to answer. As such, rhetorical influence emerges through inquiry rather than a more direct persuasive means. For example, in the first chapter, instead of directly telling a couple what a marriage is, the text proposes several questions:

--Define marriage What is its purpose?

--Do you believe that marriage is a contract? Why or why not?

--How do you think your fiance would answer these questions?

Then each partner is asked to list what they "believe are ten firm foundations which will go into making a solid marriage relationship." Later in the chapter, after couples have discussed their own definitions of marriage, BYSID provides a biblical view, which represent the "right" answers. But even here BYSID is careful in the way it provides the right answers--namely it asks more questions:

--What are the purposes of marriage and why was it originated? (See Genesis 1:28; 2:18; Ephesians 5:22-32.)

--How is marriage good? (Genesis 2:18; Hebrews 13:4)

Two important rhetorical strategies are involved in having couples look up the Bible verses: First, couples are the agent of action in that they, not the manual, are answering the questions. The couples see for themselves what the Bible has to say about the issue, and in doing so, they are not only encouraged to participate, but are assured that the manual is being truthful. Second, such a strategy alleviates or at least underplays the manual's responsibility to argue the relevancy of the biblical passage to the issue at hand. The manual asks, "How is marriage good?" Then it provides biblical citations to answer the question. It never explains why it chose these specific citations. When the couple sees for themselves that these citations actually do talk about marriage, they assume that these citations answer the original question. Whereas a more direct approach may tell the couple how marriage is good on the outset, BYSID first asks the couple to take an active part in the process. In this way, couples do not feel pushed into believing a viewpoint. Again, the manual's rhetoric is greatly dependent on the couple's participation in the program.

BYSID utilizes discussion as a third strategy. Each chapter in the manual involves several activities which encourage partners to discuss their beliefs, needs, fears,

background, etc. For instance, Chapter 20, which discusses expectations, includes the following exercise:

. . .Talk with your fiance and list, on a separate piece of paper, ten similarities and ten differences about his home and family life and yours. Discuss these together. How will any of these affect your own marriage? (p. 26)

In asking couples to discuss certain issues at length, BYSID elevates the significance of that issue. For instance, in the exercise above, family background becomes an important issue--important enough to be the central topic for an exercise. In this way, BYSID shapes the couple's image of marriage by employing an indirect strategy--discussion. Discussion maintains the couple's sense of power as they have control over the way they will discuss certain issues. They can choose which examples to choose or how intimate their discussion will be. As they participate in discussions, couples are made to believe that they are in control of the situation. However, the program certainly holds as much, if not more, control. First, the program chooses which topics are worth discussing, and in doing so, promotes the issues it believes are important to marriage. Also, in an even more indirect way, throughout the manual, BYSID promotes an image of marriage that entails a certain method of discussion--one that involves time, order, respect, and equal participation between partners.

It seems the most direct way of constructing the meaning of marriage for couples is by telling them what marriage is. However, BYSID recognizes that each of its clients are unique and do not enter the premarital program as blank slates, void of any preconceived notions about marriage. Still, the program has a structured agenda and a set of perspectives which it ultimately seeks to promulgate. The use of these three strategies--invitation, inquiry, and discussion--encourage couples to participate as free agents, active thinkers, individuals who are empowered to make decisions. The manual succeeds in shaping the meanings of marriage through an indirect rhetoric which relies on the couples themselves as agents of change. This is an effective rhetorical approach because couples, as will be discussed in the next section, become the central agents in the drama of this premarital counseling program. What follows is an application of Burke's dramatism to the texts of Wright's program, treating the premarital counseling situation as drama.

The Rhetoric of Rebirth

In the opening pages of the manual, the key drama in BYSID unfolds. Speaking to premarital couples, Roberts and Wright describe their primary purpose for creating the program:

This manual has been developed to help you remove the risk element from marriage. We trust that as you and your fiance work through this program, your present relationship will be strengthened and enriched as a prelude to an enriching, fulfilling, and growing marriage. We also hope that you will have a much more realistic perception of yourself, your fiance, and your marriage.

Noting the key terms in these few phrases, BYSID's motive emerges. Centered around identifying and removing "risk elements" or perceived problems in marriage, BYSID offers the program as a way to alleviate these risks. Further, couples by "working through this program" can achieve certain rewards such as a stronger relationship or a more "realistic perception." Unfolding in these terms is the central drama in BYSID which involves the agents (couples) trying to overcome risk elements in the scene (marriage). Thus, the act is embodied in "working through the program," and the program itself, BYSID, is agency. Purpose centers around the notion shifting the couple's identity toward a better one--one that is more strengthened, enriched, realistic, etc. As Wright explains, "There is risk involved in the marriage process, but the essential element is not so much finding the right person as it is becoming the right person" (1992, p. 37). In effect, the drama in this program is a cycle of creating and solving problems which leads couples to better states of being. Such a triadic cycle, which becomes the main structure of BYSID's rhetoric, is illuminated by Burke's "rhetoric of rebirth."

Burke borrows the concept of "rebirth" from Christian terminology (Rueckert, 1963). To Christians, rebirth refers to the process by which God saves humans from their sinful nature through the atoning work of Christ, bridging the separation between humans and God, and ultimately, allowing humans heavenly rewards--eternal life. In dramatic redemption, however, "Burke has reduced God to an idea (or term), Heaven and Hell to psychological states, Purgatory to symbolic action, Christ to the dialectics of redemption, and the grammar of Christianity to a rhetoric of rebirth" (Rueckert, 1963, p. 134). As such, Burke's secular version of redemption, Foss, Foss, and Trapp (1991) claim, "may symbolize psychological patterns that 'lie at the roots of our conduct here and now" (p. 194).

In his book The Grammar of Motives, Burke (1969) offers a comprehensive explication regarding the key terms that make up his complex theory of rhetoric. He begins by discussing the term, substance--the attributes of a thing which define what it is. Burke uses this term when he discusses the substance of humans or the substance of language or discourse. Burke further argues that a major aspect of human substance, indeed what separates us from animals, is our ability and tendency to create the negative. That is, humans are able to ponder what certain things are not and what certain things ought to be. This concept does not exist in nature, but only in human interactions, made possible through our use of symbols.

Through language and our capacity to create negatives we can construct rules for daily behavior and moral action ("Thou shalt" and Thou shalt not"). Inherent in language are hierarchies that tell humans who they are, who they are not, and who they should be.

Burke (1965) further posits that when humans fail to live up to these hierarchies they are wrought with guilt or pollution, again created symbolically through language. Thus, a major function of rhetoric is to facilitate a process of rebirth. Rebirth involves modifying one's identity--one's substance--from one goaded with guilt to a purified version, cleansed through means of symbolic purification. Humans purify themselves by transferring guilt to another (victimage) or punishing themselves (mortification).²³ The end result is a temporary state of redemption (Rueckert, pp. 84-85, p. 283). Thus, language which creates humans' fallen state, also provides the means for their redemption. If people are as Burke claims, then rhetors can take advantage of such inherent human traits to maximize the effectiveness of their rhetorical strategies.

In BYSID's three-step process of creating and resolving problems, the anxiety couples feel when the program identifies "risk elements" in their relationship correspond with pollution and guilt. When the manual

²³ Foss, Foss, and Trapp (1991, 194-197) and Rueckert (1963, 145-149) provide summaries on the "rhetoric of rebirth."

identifies "risk elements in marriage," it is employing a process of creating "crisis." In his premarital handbook, Wright describes this process of creating crisis as making sure couples are "a bit troubled or concerned, pondering the weight of this step they are about to take" (p. 35). Detecting "risk elements" or problems with the relationship that may potentially lead to marital dissolution may put couples in a state of crisis. That is, to the extent that these risk elements are identified and problematized, couples may begin to experience a level of discomfort, dissonance, or anxiety--or in Burke's terms, guilt.

After intensifying crisis, the manual provides a way to alleviate these problems: "We trust that as you and your fiance work through this program, your present relationship will be strengthened and enriched..." Here we find that the solution proposed is the program itself. This is a necessary move on BYSID's part in that, in order to sustain itself in the market, it must remind couples of the program's significance. The key term here, which later becomes a major recurring theme, is work. Though BYSID portrays marriage as an incredibly complex and challenging commitment, certainly one which couples should not take lightly, BYSID encourages couples by pointing them to the various aspects of work vital to the success of any marriage. Work becomes the central element which provides couples with a way to escape the risks involved in

marriage. In other words, work functions as the central theme for the purification process.

Ultimately, couples reach a state of redemption. The third portion in the purpose statement leads us to the final stage in BYSID's rhetorical strategy wherein the program identifies the rewards of working through premarital counseling. Couples who work through the program will experience relationships that are "strengthened," "enriched," "fulfilling," and "growing." Also, their perceptions of themselves and marriage will be "more realistic." Though the rhetorical construction of marriage occurs throughout the first two stages, during this third stage, the process takes full form. In defining for the couple what is entailed in a marriage that is "fulfilling," "growing," "realistic," etc., BYSID provides for the couple a vision of an ideal marriage. As such, this cycle of rebirth--guilt, purification, redemption--becomes the overriding method whereby the rhetorical construction of marriage occurs.

This three-step process involving crisis, work, and rewards forms the major structure of BYSID's rhetorical construction of marriage. It is through this process that BYSID captures the attention of its audience and achieves its aims. Ultimately, this process also facilitates BYSID's rhetorical construction of marriage. Especially, in premarital counseling is this rhetoric of rebirth so appropriate. To validate the significance of premarital

counseling, the program must identify and problematize issues important to the couple. Given the preventive approach of premarital counseling, the counselor's challenge is to somehow address problems that have yet to plague the relationships. Unlike marriage counselors who deal with couples who choose to enter the situation with certain problems already in mind, the premarital counselor has the difficult task of creatively constructing the problems which will provide impetus for the counseling sessions. Here, the rhetoric of BYSID is put to the test in that the manual is charged through this construct of marriage to persuade the couple not only that these risk elements exist in the relationship but that their existence maximizes the possibility of impending crises.

Furthermore, the program must also provide a way to alleviate the problems it has constructed. If the program only generated guilt without facilitating purification and redemption, it would not prove successful in preparing couples for marriage. Though programs offer differing "acts" that will lead to such redemption, critical to the self-preservation of the program is to convince couples that purification and redemption can be found through the program itself--the program as "agency." This motivation is inherent in BYSID's statement: "We trust that as you and your fiance work through this program, your present relationship will be strengthened and enriched." Notice

that BYSID does not just tell couples to work, but to work through this program.

Because the symbolic elements that drive the rhetoric of rebirth--negative, hierarchy, guilt--are inherent aspects of human symbolicity, if a critic looks hard enough, s/he will find aspects of rebirth in all rhetorical acts. However, what makes the application of this theory so interesting and so appropriate to this analysis of BYSID is its capacity to extract the ways discourse is used to appeal to this cycle of rebirth. As such, what warrants analysis in the rhetoric of BYSID are the unique strategies the program deploys to induce guilt, facilitate purification, and lead couples toward redemption.²⁴

Here's Your Problem: Intensifying Guilt

In his handbook for premarital counselors, Wright (1992) encourages counselors to strategically create, what he calls, "unrest or dissonance in the counselees":

Premarital counseling is different from other counseling approaches. How? I would like to see the couple leave my office a bit troubled or

²⁴ Reuckert (1963) explains the problem is not to determine empirically whether the various archetypes of the rhetoric of rebirth are present--they are always present--but to determine by means of what Burke calls 'free association' in what particular, specific form they appear. Burke points out, for example, that in most rituals of purification there is a transfer of some kind from the polluted, burdened person to some other person, place or thing (p. 98).

concerned, pondering the weight of this step they are about to take. I want them to leave at times with questions and concerns rather than with everything tied up in a neat package...In a sense, the counselor should create a sense of crisis in a positive way with each couple. (p. 35)

Unique from other types of counseling, the creation of crisis becomes a critical element in the marital preparation process. In fact, as Wright explains, the presence of these crises "brings about the ideal conditions for growth" (p. 35). The various ways BYSID artfully creates these crises points toward the program's treatment of guilt in the cycle of rebirth.

To intensify couples' guilt BYSID attempts to make them feel anxious about their decision to marry. Wright (1985) reminds couples of their ignorance regarding the "realistic" nature of the marital union: "As most couples move toward marriage, their sense of reality is distorted by wishfulness and fantasy, and this intense romantic illusion can neutralize the positive development of their marriage" (p. 12).²⁵ Recognizing that premarital couples may be enamored by the romance of engagement, Wright asks them to think about the seriousness of marriage:

²⁵ Wright's approach seems to correspond with empirical research. Silliman and Schumm (1989) concluded that couples are rarely interested in the "day-to-day" issues of marriage including marital roles, sexuality, and stress management. As such, "if this speculation is fact, one important caveat is that clients' input should be a critical, but not solitary determinant of premarital programming. Providers may have an important role introducing couples to these real life issues or building rapport to carry over to postmarried sessions in which issues can be discussed from a more concrete perspective" (p. 205).

Are you ready for commitment? Face your partner.
 Look at that person and hold his or her hand.
 You are committing yourself to about 50 years
 with that individual. Think about it! It is
 important to think twice before entering a room
 with no exits. (p. 8)

The concept of a long-lasting marriage could be perceived as positive if termed as "eternal love" or "forever true." However, BYSID, in using the metaphor, "a room with no exits," attempts to intensify couples' anxiety by framing marital longevity as an enclosed space from which partners cannot "exit." Especially for couples who had not considered this perspective, marriage may seem like a trap. When some couples realize they have not given this aspect of marriage enough thought, they begin to feel anxious about their decision to marry.

The program further intensifies couples' anxiety by painting an image of marriage as difficult, laborious, and full of unexpected hardships. In the chapter on expectations, BYSID assures couples that they will go through a "disenchantment stage" which is characterized with words like "burdened," "terrible," "hurt," "bitter," "trapped," "wretched," "splintered," and "irritated" (p. 25).²⁶ After presenting the hardships of the disenchantment

²⁶ Apart from textual characteristics, the manual itself serves as a message that marriage is laborious. BYSID consists of 78 pages of questions, exercises, and readings asking couples to examine and discuss their expectations, needs, family backgrounds, conflict styles, goals, etc. Outside readings are also strongly suggested. By the end of the program couples will have learned that building a strong marriage requires much work.

stage, BYSID, in an almost threatening tone, asks the couple, "Do you want to go through the full extent of the disenchantment stage as you see it expressed here?" Later in the chapter, 20 problematic scenarios are listed, including "a miscarriage," "death of a child," major financial difficulty," "car is stolen while on vacation," "finding yourself attracted to another person," and "in-laws turn hostile toward you." The manual asks the couple to discuss how they would react to such events. In doing so, BYSID brings the couple to the "realities" marriage--a marriage that is filled with hardships.

As couples are charged with the responsibility of marital preparation, part of their task is to modify their false or dangerous expectations (i.e. expectations that are based on "wishfulness" and "fantasy" instead of reality). Couples who have never considered these problematic aspects of marital life begin to realize that perhaps they have not prepared enough for marriage.

Chapter 10, entitled, "Conflict (or 'Sound the Battle Cry!')," continues to remind couples of the eminent troubles of marriage: "Are you anticipating conflict in your marriage? If not, you may be in for a surprise." Beside conflict, other terms such as sacrifice (p. 26), disruption (p. 38), and chaotic (p. 38) converge in Wright's view of "marriage as a call to suffering" (1985, p.25). By labeling marriage with these terms, BYSID employs a strategy of naming the scene in such a way that

couples as agents will feel guilt. In calling the scene of marriage conflicted, the manual places the couples in a state of disarray. So when BYSID portrays marriage as conflicted, it generates potential for making couples feel conflicted, not so much because they are presently in a conflicted state, but because they have been given a glimpse of a near future filled with hardship. In effect, BYSID problematizes or "demonizes" the scene. Couples, before entering the premarital program may have been in a relative state of comfort or satisfaction; but after being told what marriage is truly like, they become anxious. In a dramatic sense, they have recognized their guilt, manifested here as the fear of not being fully prepared for the crisis in marital life.

Similar to its strategy of naming the scene, BYSID creates crisis by naming the agents as inadequate. To do so, the manual establishes "hierarchies of being" to which a couple must compare themselves. Ultimately, these hierarchies, render couples inadequate for the requirements of a marital relationship. This is manifested in BYSID's asking of questions throughout the manual. Inherent in asking questions is the possibility of guilt which is formed when the couple (a) does not know the answer, or (b) if their answer is wrong. In either case, the outcome is similar; BYSID reminds couples of their place in a hierarchy of right and wrong ("Thou shalt" and "Thou shalt

nots"). As such, the asking of questions becomes a major force in BYSID's creation of crisis and guilt.

Chapter One in the manual, which deals with the purpose and definition of marriage, questions the couple's reasons for desiring marriage: "There are many reasons and motivating factors for marriage. What are yours? Have you ever thought about them?...What will you receive out of marriage that you wouldn't receive by remaining single?" Here, a drama occurs as the couple's motives are challenged. The couple is asked to justify their intentions by listing the reasons why they are marrying each other. Then BYSID offers a set of wrong and right answers (negative and positive reasons for marriage), and the couple is asked to compare their list with this set. This strategy creates a hierarchy of right and wrong motives to which couples must compare themselves. Guilt is intensified when couples find that some of their motives for getting married are near the bottom of this hierarchy-- what BYSID labels as "unhealthy reasons for marriage".²⁷ The word unhealthy is especially important to this guilt inducing process in that it suggests that a motive can be sickly or diseased. As such, an unhealthy motive can only develop into an unhealthy marriage, sick perhaps because of the disease of wrong intentions. Thus the couple is left

²⁷ Among BYSID's "unhealthy reasons for marriage" are marrying on a rebound, marrying to escape an unhappy home, and marrying because one of the partners is pregnant. Positive reasons for marriage include: love, companionship, and to fulfill sexual needs in the way God intends.

in a panicked state of crisis, questioning whether the engagement should continue.

Similarly, in Chapter Three, after naming love as a the foundation for marriage, the manual challenges the amount of love the couple has for each other:

Let's assume that in this society in order to be married you had to convince a jury in a court of law that you really did love the other person. Write in detail the facts you would present to a jury. (p. 12)

Such an exercise evokes a level of fear within the couples. They must suddenly defend themselves against a jury or otherwise be guilty of a crime--perhaps the crime of not loving sufficiently. Later in the chapter, the "right" types and combinations of love are established, giving the couple yet another hierarchy to which they must compare themselves.

The most powerful hierarchy in the program deals with a religious view of marriage. Throughout the program couples are measured against Christian principles to see if they relationship can live up to the expectations of the "Christian marriage":

A Christian marriage is a total commitment of two people to the person of Jesus Christ and to each other...A Christian marriage is similar to a solvent, a freeing up of the man and woman to be themselves and become all that God intends for them to become. Marriage is a refining process that God will use to have us become the man or woman He wants us to become. (p. 6)

As such, "marriage ought to be a bond of love, reflecting the love Christ has for His people, a bond of sacrificial love where husband and wife have become one, one flesh, a unity" (p. 4). Wright further explains:

The husband and wife relationship and family life is a microcosm of the Body of Christ. It is a little church, a fellowship of believers together. This relationship, particularly between husband and wife, should reflect to others--the non-Christian community--what a church is really like. A marriage and a family should be a church in miniature. (1985, p. 19)

In defining the "Christian marriage," the manual establishes the nature or substance of marriage as rooted in a higher, spiritual plane, thus creating a hierarchy of good and bad marriages. Good marriages are clearly those that recognize this spiritual aspect of the union and "reflects the love of Christ"; bad marriages do not. This strategy certainly increases guilt as couples are reminded that they do not fully understand all that entails a Christian marriage. Wright (1985) tells couples that one reason why marriages fail is because couples have "an inadequate basis upon which they build their personal identity...for many the teachings of God's Word have not been incorporated in depth into their lives, transforming both their identity and their security" (p. 13). As reflected in this statement, the "Christian marriage" theme places the couples themselves (their identity or substance) within the hierarchy, with the attributes of God or

godliness being the supreme value.²⁸ As such, couples are challenged to be more like God.

In fact, in several instance in the manual, the conversation shifts back and forth from a relationship between man and woman to a relationship between humans and God, as in Chapter Nine: "It is impossible to have any kind of relationship unless there is communication. That is true for you and your fiance and for your relationship with God." Later in the chapter, the couples are asked several questions about each partner's communication styles: "At what level does your fiance usually respond"? The questions then shift to a relationship with God: "On which level do you usually share with God?"; and "Describe a time when you really felt that you communicated with God" (p. 57). Dramatistically, the marital relationship and a relationship with God become the same.

The structure of argument that characterizes the program is centered on testimony or authority. That is, instead of using logic or scientific proof, the program focuses on appeals to the authority of the Bible. This type of argument emerges in the program through a recurring pattern. First, a problem or challenge is identified. For instance Chapter Seven begins with a warning that "failure to clarify the husband-wife roles in a relationship is a

²⁸ Ruekert (1963) explains: "Every hierarchy is headed by a 'godhead' of some kind, the godhead being that which is most valuable in a given value system" (p. 148). In this case, the godhead is actually God or at least the attributes BYSID chooses to identify as godly.

major cause of marital disruption" (p. 38). Second, the couple is asked to suggest ways they believe these problems could be managed: "Let's spend some time now thinking about your role as a wife or husband" (p. 38) What follows is an exercise which encourages both partners to define explicitly their roles in marriage.

Third, couples are provided with a Biblical perspective to the problem: "What does the Word of God say concerning the role of the wife and the role of the husband? Read Ephesians 5:21-33" (p. 43). When the couple is given a set of passages from the Bible, hierarchical guilt is produced. That is, in the way these are presented to the couple, these Biblical quotes represent the "right answer." In effect, though couples may have their own viewpoint, these passages are the words of God, and as such, have ultimate authority for those devoted to the Christian marriage.

The final element of this argument pattern involves a critical question which the manual asks at the end of each chapter: "How will the presence of Jesus Christ in your life help you in the process of decision making and discovering your gifts in marriage?" This question becomes a major theme throughout the manual, appearing in similar form at the end of other chapters.²⁹ The key terms here

²⁹ For example, Chapter Two which discusses acceptance in marriage, ends with "In what way will the presence of Jesus Christ in your life help you adjust to differences in your future marriage?";

center around the concept of how the "presence of Jesus Christ" will help the couple become a good couple. In other words how will the substance of Christ in couple's lives--their Christianity--help improve their marital relationship?³⁰ The dramatic implications of this question is significant. Having established the "right answer" (the "Thou shalt"), here, the manual challenges the couple to act in way that will not only maintain the order, but also enable the couple to reach a higher position within the hierarchy. As the couple answers this question, they not only affirm the concept of the "Christian marriage," but at the same time, they attempt to modify and improve their "identity" by becoming more like or, in Burke's terms, through "identification" with the qualities or substance of Jesus Christ.³¹ Such terms certainly create hierarchical guilt in that the couple is challenged to strive toward a deity who represents perfection. Such a

Chapter Three, dealing with the different types of love, ends with "How will the presence of Jesus Christ in your life help you to love your spouse through eros, phila, and agape love?";

Chapter Nine, discussing conflict, ends with "How will the presence of Jesus Christ in you life help you deal with conflict?"

³⁰ Chapter 12 restates the question as "What difference would being a Christian make in..."

³¹ Such a strategy relies on the "hierarchic motive" inherent in humans. That is, as Ruekert (1963) explains, ...on the one hand people are goaded by the desire to mount the hierarchy, either through action or possession; and on the other hand people are goaded by the threat of descending the hierarchy, again either by action or possession, but also by failure to act or inability to possess certain things. (p. 132)

demanding hierarchy sets the stage for a fall which ultimately leads to guilt. As such, the "Christian marriage" theme brings to full force the manuals attempt to intensify guilt.

According to Burke (1965) an aspect of humanness is "categorical guilt." That is, all humans are always in some state of pollution or guilt. Much like the Christian concept of "original sin," Burke's "categorical sin" refers to the sin inherited by humans because of their humanity and consequently, their symbolicity, tendency to create the negative, and obsession with perfection and hierarchy. Looming above the heads of couples are the constant reminders of divorce rates, domestic violence, and what some have coined, "the erosion of the marital institution." As such, couples may already have guilt that comes from the possibility of being part of these statistics. Knowing that over half of first marriages end in divorce, how can newly engaged couples know that their relationship will last? BYSID's aim, as reflected in the analysis above, is not necessarily to bring couples into a state of guilt, but to intensify their guilt or in Wright's words, "to create a sense of unrest and questioning within each person." He further explains:

In other types of counseling, including marital and crisis, we often endeavor to have the person or couple leave the session with a sense of hope and resolution. Premarital is different. We don't want them to be that comfortable. Why? So

that learning, growth, and change can occur.
(Wright, 1992, p.77)

By telling couples that marriage will be painfully difficult and by showing couples how they lack in certain areas, BYSID intensifies guilt among premarital couples, causing them to question, doubt, and reassess their motives. Moreover, by promoting the "Christian marriage" theme, the manual establishes a drama in which the couple, challenged to reach perfection, becomes riddled with hierarchical guilt. All these strategies manifest BYSID's attempt to intensify guilt by naming the couple's identity as lacking in some way. As such, the program through clusters of terms creates, in a Burkean sense, negative identities.

This shift in identity is key in the motive of BYSID. After all, Wright does believe the essential element in a successful relationship "is not so much finding the right person as it is becoming the right person" (1992, 37). As such, this strategy of creating guilt is extremely important for the rhetoric of BYSID. Only when couples believe there is a problem--a gap between who they are and who they should be (the right person)--can the medicine of premarital counseling have value to couples. If the program is successful in intensifying guilt, couples, in their distress, will feel the need for some type of relief and may become acquiescent to the particular type of cathartic procedure the program offers.

Working Your Way to the Top: Purification Through Work

If BYSID were to intensify pollution without providing cleansing, its rhetoric would fail. Couples would leave the counseling session in a state of panic, and the program's aim--to help couples "remove the risk element from marriage"--would not come to full realization. Thus, BYSID must continue the cycle of rebirth by providing a way for couples to purge their guilt. This purging of guilt, Burke (1965) asserts, occurs through victimage--transferring one's guilt to a scapegoat; and through mortification--an act of self-sacrifice. The rhetoric of BYSID utilizes mortification to lead couples through this important stage of purification.

Because guilt is inherent in all humans, Burke's concept of purification, also called catharsis or cleansing, becomes an archetypal moment in human symbolic action. In a paradoxical cycle of human symbolicity, just as language plagues humans with guilt, only through language, can humans be cleansed of the guilt. This paradox is quite evident in a preventive premarital counseling program such as BYSID. When couples enter the program they may not be aware of their problems--problems that the makers of BYSID believe may cause marital distress. Therefore, the program serves to reveal and intensify these problems so that the couple will feel guilt

and will want to seek change. Indeed, "too many couples today are committing marital suicide because of lack of preparation" (Wright, 1992, p. 83). So if BYSID wants to prepare couples for marriage, it must first tell couples what to prepare for. Purification entails the program showing the couple how such preparation can be accomplished. All this considered, it is clear that the program is responsible for making couples feel guilty enough to want change; and in the same token, it is also responsible for providing couples a way to cleanse themselves of such guilt.

In the first chapter, BYSID's phrase, "working through the program," is quite telling. It seems the only way couples can purge themselves of the "risk elements in marriage" is by "working through" all the steps entailed in the program. Furthermore, a connection is made between work and the elements of relationship strength and richness: "we trust that as you work through this program, your present relationship will be strengthened and enriched" (p. 4). Later in Chapter Four, the manual explains that "Couples expect their marriage to work out and never end in divorce. This is an excellent goal, but what will be done to make it a reality?" (p. 24) The term, work, becomes BYSID's key theme in the purification stage.³²

³² Emphasizing work, Wright states:
Marriage is one of God's greatest schools of learning--it can be a place where a husband and wife are refined. The rough edges are gradually filed away until there is a deeper,

Only through work can guilt be dissolved, and only through work can the relationship's structure (strength) and content (richness) be improved. Through work, by work, because of work, couples are symbolically purified. Here, work exemplifies Burke's term, act--in this case the act which leads to purification. As such, purification in BYSID focuses primarily on what couples do--their act. Already we can see that mortification (self-punishment) will become the main tactic for purging guilt.

Though guilt was discussed in the previous section, in discovering that "work" serves as a path toward purification, we come to a more fuller understanding of guilt. That is, if the program uses "work" or "action" as ways to remove guilt, then guilt must involve lack of work or sloth. This concept of "guilt as sloth" sheds deeper insight to "guilt as inadequacy" and "guilt as lack of preparation." The guilt couples feel stems from their failure to work on preparing for marriage. Guilt-ridden couples have not discussed the wide array of relationship issues; they have not asked the right questions nor thought about all that a "Christian marriage" entails. In effect, they have been mentally and spiritually lazy. However, through an act of mortification, couples can begin to

smoother, and more fulfilling working and blending together that is satisfying to both individuals. But this takes an incredible amount of time, energy and effort. (1992, p. 10)

remove these lethargic attitudes and behaviors within themselves.

The effects of the "Christian marriage" theme carry over in the process of mortification. In defining marriage as a "covenant," serving to honor God, the program asks couples to become a "Christian couple" which entails being "Christian individuals." The negative appears in this symbolic act. As Burke states, "what are we being Christian against?" (1969a, p. 34, emphasis in original). That is, in delineating what a Christian marriage is, the manual must reveal characteristics that would deter from such a marriage. The program does this throughout the manual. For instance, Wright explains, "the vast majority of people in our society want a stable marriage and family life. But we are competing with non-Christian values that are reflected in every phase of our society" (1992, p. 18). Here, the concept of "worldliness" is at work.³³ That is, couples as Christians must reject "the world" which is the embodiment of sinfulness. Evidently, these "non-Christian" values are at the root of marital instability, and though Wright leaves these values unspecified, we can gather what he means from his next sentence: "Thus, encouraging fidelity and commitment must be our continual

³³ The New Testament frequently uses the term "world" to signify ungodliness as in Romans 12:2 which states: "And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect" (NASB).

message" (p. 8). It seems infidelity and lack of commitment are "non-Christian" values that distort the full vision of the "Christian marriage."

Throughout the manual, we find other manifestations of what BYSID considers "non-Christian" values as reflected in terms such as arrogance (p. 9), rude, inconsiderate, envious, and suspicious (p. 15). In fact, because of the overarching effect of the "Christian marriage" theme, any characteristic that may hinder the couple from acquiring a stable "Christian marriage" becomes "anti-Christian." More importantly, BYSID finds these characteristics within the couples:

Conflict is a fact of life. It has been defined as a slash, contention, or sharp disagreement over interests, ideas, etc. Why does it occur? The answer is simply that we are human beings--imperfect people whom God graciously loves in spite of our imperfection. Each of us has our own desires, wants, needs, and goals. Whenever any of these differ from another, conflict may occur. (p. 59)³⁴

Making humanness the central blame for the disruption of marital harmony sets the stage for mortification.

Mortification entails "self-inflicted punishment, self-sacrifice, or self-imposed denials or restrictions designed to slay characteristics, impulses, or aspects of the self"

³⁴ The philosophy here corresponds with the Christian doctrine of the depravity of humans. Romans 3:22-23: "for there is no distinction; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus" (NASB).

(Foss, Foss, & Trapp, 1991, p. 197). In BYSID, all these tactics of mortification are exemplified through various terms that compel the couple to examine and modify their own acts.

Wright (1985) tells couples that marriage is "a call to suffering" (p. 25), foreshadowing mortification as a key theme in the program. Wright quotes Lewis B. Smedes who states: "Your marriage vow was a promise to suffer. Yes to suffer...A marriage is a life of shared pain" (p. 28). The word, suffering, as it is used in the program, connects back to the "Christian marriage" theme. That is, couples are asked to suffer as Christ suffered.³⁵ Just as the religious hierarchy creates the couple's guilt (as discussed in the previous section), it appears here again, as a motivation for mortification. BYSID is attempting to prepare couples for future trauma and crisis so that couples will not be surprised when such events occur.

When the drama of crisis does occur, which certainly involves guilt, the program instructs couples to act or work accordingly:

³⁵ Wright (1985) states:
 Where does the call to suffering enter this whole process? Romans 8:16-17 says, 'The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow-heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him in order that we may also be glorified with Him.' As members of the Body of Christ, we suffer when one member suffers. (p. 28)

Frustrations and disappointments are a part of life, but how they affect us is basically our choice. We can allow a disappointment to hamper us, destroy us, and even destroy our marriage. But another response is to accept it, accept the hurt, discover what we can learn from it, and then make some new plans or alternatives. (p. 28)

The key here is that when difficulties happen, couples are advised not to buckle under the pressures of the crisis (guilt), but to work on their attitude, to receive and absorb the pain. Wright tells couples, "Don't ever deny the pain or the hurt that you might have to go through, but always ask, 'What can I learn from it...'" (p. 25). Especially here is the notion of work so vital for in the drama of crisis, the couple becomes the primary agent. Couples must work to keep guilt from overtaking them. Having the power to choose even in a dilemma empowers the couple. Though troubles may come, the couple, as agents, are in control of the situation for they can work to change how frustrations will affect them. Through this process the couple learns how to cope with guilt through mortification.

Not only to cope with crisis must couples work, but also to maintain the very fabric of marriage:

You must constantly fight to keep your commitment to marriage primary in your lives and resist the pressure to share that commitment with other facets of life. Your level of commitment is the most vital factor in determining the success or failure of your relationship. (1985, p. 11)

The couple is asked to resist the pressures within them that may weaken their relationship, to deny themselves, or more specifically, to deny the pollution within themselves. Doing so requires work--in this case "fighting" to stay committed. In effect, the term, commitment, as the program uses it, is synonymous with work. Couples do not just happen to be committed but must work at being committed. Commitment is a purposive, strategic, intentional act, and not just an automatic part of being married (scene), or inherent in married couples (agents). Much like overcoming crisis is a choice, commitment is a choice--a choice to work at being committed. BYSID treats other aspects of a relationship such as love, trust, fidelity, joy, security, hope, and sexual attraction in the same way. That is, all these elements of marriage are purposive, intentional acts which must be maintained through persistent work. In effect, marriage itself becomes work.

The most important work the program promotes are the exercises within the program itself. Such work entails spending long hours in discussions, exercises, and sessions with a counselor. Even so, such efforts are imperative for as couples "work through this program," their "present relationship will be strengthened and enriched." Each activity, each discussion, leads the couples toward better states of being. For instance, Chapter Eleven emphasizes finances:

Money! It takes money to eat, pay rent, the tax collector, the grocer, etc. Your attitude toward money and past life style may be an adjustment for you as you marry. Financial disruption and difficulties in marriage can place a strain upon the marital relationship. The next several exercises have been designed to help you determine what is important to you in terms of finances and help you make some realistic plans. (Roberts & Wright 65)

Here, the "risk element" (guilt) is financial strife, and the solution is working (mortification) through various exercises that will help eliminate the risk (purification).

Again, in Chapter Four's discussion regarding the "disenchantment stage," where the manual intensifies guilt by telling couples they will go through a difficult stage of pain and frustration, the manual provides a way to cleanse the guilt by asking couples to: "Take some time first to write out what you can do as a couple to keep from going through all of the experiences of this stage. When you have finished writing, then share your response together" (p. 25). Examined dramatically, it is clear that in this passage, BYSID uses discussion and preparation as ways to purify themselves. Evidently, work not only helps couples deal with crisis, but can serve to keep crisis from occurring.

For the most part the work that purifies the couples is done primarily by the two partners. An interesting twist to BYSID's treatment of mortification is the addition of a third party in the process. The program emphasizes

that marriage is not just a relationship between two people but a relationship with God. BYSID explains:

You may be thinking that when you marry there will be two individuals involved in that marriage. That is true, but there is a third party who can give even a greater meaning to your individual and married life--that person is Jesus Christ.

As such, couples have the responsibility to a higher cause which causes guilt; but such a marriage with Christ also provides couples with the help they need to work through the mortification process. BYSID uses this relationship to encourage couples to endure because not only are they working for God, but they are working with God.

At this point, the recurring questions that appear at the end of the chapters become relevant again. Chapter One ends with "How will the presence of Jesus Christ make a difference in your marriage?" The phrase, "presence of Christ," as used here, sets up a hierarchy and intensifies guilt by challenging the couples to live up to the "Christian marriage" ideal. However, in Chapter Six the question re-appears as "How will the presence of Jesus Christ in your life help you fulfill your need and those of your spouse? How will His presence help you build your self-worth?" Here "the presence of Christ" dramatically functions to help the couple cleanse guilt as represented in fulfilling needs and building self-worth. Somewhat paradoxical, the "presence of Jesus Christ" is both guilt-

intensifying (pollution) and guilt-reducing (purification). So it seems that the hierarchy of religion as structured by the "Christian marriage" theme serves not only to goad couples with guilt, but also to encourage them as they go through the mortification process.³⁶

Apart from the language used to encourage couples to work, the manual uses visual images as another effective rhetorical strategy. The manual's cover presents a color photograph, while chapters Three, Four, Seven, Eight, and Nine open with full-page black and white photographs. Because there are no written statements accompanying the pictures, the meaning of these images remains relatively ambiguous. However, they do evoke positive images of engagement or marriage. In one sense, these pictures are romantic; they involve romantic settings³⁷, and poses³⁸. Couples are depicted as young, handsome, vibrant, and smiling, seemingly content in their relationships. However, more importantly, these couples seem to be focused

³⁶ This corresponds with Christian theology that seem paradoxical--that humans must suffer with Christ, but it is through Christ that humans are strengthened. The Apostle Paul states in Philippians 4:12-13:

I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need. I can do all things through Him [Christ] who strengthens me. (NASB)

³⁷ For example four of the pictures involve park or forest settings. The cover of the manual reveals a couple's silhouette as the sun sets behind them.

³⁸ For instance, couples are holding hands, sitting close, or embracing each other.

on working on their relationship. Except for two of the pictures in which couples are embracing, all the other photographs depict couples as discussing, getting to know more about each other, perhaps working out some issues. These pictures create a continuity throughout the program, reminding couples that discussing and working on the relationship involves a romantic, positive attitude. Whether the topic is defining marriage, expectations, roles, decision making, relationships with in-laws or communication, couples in these pictures are constantly in a good mood, discussing, working.

The manual consistently suggests that working through the program (i.e. doing exercises, discussing, etc.) will help couples become better marital partners and achieve a stronger, more enriched marriage. In doing so, BYSID develops a strong connection between marital endurance and premarital preparation. The couple is instilled with a strong work ethic through which they are purified and redeemed. This concept of work encompasses both behavior and attitudes as couples are told that even in times of crisis they can choose how the dilemma will affect them. In fact, the program takes a pragmatic, realistic stance toward the marriage in that it reduces notions of love, commitment, and joy to outcomes of hard work and dedication. This is not so surprising because, as Burke (1969a) explains, when the featured element in the drama is act, realism becomes a dominating philosophy within the

discourse (p. 128). In all circumstances, the couples' work--their act--becomes the critical element in the drama.

In the various manifestations of work as act, we find that work becomes the key theme in mortification. Couples must work to rid themselves of what the program considers "non-Christian" values, to punish themselves through suffering, and to sacrifice their time, effort, and will to work at their marriage. The redemptive drama succeeds only if the phases in the rebirth cycle are balanced; that is, "the act of purification must be equivalent to the degree of guilt" (Brock, 1990, p.186). BYSID's strategy succeeds at doing this. The program intensifies guilt which can be realistically resolved primarily by the couple themselves. Most of the time the guilt is practical and workable. For example, a recurring theme of guilt throughout the program focuses on a lack of information (e.g. couples are not aware of each other's expectations). As such, purification is also practical--couples can discuss their expectations. In some cases the guilt is not as simple, such the "Christian marriage" hierarchy. However, in these cases, BYSID still focuses on the practical day-to-day things couples can do to fulfill their duties to the "Christian marriage": "What will you do?" or "How will you work?" Furthermore, couples are given a strong helper--Jesus Christ--to balance the level of the guilt with the purification process.

Considering the aim of the program, in choosing mortification through work as the primary method of purification, BYSID chooses wisely. If victimage were the key method, couples would be able to rid themselves of guilt by blaming someone else--perhaps their parents, life's circumstances, or stress. Using mortification focuses the drama toward the couples themselves, and as such, makes the couple responsible for their guilt and responsible for its removal. Whereas the strategy of mortification in general points to the couple as agents, work as the key theme elevates the act. As a result, couples are not only empowered to act, but the program emerges as the agency that provides a channel through which the act comes to life as dramatized in the phrase, "working through the program." As such the program's integrity and success in the market relies on the success of the purification process.

A Little Closer to Perfection: Reaching Redemption

Ultimately, guilt separates people from each other and from themselves (Brock, 1990, p. 186). So when BYSID intensifies guilt by creating crisis, couples feel separated from themselves, each other, and even God. All these types of separation are summed up in the notion that couples are separated from the ideal marriage. However, this is a necessary step, BYSID claims, because only in

this stage of separation will couples realize the realities of marriage. Guilt having been intensified and purification being in progress, BYSID must complete the cycle of rebirth through redemption. That is, whereas pollution revealed visions of who couples are not, and purification presented how couples can change, the process of redemption offers who couples will become.

Foss, Foss, and Trapp (1991) explain that redemption operates rhetorically in "a change of identity, a new perspective, a different view of life." (p. 197). They add that ultimately, rebirth is a process of "building and finding the true self. It represents our attempts to discover and maintain our identities so that we can act purposefully, feel at home in the world" (p. 197). This quest to "find the self" corresponds quite well particularly to the redemption BYSID offers. After all, Wright explains that the key to addressing risks in marriage "is not so much finding the right person as it is becoming the right person" (1992, p. 37). Thus, the manual tells couples that it aims to provide them with new identities--"a much more realistic perception of yourself and your fiancée, and your marriage" (p. 4). Accordingly, redemption in BYSID occurs when couples experience a symbolic change in identity and attain a new and better view of life--one that is "much more realistic." Herein lies the rhetorical construction of marriage in Wright's

premarital counseling program as the program shapes what is "realistic"--or simply, what is "real."

Along the path to rebirth, certain images of marriage are strategically created to induce guilt and facilitate and motivate purification, including marriage as "crisis," marriage as "work," and "the Christian marriage." Though some of these themes do emerge in later visions, the redemption process works as a filter removing the unwanted images of marriage and leaving only the purified, ideal marriage. In this vision of marriage, we find what Foss, Foss, and Trapp called "a change of identity, a new perspective, a different view of life." The manual wields power in that it can shape for the couple what kind of marriage is the outcome of all this work.

At the outset, the manual tells couples that as they work through the program, their relationship will "be strengthened and enriched as a prelude to an enriching, fulfilling, and growing marriage" (p. 4). The drama of redemption, thus, moves around the concept of "rewards" or outcome--quid pro quo. The terms strengthened, enriched, fulfilling, and growing recur throughout the manual, serving as a form of reward for the couple, who, having been placed through a state of pollution, have worked through the program. Corresponding to a "Protestant work ethic," in BYSID's framing of redemption, couples work hard to please God and to attain the prize--the ideal marriage.

BYSID's ideal marriage emerges with several characteristics. Having analyzed the texts of the program, I identify the major images of marriage constructed in BYSID. These visions and their implications are explicated.

The Christian Marriage

Deploying the "Christian marriage" theme becomes one of BYSID's most characteristic rhetorical strategies. Such a concept also becomes one of the program's most powerful images of marriage. Throughout the program, couples are taught how to achieve and maintain specifically a "Christian marriage." As discussed earlier, each chapter in BYSID ends with a question that asks couples how the "presence of Jesus Christ" will affect their marriage. This technique of repeating this question not only adds continuity to the manual, but drives the "Christian marriage" theme as an element throughout the cycles of rebirth. The pollution stage depicts Christ as "ideal," and thus, creates a hierarchy which leads to guilt. In the purification stage, the manual uses Christ as "strength," encouraging couples to suffer as Christ suffered. Finally, the redemption stage identifies Christ as "ideal." That is, after working through the program, couples attain the ultimate reward--a "Christian marriage."

In dramatizing redemption, BYSID attempts to modify the couple's identities and substance to show them better states of being. Couples are told that the origins and purpose of marriage--the substance of marriage--are rooted in a metaphysical realm; that is, God created the marital institution.³⁹ In Chapter One, the manual describes a Christian marriage as "a total commitment of two people to the person of Jesus Christ and to each other. It is a commitment in which there is no holding back of anything" (p. 6). Later, the manual adds, "God will use your marriage for His purpose. He will mold and refine you for your own benefit and for His glory." (p. 6). Emerging in the center of the program's many discussions about the "Christian marriage" is the notion that who the couples are significantly affects what their marriage will be. Using Burke's pentadic terms, in this drama, agent takes center stage.

Elevating agent, BYSID also utilizes what Burke calls "familial definition," a strategy that defines "substance in terms of ancestral cause" (1969a, p. 26-31). Especially relevant to our discussion, Burke observes, "doctrines of creation extend the concept of familial descent to cover

³⁹ Couples are made aware of the following:
 In Genesis 2:18 and 24 God says, 'It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him....For this cause a man shall leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and they shall become one flesh' (NASB). From this passage we understand that marriage brings about completion. (Wright, 1985, p. 16)

the relationship between the craftsman and his product" (p. 29-30). In this case, BYSID stresses the spiritual ancestry or descent of couples, and in doing so, establishes certain correlations between the quality or substance of couples and the qualities of God. For instance, the manual tells couples:

Many of us strive for adequacy. God has declared us to be adequate in what He has done for us in His Son Jesus Christ. In your relationship with God you are assured belongingness. In your relationship with the Son of God you are assured of worthiness. (p.37)

The use of "familial definition" here as a rhetorical strategy has several important implications to BYSID's rhetoric as well as its images of marriage.

First, because couples' substance is rooted in Christianity, the manual achieves some level of identification with the couple. The term identification as used here is derived from Burke's philosophy of rhetoric (1969b, pp. 20-21). Burke believes that the people are inherently divided from each other. However, if one "identifies" with another by aligning his or her substance with the other, the two become consubstantial, symbolically sharing the same substance. In BYSID's drama, Christianity unites the players through this process of identification. The gap that separates the program (rhetor) and the couples (audience) is decreased, and the program is able to induce cooperation from the couple. The rhetor becomes more than

just a counselor, but a fellow-Christian, a person of spiritual authority, a channel through which the will of God is transmitted.

Second, because the couple's substance is connected with a spiritual ancestry, their marriage becomes much more than just the joining of two; the couple has spiritual codes, roles, hierarchies to follow, and a destiny to achieve. Accordingly, acts such as working on the relationship, remaining true and faithful to each other, and maintaining the marriage all glorify God. Likewise, couples who do not commit time, effort, and devotion into their marriage do not merely fail each other, but go against the will of God. Clearly, marriage is not something to be taken lightly. It is a religious right, a spiritual duty, indeed, an embodiment of God's love.⁴⁰ Thus, as couples are oriented with the concept of the "Christian marriage" concept, their view of marriage becomes "spiritualized." Consequently, marriage becomes an eternal concept with metaphysical overtones, and couples become individuals with a "higher purpose." As such, couples may feel more invested in their marriage, taking their responsibilities to heart.

Finally, because of their spiritual ancestry, couples are asked to practice attributes they derive from their

⁴⁰ Chapter Seven, which discusses marital roles uses biblical passages that use Christ's love for the Christian church as an analogy for the love couples share.

familial roots; that is, they are asked to be like their "Heavenly Father."⁴¹ Through this claim the program elevates certain "Christian values" as central elements in a marital relationship. For example, marriage as "suffering" emerges as an important aspect of the "Christian marriage." That is, couples are told to suffer as Christ suffered. Also, marriage as "servanthood," "self-sacrifice," typify the main vision of the "Christian marriage." Marriage is a "mini-Church" as Wright says, and everything in the Bible that applies to the church applies to marital relationships as well. For example, in Chapter Seven the husband's role in the marriage is likened to the "Headship of Christ" over the church. However, BYSID assures couples that "headship has nothing to do with being boss...neither does headship imply inferiority or superiority" (p.47). Still, it is clear that through such familial definition, BYSID crafts multiple aspects of the "Christian marriage."

Marriage as Strong

As part of the redemption phase, marital "strength" is used to entice couples to work through the program.

⁴¹ An activity in Chapter One follows:
 Turn in your Bible to Galatians 5:22,23 and read over the fruit of the Spirit. Would these traits, manifested in a person, give him a greater potential of success in marriage? If so, indicate which of these you manifest and which of them you are still having difficulty displaying. (p. 7)

Indeed, in several instances, the manual as well as Wright's other texts tell couples that "working through the program" will "strengthen" their marriage.⁴² Depicting marriage as "strong" enables BYSID to fashion the image of marriage. When the term, "strong marriage," is used, the program necessarily conjures what constitutes as "weak marriage." As such, the program creates a hierarchy of marital quality--one based on how strong the marriage is. However, the hierarchy is strategically ambiguous because "strength" is a subjective term. What exactly does "strong" mean? Strong because of what? Strong against what? As such, what "strong" means depends on how the program defines it. No matter what the meaning is, at the end of the program, couples, if they are to reach a state of redemption, must believe that their relationship is "stronger" in the way BYSID has defined "strong."

In describing marriage as "strong," BYSID reaffirms the notion of marriage as something to be built, to be put together. The phrases "building a good marriage" and "the foundation of marriage" recurs in various forms, and Chapter One likens a marriage to a house built on solid

⁴² Wright (1992) explains:

One of the main purposes is to help the couple eliminate as many surprises as possible from the impending marriage. By helping them become more realistic about the future, the counselor can lessen marital conflict. I tell the couple this is my goal in disclosing their fears and hopes--to reduce conflict in marriage. I also let them know that by doing this they will have a greater opportunity to build and enrich their marriage. (p. 83)

ground. Marriage is depicted as "house," "foundation," "structure," "solid," and "strong." In the same token, couples are described as "working," "building," and "strengthening." Note that couples are not asked to "find" or "cook" a marriage, but they are asked specifically to "build" or to lay a "solid foundation" for marriage. The program utilizes these metaphors to encourage the couple to actively participate in the building process of their marriage. In doing so, the rhetors necessarily objectify marriage. Marriage here can be looked at from a distance as if a couple can step back and see a thing called marriage. Likewise, marital success becomes a product--an outcome of preparation. A "strong" or "solid" marriage, much like a well-built building, is completely dependent on the carpenters and the design. In this case, the couple are the primary carpenters, while the program provides the design. That is, the program serves as the couple's "blueprints" for instructions on how to build a good, strong marriage. Indeed, the main text for the program is called a "manual" for marriage preparation.

BYSID's definition of "strong" is linked with another concept used throughout the manual: "preparation." According to the program, a strong marriage is one that has been prepared diligently. Wright tells couples that "building a good marriage means that you must take time to define roles, beliefs and behaviors and negotiate the differences with your partner" (1985, p. 12). The program

alludes to the concept of structural strength as an outcome of preparation:

Many marriages today are like the house built upon sand--they have been built upon a weak foundation of dreams...our dreams are starting points for successful endeavors; however, dreams that are not followed by adequate planning usually do not come true. (p. 12)

Moreover, Wright tells couples that "marriages dissolve because the partners were never prepared for marriage" (1985, p. 13). In defining strength as an outcome of preparation, the program elevates itself as the path toward such strength; after all, the program's main focus is marital preparation. As such, the program is afforded with much persuasive power. It is toward the program that couples, who seek a strong marriage, turn. To bring couples to a state of redemption, BYSID attempts to equate "preparation" with "strength," and assures couples that working through the program--that is working on preparing for marriage--will strengthen their relationship. Such a rhetorical strategy must be evaluated for it seems to impart a sense of security to anxious couples, giving them a simplistic view that preparation itself is strength. If taken to the extreme, such rhetoric can lead to false expectations and a dangerous view that marital success is somehow a product that comes with a guarantee.

Marriage as Action.

Also found throughout the program is the concept that an ideal marriage involves the willful, strategic acts of each marital partner. Moreover, an ideal marriage is one in which couples act daily to reassess and maintain the relationship. This concept is manifested in various discussions about the nature of marriage, all of which center on what I call marriage as "action."

Though action takes form in the program through terms such as "serve," "suffer," "prepare," and "discuss," it appears most strongly as "commitment." Opposing the popular notion of marital contracts as binding agreements between couples, Wright argues that marriage is a much deeper commitment. "Some psychologists, marriage counselors and ministers have suggested that marriage is a contract, and many people are quick to agree," but Wright explains, "marriage is an unconditional commitment and not a contract." Wright pleads with couples, "Please do not marry if you cannot keep a commitment" (p. 8). Clearly, according to the program, commitment is a key ingredient in a relationship.⁴³ In other discussions about commitment, we discover what the program means by such a term: "Commitment involves action. Many couples make a genuine commitment at

⁴³ In his book, So You're Getting Married, Wright divides his chapters into various ways couples must commit (i.e. "Commitment to Marriage," "Commitment to Be Free from the Past," "Commitment to Love," "Commitment to Change," "Commitment to Understand Yourself").

the altar but their commitment is not lived out in action" (p. 13). Commitment is the daily, purposive, intentful acts of individuals to improve their relationship.

Framing marriage as commitment instead of contract, BYSID emphasizes the active nature of marriage. Couples are taught to overtake the circumstances that surround them and to modify their behavior and attitudes always in such a way to uphold the marital relationship. In contract agreements, there are loopholes and conditions which may lead to the termination of the contract; but as the program makes clear, marriage is an unconditional, eternal commitment to remain faithful and devoted to one partner; it is a "pledge carried out to completion, running over any roadblocks" (p. 9).

In BYSID's drama of premarital preparation the couples become "agents" of change. Couples have the choice to "act" instead of merely "reacting" to the circumstances of life (Wright, 1985, p. 25).⁴⁴ In this agent-scene ratio where the scene is marriage and the agent are the engaged couple, the agent dominates the scene. The program treats couples as "actors," in a Burkean sense. That is, though

⁴⁴ Wright (1992) describes the pitfalls of codependency as a matter of response vs. reaction:

...there is a difference between helping and codependency. A codependent reacts to another person's problem instead of responding to his need. In fact, the codependent often overreacts or underreacts. Instead of measuring and controlling his response, he allows the problems, pains, and dysfunctional behaviors of others to dictate his actions. (p. 72)

couples cannot shape their circumstances or hinder crisis, they can control their response to the scene.⁴⁵ Everything is a choice--a choice to act. Thus, emerging from the program, the ideal marriage consists of couples who take an active part in the building of a strong marriage--that is couples who "act" instead of merely "reacting." In effect, couples who participate in the program already fall into this category because they have taken action towards building their marriage.

BYSID's depiction of marriage as "action" also promotes an egalitarian system in that both couples are asked to act equally in building the marriage. The words "partner," "partnership," "share," "together," and "both," used quite frequently throughout the text, describe marriage as a dyadic effort and promote an egalitarian view of marriage. "To work together and fulfill your own and each other's needs" is described as one of the reasons for marriage (p. 7). Exercises where the couple is asked to discuss goals and expectations are careful to stress equality in marriage. For example, in discussing sex roles in marriage, BYSID suggests:

Each couple should discuss together and decide who is most competent to do which task. Assignment of tasks

⁴⁵ This concept is evidenced in Wright's discussion about marital hardships: "The key issue to life's crisis is our response. When trouble comes we may say, 'God, this isn't what I wanted in my life, I didn't plan for this.' But the trouble is there, regardless of our wishes. How will we respond to it?...You have the power to decide what your attitude will be" (1985, p. 25).

should not be made simply because of parental example, because it is expected in your social group, or because of tradition. When an individual's abilities, training, and temperament make it difficult or unnecessary to follow an established cultural norm for a role, the couple will need to have the strength to establish their own style of working together.
(Roberts & Wright 38)

The manual upholds the significance of each partner's participation--their acts.⁴⁶ As such, an ideal marriage is centered not only around action, but reciprocal action between partners.

Having constructed major images of marriage--marriage as "action," marriage as "strong," and the "Christian marriage"--in order to maintain the credibility and

⁴⁶ Describing leadership as a dynamic responsibility which falls on either or both partners according to the situation and based on abilities rather than power-positions, later in the chapter, BYSID discusses the concept of "mutuality of submissiveness":

The principle of mutuality of submissiveness in marriage is similar to the pattern of submissiveness between the members of the Body of Christ. There are times in the Body when it is appropriate for one member to exercise leadership over the other members as a function of his or her spiritual gift. . . Likewise in marriage, in which there is mutuality of submissiveness, the role of leadership is assigned not according to some decree from God, or on the basis of 'maleness' or 'femaleness,' but on the basis of the leadership role the partner has been assigned by the mutual decision of the marriage. (p. 47)

Furthermore, the structure of BYSID also promotes a view of marriage as egalitarian. The manual was developed as a workbook for both partners. Every page elicits a response from both partners. Each partner completes the assignment alone, then shares her/his views with the other, abiding by the rules of equality that the text implies. Thus each partner's view is given value. Never does BYSID suggest that one partner's ideas are more important than the other. Instead, each partner is encouraged to listen and consider carefully what the other has said. Clearly, an ideology of the ideal couple is marked by the concept of equal participation.

marketability of the program, BYSID must make sure that couples believe that they have developed aspects of these ideals as a result of participating in the program; in this redemption occurs. The particular images BYSID has chosen to characterize the ideal marriage help to facilitate this process. Specifically, BYSID focuses on the process of becoming an ideal marriage instead of giving couples concrete measurements to judge their marriage such as a personality or relationship assessment test. Focusing on process, BYSID tells couples that the ideal marriage is one of work, suffering, and action. Thus, couples leave the program believing that if they want an ideal relationship, they will have to work for it. So after intensifying the couple's guilt and telling couples that purification comes through work, BYSID now uses work again to redeem couples. In receiving this wisdom, a certain level of redemption has occurred; that is, the couple's identities have changed. They are now aware of their duties, rights, and abilities as Christian individuals. Of course, for some couples BYSID's redemption may be difficult to attain. Non-Christian couples, in particular, may find the program's "Christian marriage" image confining and exclusive. On the other hand, ultra-conservative couples, who adhere to a patriarchal view of marriage, may find BYSID's egalitarian view troubling. However, in either case, what the program tries to emphasize is that through work--discussing,

reading, contemplating, planning, etc.--couples can continually improve on their relationship.

From a contextual perspective, redemption deals with the counselor's assessment of the relationship. Usually, at the culmination of the program, a counselor will provide the couple with her/his judgment of the relationship, highlighting its strengths and weaknesses (Wright, 1992). BYSID has power in this decision in that it has laid the standard for what is to be considered a "good" relationship. BYSID's activities and tests, by which the couple are measured, help the counselor decide when the premarital relationship is one that deserves approval. In some instances counselors may suggest that the couple postpone or cancel the wedding because the couple is "unfit" for marriage. Consequently, these couples are not redeemed. However, for those couples that the counselor chooses to encourage, a powerful brand of redemption occurs. If these couples entered premarital counseling with doubt about the relationship, such a blessing from the counselor gives them hope, courage, redemption. Herein lies the power of the rhetoric of premarital counseling. Whereas couples were once in a state of guilt caused by the various tensions germane to engagement and pre-wedding jitters, the program has brought them through and out of this state. Premarital counseling has led them to "salvation." And perhaps rightly so. After all, they have worked hard to achieve this state and deserve to reap the

harvest of their effort. Not unlike the gasp of air students take right before a teacher hands them their grade, couples wait for the final word from their "teacher." With this final admonition as the reward or redemption, couples are driven to work through the manual.

Conclusion

The rhetorical construction of marriage in H. Norman Wright's premarital counseling program is one which utilizes the three phases of the cycle of rebirth to move couples toward better states of being. First, the program artfully intensifies guilt by naming marriage as troubled and difficult, and by creating hierarchies that goad the couple, reminding them of their inadequacies and responsibilities. In this phase couples are told who they are not. Second, the program provides a method of purification through a process of mortification. Specifically, the program encourages couples to purge their guilt by denying themselves and working to build a stronger marriage. In this phase, couples are told how to change. Third, the program completes the cycle of rebirth by revealing to couples aspects of a redeemed state of marriage--an ideal marriage. Important to this phase are the images of marriage as "action" and "strong," and the "Christian marriage" theme. In this phase couples are told who they are. Through this cycle of rebirth, Wright's

program attempts to prepare couples for their marital relationship, and in so doing, constructs various images of marriage.

Because Christian themes and terminology recur in Wright's program and in the context in which it is administered, it should not be so surprising that the rhetoric of rebirth, which is Burke's secular version of Christian redemption, explains so well the rhetoric of this program. In BYSID the couple works through the various polluted aspects of their relationship intensified by the program. As such, this program is in a sense, a "rebirth factory" wherein humans enter to find better states of being and come out purified and redeemed. Such a process is particularly significant to the study of rhetoric and communication in that it is an event in which dialectic is used (instead of physical force or chemical inducement) to transform human beings. This process in BYSID can be likened to a religious conversion. Couples learn about what a "Christian marriage" is, and as such, they learn about their own identities, their substance. If indeed couples are converted into a religion, what religion is this exactly? To say that they become "Christian" is too simple and general. Specifically, the religion becomes a "cult of work." And couples become devout worshipers of the "act"--particularly the act of marital preparation. This process emphasizes the notion that those who work can reap the benefits of a successful marriage. Such work

involves discussing areas that have been left uncovered, working through conflict in a strategic fashion, keeping realistic expectations of marriage and spouses, and overcoming circumstances by maintaining a positive state of mind. In as much as couples become true believers of this religion, the power of premarital counseling takes full force.

The program's process of telling couples who they are not (guilt), how to change (purification), and who they are (redemption), is never-ending. After all, characteristic of any type of cycle, the phases of rebirth do not end, but continue to rotate as humans attempt to achieve perfection. For instance BYSID, to give couples a more realistic view of marriage, intensifies guilt within the couples, for which ultimately, the manual provides a path for purification and redemption. However, in so doing, the program has merely perpetuated a cycle of guilt. That is, couples who participate in premarital counseling leave, knowing more about what they should expect from marriage. However, when BYSID tells couples to eliminate "false expectations," the program has, in effect, has only given couples a new set of expectations which BYSID has re-defined and intensified. So when BYSID tells couples who they are in the redemption phase, it necessarily tells couples who they are not; this is the principle of the negative. In knowing who they are not, couples must again find ways to become who they should be. As such, couples

are left back where they started, goaded with guilt, seeking purification, needing redemption. But Wright is still there, offering a helping hand with books such as - After You Say "I Do" and The Seasons of Marriage.

Not so surprisingly, religious principles, particularly the "Christian marriage" theme, permeate a Christian premarital program such as Wright's. Biblical proof serves as the primary arguments for supporting various claims made throughout the program. BYSID does not rely heavily on logical or scientific proofs, but holds the Bible and other Christian literature explicating biblical principles as the source of knowledge regarding marital relationships. So it seems the fundamental rhetorical structure in religious counseling is not so much the validation of truths, but the grounding of such truths upon the authority of divine scripture. Here we see the power of religion as a rhetorical device in Christian premarital counseling. Statistics and experiments may go awry, but who can question the authority of a Supreme Being? Thus, for couples who adhere even slightly to Christianity, BYSID's rhetoric is compelling.

If the aim of premarital counseling is to improve couples' future marital relationship, BYSID hopes to do so by reminding couples who they are as Christians. When couples realize their purpose--or more specifically God's purpose for them--marriage becomes more than just a human concept, but rather a covenant fashioned by God. As such,

the meaning of marriage is elevated to a metaphysical, spiritual realm. Key here is Wright's claim that there are three participants in marriage--the two partners and Jesus Christ. Throughout the manual couples are asked how this third party will help them establish a strong relationship with each other and with God. As revealed in the preceding analysis, this premarital program seeks to help couples overcome the "risk elements in marriage" by showing them better states of being--specifically, their Christian identity which affords them with great responsibilities but also great rewards.

BYSID's constant use of "work" and "rewards" ultimately suggest to the "commodification" of marital success. That is, marital success becomes a product which is sold and bought. In general, premarital counseling manuals are marketed based on what they can provide to couples who desire marital success. For instance, programs offer communication skills, personality inventories, and/or conflict management techniques. To engaged couples today, attaining a marriage license is a fairly easy task. The challenge lies in making sure the marriage is "enduring" and "successful." So couples attend premarital counseling--either voluntarily or by coercion--with an underlying understanding that the purpose of such meetings is to prevent marital dissolution. In this way, marital "success" becomes a product. Specifically, BYSID's marital success is characterized as "firmly founded," "fulfilling,"

and "successful." This "product" even comes with an instructions manual.⁴⁷

Premarital counseling clients are usually younger couples who need reassurance about the relationship (Buckner & Salts, 1985, p. 512). Programs provide this reassurance by providing an "if/then" promise: if couples work hard, then they will achieve a good marriage. In effect, the program offers a promise of product quality; couples are assured that through hard work, a successful marriage can be attained. When marriage is framed in this manner, couples may begin to believe that the "product"--marital success--comes with a guarantee.

In the next chapter, we can compare BYSID's approach to a non-religious program, PREPARE, and examine how programs which do not appeal to religious principles can still prove to be efficacious in accomplishing the aims of premarital counseling.

⁴⁷ BYSID's full title is Before You Say "I Do": A Premarital Preparation Manual.

CHAPTER IV

PREPARE FOR MARRIAGE: SCIENTIFIC RHETORIC IN NON-RELIGIOUS
PREMARITAL COUNSELING

The continuing proliferation of marital dissolution in the United States has been met not only by Christian counselors who offer religious programs such as Wright's, but also by a fervent response from social scientists in the fields of psychology, psychotherapy, and family studies who emphasize a scientific approach to marital preparation. As the literature review in Chapter I reveals, much of the theoretical and experimental work being done in this area occurs within academia.

Premarital counseling may be divided into two categories, religious and non-religious. In using the term "religious," I refer to a program's tendency to use religious principles and terms to assess, motivate, or judge couples. For example, BYSID clearly falls under the category of religious counseling.⁴⁸ To delve into the rhetoric of non-religious approaches to premarital counseling, particularly those that use science as the primary means of persuasion, this chapter examines Olson's highly scientific premarital counseling program, PREPARE.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Some programs, such as PREP (Renick, Blumberg, & Markman, 1992), are produced in two formats (religious and general) to appeal to both Christians and the general public.

⁴⁹ Though several individuals have participated in developing and validating PREPARE, David Olson serves as the president of PREPARE/ENRICH, Inc., the organization that manages the distribution of the inventories. As such,

This analysis is divided into three sections similar to the division in the previous chapter. Section one identifies the contextual constraints that shape PREPARE's rhetoric, including its multiple audiences and appeal to science. Section two examines the structure of arguments that characterize and empower the program, focusing on PREPARE's use of a premarital questionnaire as a primary tool for counseling. Finally, in phase three, I evaluate the rhetoric of PREPARE in terms of Burke's dramatism, focusing on PREPARE's use of the negative and hierarchy which ultimately drives a cycle of rebirth and the rhetorical construction of marriage. Throughout this chapter, I also compare the rhetoric of PREPARE to that of BYSID, highlighting the variance in counseling approaches and rhetorical devices utilized in the two premarital counseling programs.

To gain a more complete understanding of PREPARE's rhetorical strategies, we must examine a wide array of artifacts that capture PREPARE's motives. As such, apart from "internal" literature which couples receive, "external" materials, such as journal articles and other literature produced by the makers of PREPARE describing the program to other audiences, become invaluable. The artifacts for this analysis include a short manual for couples (Olson, 1993); a flier sent to prospective clients

in much of the literature that PREPARE/ENRICH produces, Olson represents the program.

(PREPARE/ENRICH, n.d.); a sample questionnaire (PREPARE/ENRICH, 1992); a sample "Computerized Report" of couple scores (PREPARE/ENRICH, 1986),⁵⁰ various academic journal articles in which the producers of PREPARE describe and evaluate the inventory (Fowers, Montel, & Olson, 1996; Fowers & Olson, 1986; Fournier, Olson, & Druckman, 1983; Larsen & Olson, 1989); and an information package sent out by the national office.⁵¹ In analyzing significant clusters of terms within these materials, we are able to reconstruct and examine PREPARE's motives.

Although, some of the more important artifacts for this analysis (such as the inventory questions and the "Computerized Report") are "samples" and not the actual documents used in programs, using these materials to assess the rhetoric of PREPARE is justified. The "sample" materials used in this study are what PREPARE/ENRICH, Inc. provides researchers and media representative interested in examining the program. As such, these materials should provide an accurate sample of the language, structure, and form of the actual inventory and computer report. Furthermore, the discourse in these materials represent how

⁵⁰ For the purpose of this study, a condensed form of the PREPARE Computerized Report was examined. Actual inventories are only made available to counselors for use in actual counseling sessions. However, the PREPARE/ENRICH company provided me with sample questions as well as the sample computer printout.

⁵¹ I attained this information package by contacting the research department of PREPARE/ENRICH, Inc. (Life Innovations, Inc., P.O. Box 190, Minneapolis, MN 55440-0190)

PREPARE wants to depict itself and reveals the particular characteristics about the program that PREPARE has chosen to highlight. Thus, analysis of messages embedded in these materials should allow a thorough exploration of the rhetorical dimensions of the PREPARE program.

Science as Contextual Constraint

The most powerful contextual constraint that shapes the discourse of this program stems from the wide scope of its target audience. Whereas, BYSID is administered specifically in Christian settings, PREPARE's audience is much wider. The program was designed to be used in any type of premarital counseling situation, encompassing both church and non-religious settings. As such, PREPARE's discourse must be able to appeal to religious counselors without excluding more general counselors and vice-versa. Because religious principles as the basis for counseling may be somewhat limiting and exclusive, in appealing to a more general population, PREPARE uses a more universally accepted platform: science. Specifically, PREPARE appeals to clients and counselors by claiming to be a program that can scientifically measure various relationship characteristics pertinent to premarital counseling. In so doing, the makers of PREPARE must also appeal to yet another audience--namely, other social

scientists, from whom the program gains its scientific validity.

Though it does cover religious issues as one of its 11 relationship areas, PREPARE is not a "religious" program in that it does not particularly use an abundance of religious terminology and principles. However, PREPARE is evidently quite suitable for religious counseling (Fournier, Olson, & Druckman, 1983; Fowers, Montel, & Olson, 1996).⁵² In fact, PREPARE receives much praise from religious organizations which proclaim its ability to strengthen marital relationships (McManus, 1994) and decrease divorce rates (Johnson, 1995, p. 35). In order to maintain such ties with both religious and non-religious organizations, PREPARE must keep its discourse relatively ambiguous. For instance, the program must be careful in how it defines the purpose of marriage or delineates marital roles. PREPARE must refrain from using philosophy or counseling methods that will exclude large portions of its multiple audiences. However, PREPARE's discourse, to be socially fruitful, must have some element which makes it not only believable but desirable to a diverse audience. In short, PREPARE's discourse must resemble that of a good politician. In choosing the notion of science and technology as its central persuasive appeal, the program remains "non-

⁵² Using secular questionnaires is not uncommon in churches. Other examples of questionnaires used are : Taylor-Johnson Temperament Analysis, Taylor & Morrison (1984); and Myers-Briggs Type Indicator Relationship Report, Hammer (1948)

partisan," while offering something in which a general public will take interest.

Another audience to which the makers of PREPARE must appeal are its peers--the body of scholars and researchers interested in the practice of counseling. Unlike the makers of BYSID, Olson and his associates have published numerous articles in academic journals, detailing research that scientifically validate their premarital program. Such ongoing research is critical to a program which is grounded upon science. If PREPARE is to become a successful scientific program, it must gain the approval of other social scientists. Evidently, PREPARE also receives much acclaim with this audience (see Larson, Holman, Klein, Busby, Stahmann, & Peterson, 1995). However, to maintain its scientific validity the makers of PREPARE must continually reassess the program's structure and counseling materials through ongoing empirical research to make certain that PREPARE reflects high scientific standards (i.e. accuracy, validity, reliability, and objectivity).

The acclamation that PREPARE receives from its multiple audiences (i.e. clients, counselors, and scholars) is due primarily to the program's reliance upon scientism. Nothstine, Blair, and Copeland (1994) explain this notion of scientism:

The image of knowledge and power that has emerged from the modern culture of professionalism, and that in turn supports that culture, is

overwhelmingly a technological one. "Knowledge" has come to refer to the methods and instruments by which professionals study things as much as to the results of those studies...The sum total of this reduction of knowledge to technology we call "scientism" (p. 22)

What PREPARE offers couples is a scientific questionnaire which will provide "knowledge" about their relationship. Such knowledge does not stem from religious scripture or expert testimony, but directly from technological advancement as manifested in an instrument which can "measure" and "predict" several variables in a relationship. Thus PREPARE's discourse is constrained in such a way that it must give the appearance of being "scientific." Specifically, its discourse must reflect a certain amount of accuracy, objectivity, logic, order, and other characteristics of the scientific method. Much like the way BYSID's discourse is entrenched in religion, PREPARE's rhetoric is shaped by science--more specifically, the boundaries set by the conventions of scientific theory and methodology.

Like BYSID, PREPARE's basic structure of argument is based on authority. However, whereas, BYSID utilizes Biblical authority, PREPARE uses scientific authority to give validity to its claims. Using science as proof adds to PREPARE's rhetorical power because, as Chesebro (1990) observes, scientists have "occupied a preeminent position

within the world culture for almost four centuries. The concepts and data of the scientist have long been presented and perceived as the end product of a logical, precise, objective, and rigorously tested set of procedures" (p. 156). So not only does science constrain PREPARE's discourse; it propels it as well.

Measurement and Instruction as Forms of Argument

PREPARE's most distinguishable characteristic is its use of a premarital inventory to assess couples' relationship. The theoretical grounding of PREPARE falls under the category of "preventive science" which attempts to evaluate the premarital relationship by focusing on the "identification and intervention of variables most predictive of later distress as well as relationship satisfaction" (Renick, Blumberg, & Markman, 1992, p. 142). In effect, these "prevention scientists," much like doctors who administer flu shots, attempt to prevent problems from occurring by addressing these problems beforehand (see Coie, Watt, West, Hawkins, Asarnow, Markman, Ramey, Shure, & Long, 1993).⁵³ To help counselors evaluate relationships, premarital assessment questionnaires or inventories are

⁵³ I use the term "addressing" to emphasize the dependence of even these scientific approaches to premarital counseling on the use and manipulation of language. Indeed, these programs do not attempt to modify behavior and attitude by manipulating couples' biological or chemical makeup, but by using symbols to appeal to, as Burke might say, human symbolic nature.

used as "instruments" for measuring various characteristics about the couples and the individual partners (Larson, Holman, Klein, Busby, Stahmann, & Peterson, 1995). Olson (1983) asserts that an ideal premarital counseling program should include some type of inventory which should be administered to each partner. Likewise, Holman, Larson, and Harmer (1994) argue that "with any preventive approach, an assessment instrument is useful for critically examining relationships and providing information about the couple's strengths and potential problem areas" (p. 46). Currently, a growing number of self-report inventories⁵⁴ are utilized by marriage and family researchers and counselors in both religious and non-religious organizations (see Larson, Holman, Klein, Busby, Stahmann, & Peterson, 1995).

The 125-item PREPARE inventory addresses 11 areas which the program believes are the most pertinent to the premarital relationship (see Table 4). Another scale accounts for the couple's "Idealistic Distortion"--their tendency to be "idealistic about their relationships" and "to deny or minimize any problems" (PREPARE/ENRICH, 1986, p.3). This "Idealistic Distortion" score is used to adjust scores in the other areas. The inventory also assesses the couple's family background and plots the results on a

⁵⁴ The following describe or evaluate examples of such inventories: Fischer & Corcoran (1994); Fredman & Sherman (1987); Holman, Larson, & Harmer (1994); Markman (1981); Touliatos, Perlmutter, & Straus (1990).

1. Communication
2. Children and Parenting
3. Equalitarian Roles
4. Sexual Relationship
5. Family and Friends
6. Personality Issues
7. Realistic Expectations
8. Financial Management
9. Conflict Resolution
10. Leisure Activities
11. Religious Orientation

Table 4. Content Categories in PREPARE (Olson, 1993)

"Family Map." A 12-15 page computer printout reveal graphically and numerically individual and couple scores (see Appendix A). This printout is given to the counselor who interprets the results for the couple.

The 19-page manual, Building a Strong Marriage, (Olson, 1993), which all couples who participate in the program receive, introduces the couples to the program's aims and purpose. It has discussions about the nature of marriage and marital preparation, as well as communication exercises which utilizes the scores from the inventory. It also contains a guide which helps couples discuss their

family backgrounds and the "Family Map." The manual ends by presenting couples with "Ten Steps for Resolving Conflict."

The PREPARE program is much more compact than BYSID. The discourse in the manual is succinct and direct. Literary flourishes are kept to a minimum, and information is conveyed through compact structures such as graphs and bullet points. These structural characteristics adhere to the program's attempt to remain scientific. Also, the entire program can be administered in as little as two sessions, whereas Wright's program takes seven meetings. Unlike BYSID, the program's truncated format cuts away from flowery discussions about marital and relationship issues. Instead, the results of the inventory are the central focus. As such, the program leaves much room for the counselor to steer discussions, making the program compatible with diverse counseling settings. However, the program's compact size does not limit its ability and tendency to construct images of marriage. In fact, in less time, PREPARE covers more topics than BYSID, though perhaps not in greater depth. Moreover, research reveals that this program is quite successful in modifying couple behavior and attitudes (Fowers & Olson, 1996). So it seems that in premarital counseling, what matters is not the time spent in actual sessions, but the contents of these sessions. In constructing meanings of marriage, PREPARE's major strategies center around the "scientification of marriage,"

specifically through two strategies: measurement and instructions.

Much of the couple's time is spent filling out the premarital questionnaire. In the end, what couples have are summaries of what they believe, hope, and fear about marriage and their partners. In effect, the questionnaire replaces long hours of identifying expectations, family background, problematic areas, etc. Instead, the inventory quantitatively measures these variables for couples. The manual states that one of its goals is "To help [couples] to identify [their] strength and growth areas" (p. 3). As such, measurement, founded on a scientific method of gathering data, not only saves couples' time and effort, but also provides couples with an "objective" description of who they are and what their relationship is like. As a rhetorical strategy, measurement can be quite effective in that, grounded on scientism, the results of the inventory seem infallible or at least more accurate than informal descriptions of the relationship.

When something is measured with an instrument--such as when the height of a plant is measured with a yard stick--the results are perceived as more accurate than if someone had guessed the plant's height. Moreover, the more reliable the instrument is, the more accurate the data. Likewise, when PREPARE "measures" premarital relationships with its "instrument," it provides a seemingly more accurate description of the relationship than if couples

themselves had discussed issues. As for the reliability of PREPARE, several times in the manual and even on the inventory itself, couples are assured that "PREPARE has a high level of validity, reliability and clinical utility." Thus as a rhetorical device, measurement enables the rhetors to induce cooperation from couples by revealing to them "scientifically more accurate" data about their relationship.

Such a strategy does not invite couples, as BYSID attempts to do, through more qualitative discussions about the relationship. Instead, PREPARE reveals to couples who they are much like a doctor would reveal to a patient the results of a medical test. PREPARE's rhetoric is cloaked in objectivity, for just as a doctor presumably separates her/his own ideologies from the results of medical test, PREPARE presents the results of its inventory as something void of bias.⁵⁵ Thus, in as much as couples are made to think that the results of the inventory are accurate and objective, measurement yields much persuasive power if not to modify couple's behavior, at least to shape their beliefs about their relationship.

PREPARE's second major rhetorical strategy, instructions, appeals to a strong sense of order and systematic strategy. The PREPARE emphasizes process; that

⁵⁵ Prepare was "designed to provide systematic and objective assessments of both personal and relationship [emphasis in original] issues for couples" (Fournier, Olson, & Druckman, 1983, pp. 229-30).

is, the program focuses not on telling couples what to do, but telling couples how to do it. This emphasis on process is manifested in all of the exercises and activities in that they each provide very detailed instructions. For instance, instead of telling couples to merely discuss issues, the manual provides the following instructions:

1. Now that you have each identified three strengths and three growth areas, you can begin by individually sharing what you each perceive as your relationship strengths. Do not show each other your responses, but begin verbally sharing them--each taking a turn.
2. One partner proposes a strength area, discusses the strength, then the other partner indicates one strength they have selected. This process should be repeated until all three strength areas have been discussed by both partners.
3. In terms of the growth areas, follow the procedures used in Step 2.
4. After completing the above steps, briefly discuss these questions:
 - a. Did your partner's response surprise you?
 - b. Where did you have the most disagreements regarding your strength and growth areas.
 - c. Where did you have the most agreements regarding you strength and growth areas.
[emphasis in original] (p. 6)

Later the manual provides ten steps for solving conflict, including "Set a time and place for discussion," "Brainstorm. List all possible solutions," and "Set-up another meeting. Discuss your progress." The "Family-of-Origin" exercise is as, if not more, detailed and systematic. PREPARE even systematically plans the way

couples participate in daily dialogue and share compliments.

In making instructions so explicit, the program appeals to a scientific approach to maintaining the marital relationship. Two important implications emerge from such a rhetorical strategy. First, the couple feels empowered to act in the situation. PREPARE provides couples with tools that they can use to conquer difficulties. Indeed, even the most seemingly difficult marital problems become easier to manage through several systematic steps. Second, focusing on instructions allows the program to promote a certain view of marriage. Specifically, PREPARE portrays marriage as a systematic and scientific, a machine which can be managed with effort, strategy, and order.

Both measurement and instructions reinforce PREPARE's scientific rhetoric. First, the two strategies provide couples with a sense that what they are doing is grounded in scientific method, and as such will prove to be efficacious. Furthermore, these strategies create an image of marriage as science--that is, marriage as accurately described and maintained by scientific method. Emerging in the end is what I term the "scientification of marriage"-- marriage reduced to variables and processed through scientific methods of analysis. As will be discussed later in this chapter, this process is what fuels PREPARE's powerful rhetoric. What follows is an examination of PREPARE's discourse using Burke's dramatism.

Rebirth Through Science: A Dramatistic Analysis of PREPARE

As revealed in the previous chapter, a critical analysis of the rhetoric of premarital counseling enables us to examine how counselors utilize stylized techniques to problematize relationships and, ultimately, induce cooperation from clients. Examining PREPARE specifically focuses our attention on a program which calls upon the name of science to carry out such a task. As such, an analysis of this program provides a glimpse into the rhetorical techniques that make scientific PCP's so successful. Furthermore, this study also may illuminate how modern scientific efforts to aid premarital relationships help shape the construction of certain images of marriage.

A color portrait of David H. Olson, President of PREPARE/ENRICH Inc. and a welcome greeting introduces couples to the PREPARE program manual. He address the couple as "Dear Friends," commending them for having "taken the opportunity to experience our PREPARE Program" and assuring them that the program will be a "useful and enjoyable experience." What follows is a brief summary of PREPARE's purpose:

PREPARE was designed to:

- help you get your marriage off to a good start

- help you become more aware of your strengths as a couple and the areas that need growth
- help you build on your strengths and overcome any problematic issues you have before you get married
- be of maximum value to you as a couple

Later in the same welcome letter, Olson adds:

While marriage can be one of life's most satisfying experiences, the risk of divorce continues to be about 50 percent for those marrying today. We want to help you reduce these risks by encouraging you to use the ideas and resources suggested in this booklet. (Olson, 1993, p. 1)

The discourse contained in the 18-page manual as well as the inventory itself are the primary means PREPARE uses to help couples get their "marriage off to a good start" and reduce the risks of divorce. The program attempts to accomplish these goals in three phases that coincide with the rhetoric of rebirth. First, the program aims to help couples "become aware of...strengths as a couple and the areas that need growth." Identifying these "growth areas" corresponds to the pollution stage. Second, the program hopes to "build on...strengths and overcome any problematic issues." This step aligns with purification. Ultimately, PREPARE hopes to teach couples how to attain a strong marriage, a goal embodied in the title of the manual, Building a Strong Marriage. In effect, PREPARE brings

couples to a state of redemption as couples move closer to the "strong marriage."

In line with the preventive trend in premarital counseling, PREPARE is concerned with predicting the future quality of marriages by assessing premarital relationships. The creators of PREPARE explain that prediction has emerged as a response to marital dissolution:

The ability to predict marital success has become increasingly important given the high divorce rates of the last 2 decades. Current estimates of this divorce rate are that 50% of all first marriages will end in divorce...Several recent longitudinal studies have attempted to pinpoint the factors that are predictive of marital success. These studies have shown great promise in identifying which aspects of premarital relationships are associated with marital discord and dissolution. (Larsen & Olson, 1989, p. 311-312)

Because "effective divorce prevention is entirely dependent upon knowing where to intervene" (p. 312), the PREPARE program includes a scientific inventory that evaluates personal and relationship traits, identifying the areas which require "intervention." Information from such an instrument is then utilized in counseling sessions.

Much like BYSID, the cycle of pollution, purification, and redemption undergirds PREPARE's rhetorical strategies. However, whereas BYSID's approach is driven by the "Christian marriage" theme, PREPARE's rhetoric relies on "scientification of marriage." Using science as the overriding model, PREPARE crafts a drama in which couples

as actors, through the agency of the inventory, become aware of the pollution within them (risks) which may lead to divorce. As these "polluted" elements are identified and as hierarchies of relationship "strength" and "growth areas" are established, couples ultimately experience guilt for which purgation is required. This guilt stems back to the fear of divorce and marital distress as couples discover "seeds" of marital discord in their premarital relationship.

To alleviate such guilt, PREPARE offers couples purification through the discussion. As an act of mortification, couples are asked to give up of their time and effort to participate in rituals of self-expression, listening, and other systematic interactions. Such actions, PREPARE claims, can improve poor communication and enable couples to cope with lack of homogeneity.

Finally, PREPARE completes the cycle of rebirth by moving couples toward a temporary state of redemption. By offering glimpses of an ideal marital relationship and providing couples practical methods by which such ideals can be maintained, PREPARE constructs the "shift in identity" required in rebirth. Couples must accept a new perspective toward marriage and the responsibilities of marital partners. PREPARE utilizes the terms, "strength" and "growth" to create images of ideal and antithetical relationships. Fears about divorce and marital distress are brought into a new light, and couples are given ways to

turn "growth areas" into "strengths." In this third stage in the process of rebirth, the rhetorical construction of marriage takes full form.

Ultimately, through this rebirth process, PREPARE hopes to help couples build stronger marriages--ones that can withstand the turbulent forces of marital discord and divorce. As a preventive counseling program, PREPARE is designed for couples who may not necessarily believe they have serious relationship problems. Thus the program's challenge is to convince couples that what the inventory discovers as "growth areas" are indeed problematic elements in the relationship. Then the program must insist that its methods of reducing or improving such growth areas are effective. To accomplish both these tasks, PREPARE relies on science as the primary source of argument. In the end, PREPARE constructs a "redeemed" perspective of marriage--marriage as scientific--or what I call, "the scientification of marriage."

Seeds of Divorce: The Function of the Negative in Pollution

Whereas BYSID constructed hierarchies based on Christian themes to induce guilt in couples, PREPARE's primary strategy involves hierarchies created by its premarital relationship inventory. Speaking to couples the manual explains: "The foundation of the PREPARE Program is a scientifically developed questionnaire that you and your

partner take individually" (p.4). One of PREPARE's primary goals is to provide couples with a profile of their relationship as filtered through a scientific instrument. According to the creators of PREPARE such a profile is crucial to the program. Olson (1983) discovered that "when PREPARE was used in combination with four intensive premarital counseling sessions by a trained marriage counselor, there was some additional benefits but not much more than was obtained from having couples simply take PREPARE and have one feedback session" (Olson, 1983, p. 70). Though counseling sessions are a necessary element in PREPARE, the scientific inventory itself seems to be the most important (and perhaps the most potent) element in the program.

The inventory is held in such high regard because, according to its creators, the benefits of the program are maximized when couples become aware of their own strength areas (positive scores) and growth areas (negative scores); only then can couples begin an informed discussion about their relationship. So one of PREPARE's primary challenges is to convince couples that the inventory is indeed valid--that the scores it provides can accurately assess the premarital relationship. However, not only must couples come to believe that these scores reflect the quality of their relationship, they also must trust that their negative scores warrant certain acts prescribed by the program will lead to an improved relationship. In an ideal

scenario, after taking the inventory, couples realize the severity of the problems and fervently believe that these problems must be overcome in order to achieve marital bliss. In short, the inventory attempts to produce a state of pollution or guilt so that couples will become vulnerable to the persuasive discourse of the program.

The makers of PREPARE assert that the program's inventory has the ability to "predict" the success or failure of marriage during the premarital stage of the relationship. To observe this point, we need only to peruse the titles of articles and research reports regarding the PREPARE program (see Table 5). Claiming to be able to predict marital bliss or divorce seems a bold statement to make, but prediction is a common topic in contemporary premarital counseling research (see Fowers, Montel, & Olson, 1996; Holman, Larson, & Harmer, 1994; Larsen, & Olson, 1989; Markman & Hahlweg, 1993; Markman, Renick, Floyd, Stanley, & Clements, 1993). Fowers and Olson (1986) claim that premarital relationships can be assumed to contain "seeds of eventual breakup from the very beginning (p. 403). They further posit that intervention might be helpful if these "potential trouble spots" can be identified. In other words, the brand of counseling PREPARE hopes to provide involves identifying "seeds of divorce" and intervening at a point where a trained counselor can address problems before they become too critical.

"Predicting Marital Satisfaction Using PREPARE: A Replication Study"	Larsen & Olson, 198
"Predicting Marital Success with PREPARE: A Predictive Validity Study"	Fowers & Olson, 1986
"Predicting Marital Success for Premarital couple Types Based on Prepare"	Fowers, Montel, & Olson, 1996
"Types of Marriage and Predicting Divorce"	Olson, n.d.

Table 5. Journal articles and reports based on PREPARE.

Ultimately, PREPARE hopes to help couples "reduce the risk of divorce" (Olson, 1993, p. 1). Toward this end, the program utilizes the methods and approaches of science to measure empirically the substance of premarital relationships to provide a "systematic and objective assessment of both personal and relationship [emphasis in original] issues for couples" (Fournier, Olson, & Druckman, 1983, p. 229-30). According to PREPARE, in knowing who they are--that is knowing their "strengths" and "growth areas"--couples can discuss problematic issues before they intensify over time. In this way, couples "can prevent future problems," including the risks of divorce. By telling couples who they are, PREPARE intensifies guilt for in knowing who they are, couples also catch glimpses of who

they are not. Hence, Burke's concept of the negative plays a major role in this rhetoric.

As discussed briefly in Chapter III, Burke's concept of the negative is a central term in dramatistic analysis. In fact, as Burke (1968/1992) explains, dramatism itself "is devoted to a stress upon the all-importance of the negative as a specifically linguistic invention" (p. 241). Humans, through the use of symbols, are enabled to perceive what "is not." Unlike the unbreakable precepts of natural law, which involves not "wrong" or "right," but merely "is," Burke claims, human experience involves shades of moralistic codes. This ability to perceive and react to negatives ultimately compels humans to construct various kinds of "hierarchies," Burke's term for ordered rules for behavior or as Rueckert (1963) explains, "any kind of graded, value-charged structure in terms of which thing, words, people, acts, and ideas are ranked" (p. 131). In effect, hierarchies makes order possible, putting people, objects, attitudes, and behaviors, in some sort of order that makes sense. Embedded in such order are rules for behavior ("thou shalt" and "thou shalt not"); and because people can never live up to all these rules, humans experience guilt and require redemption through purification.

The premarital inventory is the "foundation of the PREPARE Program" and functions as a rhetorical device which introduces couples to negatives about their relationship.

In other words, PREPARE shows couples what "is not" in their relationship. Similar to a doctor's diagnosis, PREPARE provides couples with a scientifically derived assessment of the individual partners and the dyad, highlighting problem areas that may plague the relationship in the future. Olson (1993) explains that "Based on [couples'] responses, a personalized PREPARE Computerized Report is printed identifying [couple's] strength and growth areas [emphasis in original]...It summarizes how you each view your relationship" (PREPARE/ENRICH, 1986, p. 2). Each partner completes the inventory separately, answering various questions that attempt to scientifically measure the individual's "strengths" in that area. For each question, the individual must estimate their agreement or disagreement (positive or negative) with a certain claim using a 5-point Likert scale (with 1 being "strongly agree" and 5 being "strongly disagree"). For example, the "Realistic Expectations" category includes questions like: "There are probably many people in the world with whom I could have a happy marriage," "Time will resolve most of the problems that we have as couple," and "I believe that some romantic love will fade in my marriage." Each partner is later judged by the answers they provide to the questions. Also, the couple is judged by the extent to which they are in agreement. On the computer printout of the couple's scores, the inventory provides the actual questions answered by the couple with a parenthesis next to

it that reveals the "right" answer--what the test-taker should have answered in order to be considered "strong" in this area. For instance, in the examples given above, the first question, "There are probably many people in the world with whom I could have a happy marriage," according to the inventory, should receive a positive response from the test-taker. That is, if the individual answers in disagreement with the statement, he or she receives a lower score.

Only the presence of a trained counselor are couples allowed to view the PREPARE Computerized Report⁵⁶ (PREPARE/ENRICH, 1986) which provides individual and couple "scores." Partners are evaluated for the extent to which they agree on "right" characteristics of a strong marriage. Much like percentages used in a classroom setting, if the couple receives 70% or above, they are considered "strong" in that category; it is called a "strength area." If the couple receives a score below 50%, this category is labeled a "growth area." In the end, the inventory constructs a hierarchic order of relationship by assigning couples scores that indicate the degree to which couples meet the various criteria for a "strong relationship."

⁵⁶ The computer printout is not given to couples because they contain the actual items in the inventory. To ensure the inventory's validity, PREPARE must make prevent the dissemination of these inventory items so that other couples will not be exposed to the items before they participate in the program.

Obvious from all the artifacts in this analysis is PREPARE's exaltation of scientific accuracy. In the manual Olson (1993) emphasizes the program's reliability and validity, stating,

We are very proud of the fact that PREPARE is one of the most rigorously and scientifically tested [emphasis in original] programs developed for premarital couples...The foundation of the PREPARE Program is a scientifically developed questionnaire that you and your partner take individually. (pp. 1-2)

In the manual, scientific research serves as proof:

"Studies of couple have found that if small problems are not dealt with adequately, they will often become serious" (p. 4). In the "Computerized Report," couples are assured that "PREPARE has a high level of validity, reliability and clinical utility" (PREPARE/ENRICH, 1986). In effect, PREPARE argues the usefulness and validity of the program by appealing to the audience's faith in scientific authority.

The genius of PREPARE's scientific counseling device lies in its ability to influence and modify couples' identities and perspectives. Fueled by couples' faith in science, the inventory gains the trust of couples and systematically dissects the relationship and places elements of the relationship in a specific order. In other words, the inventory generates a hierarchy of relationship characteristics. This order will eventually enable PREPARE

to establish a hierarchy of relationships on which couples are ranked. Ultimately, the program will attempt to move couples from one point in the hierarchy to another--what Burke calls a "shift in co-ordinates" (Burke, 1984, p, 269). Such a shift is key in the cycle of rebirth which chronicles the metamorphosis of human substance.

Rueckert (1963) explains that "all hierarchies have inherent in them a progressive form which comes from the nature of language itself: the upward movement from lower to higher and the downward movement from higher to lower" (p. 132). PREPARE's dialectical terms demonstrates this concept. At the outset, the program rejects the symbolic term, "divorce," and identifies it as a negative term. At the other polar point, PREPARE introduces the positive term, "strong marriage" as found in the title of the manual, Building a Strong Marriage, and throughout the program's discourse. A hierarchy emerges with divorce at the bottom of the order and "strong marriage" as the highest, most prized position or what Burke calls, the "god-head." In set of co-ordinates which PREPARE creates, couple are compelled to move as far away from "divorce" and as close as possible to "strong marriage."

Divorce and its devastating effects are recurring themes in much of the literature regarding PREPARE (see Fowers, Montel, & Olson, 1996; Fournier, Olson, & Druckman, 1983; Larsen & Olson, 1986; Larsen & Olson, 1989; Olson, 1983). The "rising divorce rate" is used to warrant

further research, and "divorce prevention" becomes a primary mission of such research. A flier sent to prospective clients opens with "About 54 percent of all first marriages end in divorce and 20 percent of those divorces occur within the first two years" (PREPARE/ENRICH, n.d.). In the manual, couples are reminded that "While marriage can be one of life's most satisfying experiences, the risk of divorce continues to be about 50 percent for the marrying today" (Olson, 1993, p.1,4). PREPARE's repetitive use of divorce statistics and the term "risk of divorce" creates an image of marriages as somehow always having the potential for failure. PREPARE attempts to strike fear and anxiety within couples who, at this point in their life, are presumably content in their relationship. If couples accept the authority of PREPARE's scientific statistics, they begin to feel symptoms of "guilt."

When PREPARE tells couples that it hopes to reduce "risks of divorce" in a relationship, it takes on two responsibilities: a) the program must define the particular relationship and individual characteristics that increase the risk of divorce, and b) PREPARE must be able to identify these risks in each of the couples that participate in the program. Both of these tasks focus particular attention to what Burke calls the "substance" of couples. That is, PREPARE focuses on manipulating the attributes that define who couples are.

To accomplish the first task, PREPARE constructs an image of marriages that lack "strength"--marriages that are "weak":

Too often, couples invest time in their work and in themselves but not in helping their relationship grow...

Most premarital couples spend a great deal of time, energy and money on their wedding ceremony which only lasts a few hours. However, they often invest little time in building relationship skills that would help them have a more satisfying and lasting marriage... (pp. 2-4)

In PREPARE's discourse, we discover that a general lack of effort and dedication is a primary characteristic of "weak" marriages. Later, the program specifies that a lack of effort in "sharing feelings" is detrimental to marriage:

It is much easier to prepare for a successful wedding than a successful marriage. While a wedding involves concrete tasks that need to be completed, a successful wedding requires you to take time to share feelings [emphasis in original]

Too often couples simply take each other for granted and wonder why their relationship is not satisfying. (P. 4-5)

PREPARE adds that a strong marriage requires not only sharing feelings but "ideas and goals" as well.

These brief descriptions of weak marriages, reveal much about PREPARE's rhetorical strategy. The program makes couples aware that a large number of people just like them neglect their relationships, and these marriages are the ones bound for divorce. Identifying these

"antithetical" marriages is a necessary step in inducing guilt because if PREPARE hopes to move couples towards an ideal persona, it must first reveal to couples who they should not be--the antithetical persona. This definition through opposites aligns with Burke's (1969a) claim that

"Substance," used to designate what a thing is, derives from a word designating something that a thing is not. That is though used to designate something within the thing, intrinsic to it, the word etymologically refers to something outside the thing, extrinsic to it [emphases in original]. (p. 23)

The term "strong marriage" is somewhat ambiguous. It cannot be defined completely without defining the opposite term. So at the outset, PREPARE establishes the substance of "strong marriages" by identifying the things against which marriages must be strong or simply put, the substance of weak marriages. In effect, PREPARE has revealed for couples the elements that attribute to the "risk of divorce" or simply, the substance of divorce.

PREPARE's next task is to show couples that elements of this substance of divorce are present in their current relationship. If the program is successful in doing so, then couples will be more likely to adhere to PREPARE's prescribed methods of removing these characteristics. Relying on a scientifically-validated questionnaire, the program accomplishes this critical task as it identifies couples' "growth areas" or areas in the "relationship that

may be problematic or in need of enrichment" (p. 2). The term, "growth areas," is connected with the term, "risk of divorce," in that these areas in which couples need growth are the same areas that PREPARE asserts will lead to divorce; these are the characteristics of weak relationships or characteristics that are lacking in strong marriages. Consequently, the characteristics of weak marriages described earlier emerge in the inventory as criteria for wrong and right answers. For instance, "sharing feelings, ideas, and goals" emerge in many of the inventory items as shown here with their respective "correct" answers:

- It is very easy for me to express all my true feelings to my partner. (+)⁵⁷
- When we are having a problem, my partner often gives me the silent treatment. (-)
- I wish my partner was more willing to share his/her feelings with me. (-)
- Sometimes my partner does not understand how I feel. (-)
- My partner is always a good listener. (+)

(PREPARE/ENRICH, 1986, p. 6)

⁵⁷ As part of the Computerized Report shown to couples, plus (+) and minus (-) signs, as shown here, are attached to each question in the inventory to reflect what the program believes are the "correct" answers to the questions.

So having named the substance of divorce and detecting this substance within the couple, the program succeeds in inducing guilt.

The PREPARE Computerized Report informs each couple of their scores in the 13 areas PREPARE evaluates (i.e. Personality Issues, Conflict Resolution, Equalitarian Roles, etc.). Each score is presented as a percentage, giving the appearance that it is possible to receive 100 percent, a perfect score. However, achieving perfect scores throughout the inventory areas is very difficult because to do so, both partners must answer each of the 125 questions identically. Additionally, couples also must answer each of the questions "correctly"--that is they must answer in a way that reflects characteristics of a "strong marriage" as defined by PREPARE. Some of these questions would be very difficult to answer "correctly." For example, "My partner is always a good listener" or "Sometimes my partner does not understand how I feel." To receive a perfect score each must have answered "yes" to the first question and "no" to the second. Clearly, attaining 100 percent is incredibly difficult but still possible. However, the inventory has a built-in device that keeps couples from ever reaching the perfect score. Because of the 14th assessment area, Realistic Distortion, which renders extremely high scores invalid and adjusts accordingly, the 100 percent is not only difficult to achieve but mathematically impossible. As such, PREPARE's

stringent hierarchic order renders every couple with some level of guilt, identifying for each couple the seeds of divorce in their relationship.

The impossibility of the perfect score helps to drive the cycle of rebirth, especially in inducing guilt. Burke believes that an inherent in human nature is the ability to "construct ideal selves and ideal modes of behavior which are never capable of attainment, but on the basis of which [they] nevertheless [judge themselves] and others" (Rueckert, 1963, p. 133). This concept is demonstrated in the way PREPARE creates the unattainable "ideal couple." The inventory will find a flaw in every couple, and as couples recognize their pollution, they will eventually fall beneath the top of the hierarchy, recognize and be goaded with guilt, and be compelled to move up the hierarchy. It is important that every couple receive some negative scores ("growth areas") because if not, premarital counseling would seem futile, especially for a couple who has no risks of divorce. So to preserve its own utility, PREPARE must be able to detect seeds of divorce in every premarital couple that participate in the program. However, PREPARE is also careful not to emphasize the point so much that couples become discouraged to the point of giving up. If couples reach such a point, then the cycle of rebirth falters. The program, instead, encourages couples toward purification by describing marriage as possibly "one of the most satisfying experiences" in life.

Doing so reminds couples of the dialectical tension between "divorce" and "strong marriage" and that although "risks of divorce" are present in the relationship, the hope for a satisfying marriage is also within reach. PREPARE also employs two other rhetorical strategies to further encourage couples. First, the program uses the term "growth areas," and second, it tells couples PREPARE will not predict the success or failure of their marriage.

PREPARE could have used more direct terms such as "poor areas," "weak areas" (which would seem to be the appropriate opposite for "strength area") or even "divorce-prone areas." After all, these harsher terms may induce more guilt. However, such terms may leave couples at a state of pollution without driving them toward purification. Labeling negative scores as "growth areas" empowers the couple toward improvement (a move upward in the hierarchy). After being diagnosed with the disease (seeds of divorce), couples are immediately turned toward healing. The term "growth" reflects a movement from one point to another-- what Burke (1969a) calls, "directional substance" (pp. 31-33). In using this term, the program overrides the "place" couples are in currently ("this is where you are"), with an ideal counter-point ("this is where you should be going"). Thus, couples are compelled toward purification.

The program employs another strategy to insure couples do not remain polluted by telling couples that "PREPARE

will not predict the success or failure of your marriage" [emphasis in original] (Olson, 1993, p. 3). A similar statement is also printed on the computer printout of the couple's scores: "PREPARE has a high level of validity, reliability and clinical utility. However, it is not a test to be passed or failed and it is not designed to predict chances for success in marriage" (PREPARE/ENRICH, 1986, p. 1).

Having examined other materials describing PREPARE to counselors and scholars, it is clear that what PREPARE tells couples does not coincide with what PREPARE tells others. The program does predict the success or failure of marriages. It was designed to do so and is continually tested to make sure it remains valid. However, couples are shielded from this information so that especially those who receive many "growth area" scores will not feel hopeless (S. Fye,⁵⁸ personal communication, October 15, 1996). In a paradoxical twist, the PREPARE program juxtaposes its appeal to scientific validity with its reminder that the inventory is not a predictive test. PREPARE clearly wants couples to believe that the scores they receive are scientifically valid, but in the end, the program assures couples that they can still break free from these scores.

⁵⁸ Fye is a representative from the PREPARE/ENRICH, Inc. She is responsible for sending appropriate materials to researchers interested in examining the program. She can be contacted at PREPARE/ENRICH, Inc., P.O. Box 190, Minneapolis, MN 55440-0190.

What PREPARE offers here seems to be a rhetoric of hope which leads couples from a state of guilt to purification.

In summary, PREPARE identifies the pollution in premarital relationships and attempts to foster in couples the desire for removing or purifying such pollution. The program utilizes three steps, all of which exemplify PREPARE's masterful rhetorical strategy. First, PREPARE "demonizes" the term "divorce" and glorifies "strong marriage" and places the two terms in dialectical opposition. Doing so creates a plane of co-ordinates on which couples are moved from "divorce" to "strong marriage." Choosing these particular dialectic terms, PREPARE appropriately triggers critical concerns of its primary audience--premarital couples. Second, PREPARE names the characteristics or substance of "weak" marriages (seed of divorce). In this step, the program has the power to define for couples the meaning of "strong" and "weak" marriages. PREPARE is careful to define in such a way as to empower couples with the ability to change (i.e. through heightened devotion and sharing). Finally, the program finds the flaws of "weak marriages" within the premarital relationship by quantifying the personal and dyadic attributes of couples, using a scientific instrument that removes the possibility of purity--that is, every couple will necessarily discover faults (pollution). In effect, PREPARE motivates couples toward acquiescence by placing them against an impossible hierarchy, one which distributes

guilt and necessitates purification. Whether or not couples decide to believe PREPARE's diagnosis becomes a matter of personal choice; but if couples have even an ounce of faith in science, guilt abounds.

These three steps, driven by the effects of the negative, ultimately create a hierarchic order of relationships. As the repercussions of the negative and hierarchy are intensified in the program, couples ultimately fall somewhere beneath the "god-head" of the hierarchy ("strong marriage") and are driven into a state of dissonance or guilt. As couples struggle with their imperfections, PREPARE employs another effective strategy by using the term "growth areas" to assure couples that their weak areas can be improved. Knowledge of their guilt paves the road to purification. Here, PREPARE induces this guilt with an upward stroke, encouraging couples to seek a better way, leading them toward the next phase in the cycle of rebirth, purification.

Let's Talk It Out: Purification Through Identification and Disclosure

The presence of a hierarchy necessarily creates guilt. As Rueckert (1963) explains:

Every hierarchy, which is a "good" in that it makes orderly what otherwise might be chaotic, is a "goad" in so far as division into higher and lower is inevitable wherever there is ordering, and such division makes inevitable the hierarchic

psychosis and categorical guilt engendered
"spontaneously" by any "social order." (p. 132)

Having established a hierarchy and identified the pollution within couples, PREPARE must provide purification for "if order, then guilt; if guilt, then need for redemption" (Burke, 1963/1992, p. 242). This purification process is a particularly important element in the counseling program because if PREPARE hopes to help couples reduce the risks of divorce, it must provide practical ways of doing so. In this program pollution has taken form as "seeds of divorce" found embedded in premarital relationships. As such, the program must be able to show couples how to remove or diminish these characteristics, which the program itself has labeled destructive. In regards to the program's hierarchical order of relationships, PREPARE must move couples further up the hierarchy, away from "divorce" and closer to "strong marriage." Such a move is not easy. It involves asking couples to make adjustments to their communication styles, personal habits, expectations, traditions, and values. In effect, couples are asked to be transformed into new, better selves. Though difficult, this process is necessary if couples are to reach a state of redemption. As will later become evident in PREPARE's discourse, couples are asked to participate in "mortification" in order to purge their own guilt.

Acts of purification always involve some kind of symbolic death whether through victimage (killing a

scapegoat) or mortification (killing aspects of one's self)--hence Burke's (1961) phrase the "cult of the kill" (p. 5). Rueckert (1963) explains Burke's terms further:

The essential difference between victimage and mortification is that the first always directly involves some other person, place, or thing; always calls for a ritualistic transference of pollution to the chosen vessel...In mortification, however, even in its most extreme form of suicide, or self-mortification, nothing outside of the person involved needs to be polluted or destroyed in order for the purification to take place. (pp. 146-47)

Thus, to blame our own guilt on someone else is victimage, and to accept our own guilt is an act of mortification. Rueckert explains that mortification usually takes form as negation of the flesh: "the controlling and denial of the 'natural' 'animal' impulses" (p. 148). Because guilt is found within the individual, denying inner impulses is critical and often involves abiding by a set of rules ("thou shalt nots") of human behavior. Mortification, then, has an intrinsic relationship with the negative. In PREPARE's drama of rebirth, couples are asked to participate in mortification. The program points to the "seeds of divorce" as the various types of "natural impulses" which need to be killed. These seeds, for instance, are the tendencies of couples to neglect their relationships, their failure to share feelings, ideas, and goals. For true mortification to take place, couples must

symbolically kill these "seeds" which pollute the relationship.

In naming the "villain" in the drama, PREPARE focuses mostly on the specific characteristics ("seeds of divorce") that weaken a strong relationship, not condemning the relationship itself. Naming "seeds of divorce" as the "villains" instead of the relationship, PREPARE insures the self-preservation of couples. After all, if the cycle of rebirth is to reach completion, the "villain" who embodies the pollution must be sacrificed in order to purge sin. So when the program targets these "seeds," it negates parts of the relationship instead of the whole. Doing so gives couples the chance to separate the polluted parts from the unpolluted areas without having to "kill" the whole relationship. As it stands, couples need only to terminate "seeds" or "risks" that contaminate the relationship.

PREPARE's brand of pollution as revealed in the inventory is manifested as relationship and personal "flaws." For example, the program "negates" drug addiction,⁵⁹ unrealistic expectations,⁶⁰ dissatisfaction with the relationship/partner,⁶¹ negativity,⁶² jealousy,⁶³ and

⁵⁹ This is reflected in the inventory question, "My partner should smoke, drink or use drugs less often" (-).

⁶⁰ "I think we will never have problems in our marriage" (-).

⁶¹ "Sometimes my partner is too stubborn" (-).

⁶² "My partner is often critical or has a negative outlook (-).

⁶³ Sometimes I am concerned about my partner's jealousy (-).

communication problems.⁶⁴ In general though, two types of "seeds" emerge repeatedly in the inventory and in the manual: poor communication and lack of homogeneity. The former is a type of "seed" that sprouts because partners have failed to communicate well or enough, while the latter deal with dissimilar and perhaps incompatible beliefs, values, histories or expectations. For both types of guilt the program offers discussion as a primary mode of purification. From PREPARE's perspective, "sharing feelings, ideas and goals," will enable couples to kill the negative characteristics within them.

A couple begins the purification process by first adhering to the order that PREPARE attempts to bring to their relationship. Such acceptance reflects the couple's faith in science, for the evaluation that couples receive does not come from the counselor or any other human being, but from a computerized report. So as part of this step, couples must believe to some degree that their individual substance and the substance of their relationship can be summed up in numbers and graphs produced by a machine. In effect, they must bow to the power of science. Consequently, couples also accept their position in the hierarchic order of relationships (as expressed in their "strengths" and "growth" areas). This step fulfills one of PREPARE's primary goals--to "help [couples] become more aware of [their] strengths as a couple and the areas that

⁶⁴ "I wish my partner was more willing to share his/her

need growth" (p. 1). PREPARE places great significance in this concept of "becoming aware." From PREPARE's perspective, knowing the quality of their relationship helps couples get their marriage "off to a good start." In fact, one of the program's three main exercises is devoted just to this concept. The "PREPARE Couple Communication Exercise" involves each partner selecting three of the 13 relationship categories which he/she feels are strengths and three that are growth areas. The partners then share their answers and discuss each area they individually chose.

Having accepted PREPARE's order, couples are left goaded with guilt, knowing that they are not who they should be. At this point, couples look to the creators of the hierarchy (the program), seeking the particular ways they can start improving themselves. PREPARE empowers couples to act against their pollution, playing out a drama in which couples themselves are the agents of change. Purification acts are phrased in such a way that couples are the key agents in the drama with the program as "helper": "We want to help you reduce these risks..." (p. 1), "PREPARE was designed to help you build on your strengths and overcome any problematic issues..." (p. 2), "...help you prepare for marriage by encouraging you to talk more openly with your partner" (p. 3). Empowering couples in this way is important because the types of

feelings with me (-).

problems PREPARE identifies necessitate self-imposed effort from couples (e.g. lack of devotion, lack of sharing, etc.). Also, according to Burke (1961), the ideal type of mortification is self-willed. That is, the act of killing the sin must be dominated by the individual in whom the sin lies, not by an outside agent forcing the guilty person. Placing the blame and the responsibility for blame on the guilty individual helps to balance the guilt-purification ratio. That is, the intensity of the guilt must be similar to the intensity of the purificative act.

As we now follow the progression of the manual, we discover that PREPARE's path of purification involves commitment and communication. First, the program offers a general plea for couples' participation and devotion in their marriage. Specifically, couples are asked to "invest":

To keep your marriage alive and growing it requires you to invest time, energy, and money [emphasis in original]. Too often, couples invest time in their work and in themselves but not in helping their relationship grow. (P. 2)

The act of "investing" is particularly important in the process of mortification in that the term, "invest," necessarily asks for sacrifice--in this case, a sacrifice of time, energy and money. Though it may cause suffering at the start (mortification), marital investment just like financial investments, in the long run, may reap abundant benefits (redemption). As PREPARE has phrased this act,

couples are almost forced to invest; that is, if couples want their marriage to stay "alive" and "grow".

Again, we see the term, "growth," used to motivate couples toward change. Here, the relationship becomes a living entity which, as PREPARE describes, "continually needs attention and support" (p. 2). Promoting marriage as "life" motivates couples to treat their relationship with care, perhaps as they would a plant. If marriage is alive, then it can die. In effect, couples are urged to keep their relationship from dying by killing the poisonous "seeds of divorce." Marriage as "life" also reinforces the upward movement in the program, especially when the very substance of marriage is described as "alive" and "growing." The ideal marriage here is never static but in continuous motion up toward growth and life.

If marriage is a living thing, then communication is that which sustains its life. Like many other popular premarital counseling programs today⁶⁵, including BYSID, PREPARE devotes a portion of the counseling to the topic of communication. In fact, PREPARE seems to view communication as the most important problem in marriage.

Describing its aim, the program tells couples:

"PREPARE...is a program that will help you prepare for marriage by encouraging you to talk more openly with your

⁶⁵ Some examples include: PREP (Renick, Blumberg, & Markman, 1992); the Couples Communication Program (see Miller, Miller, Nunnally, & Wackman, 1991), and PAP (Buckner, & Salts, 1985).

partner" [emphasis in original] (p. 3). To this end, all of the exercises in the manual attempt to encourage couples to communicate more and to communicate well. The term "sharing feelings" appears numerous times, in every case, emphasizing the symbiotic relationship between "sharing" and "growth," and at times even equating the two terms: "Growing together as a couple means [emphasis added] sharing feelings, ideas and goals" (p. 2).

Similar to BYSID's brand of purification, PREPARE emphasizes "work" as the key act in mortification. However, whereas BYSID allowed for more varied types of "work" as purification acts, PREPARE, perhaps because of its brevity, focuses mostly on communication. "Discussion," "talk," and "sharing" become quite powerful acts in the program. Through these communicative and meta-communicative (communication about communication) acts, couples can purge the guilt PREPARE induced in the earlier pollution stage. Specifically, the program promotes discussions to "kill" two major types of "seeds of divorce": poor communication and lack of homogeneity.

As in BYSID, discussions are prevalent in the PREPARE Program. In fact, the program identifies its major goal: "to help you better communicate your feelings and ideas with each other" (p. 2) and "to encourage you and your partner to talk with each other more openly and honestly about your relationship" (p. 4). The program attributes marital problems to poor communication as manifested in

"lack" of communication: "Growing closer to each other requires sharing feelings, ideas and goals. Too often couples simply take each other for granted and wonder why their relationship is not satisfying." According to PREPARE, many couples fail to communicate because communication is "usually difficult" (p. 4), "requires time" (p. 4), and "easy to forget" (p.5). And so, PREPARE encourages partners to talk more and to talk more openly. Doing so will remove some of the "seeds of divorce" in the relationship. In the way PREPARE describes the power of talk, communication becomes the ultimate method for solving marital problems. The program eventually discloses the full potential of communication as a preventive device: "By discussing and dealing with current issues before they become more serious, you can help prevent future problems..." (p. 4).

Later in the manual, PREPARE suggests that poor communication is also a result of ineffective communication styles. Thus, couples must learn not only to discuss more but to discuss more appropriately: "Every couple has difference and disagreements, but healthy couples find ways to resolve marital disputes without turning them into marital wars" (p. 16).⁶⁶ Because PREPARE targets lack of

⁶⁶ Some of the questions in the inventory reiterate this point: "My partner sometimes makes comments which put me down," "I do not always share negative feelings with my partner because I am afraid she/he will get angry with me," and "When we are having a problem, my partner often gives me the silent treatment" (p. 6).

communication skills as a primary characteristic of distressed marriages, as part of purification, the program offers couples techniques for communicating well. For example, one exercise teaches couples how to deal with conflicts through a 10-step exercise (see Table 6).

Steps for Conflict-Resolution

1. Set a time and place for discussion.
2. Define the problem or issue of disagreement.
3. How do you each contribute to the problem?
4. List past attempts to resolve the issue that were not successful.
5. Brainstorm. List all possible solutions.
6. Discuss and evaluate these possible solutions.
7. Agree on one solution to try.
8. Agree how each individual will work toward this solution.
9. Set-up another meeting. Discuss your progress.
10. Reward each other as you each contribute toward the solution. (p. 16).

Table 6. PREPARE's "Ten Steps for Resolving Couple Conflict" (Olson, 1993, p. 6).

Another activity, called the "Couple Communication Exercise," teaches couples how to discuss relationship strengths and growth areas, whereas the "Family-of-Origin" exercise details how couples should discuss family background and leadership styles. The program also describes a daily dialogue exercise which provides a structure for sharing feelings each day. Promoting these instructions for communication, the program points to technique as a purifying method. Merely communicating will not remove guilt; couples must learn how to communicate properly by accepting these techniques provided by a superior authority--namely, science. Practicing these systematic techniques will help to remove pollution (i.e. poor communication) and to begin couples' quest toward new identities (i.e. couples who communicate better).

Aside from poor communication, the program also negates couples' lack of homogeneity. Overall, higher couple-scores are greatly dependent on couple-agreement, which reflects, to some degree, how similar couples' views and beliefs are. So every time a couple disagrees on a given topic such as child-rearing, financial management, religious beliefs, or family background, that couple will be notched with more "seeds of divorce." This preoccupation with homogeneity demonstrates the program's appeal to the Burkean term, "identification." Brock (1990) explains:

Burke sees identification as an "acting together" that grows out of the ambiguities of substance. People feel social division and unity simultaneously, division because each person remains unique and unity or "consubstantiality" to the extent that the actors share locus of motives. (p. 187)

Couples are necessarily divided because they are different people--their substances are unique. Moreover, as couples become aware of their growth areas which are partly determined by disagreement on a certain issue, they may feel a more acute form of division, which leads to guilt. As such, PREPARE must construct ways to address these dissimilarities in such a way as to alleviate the guilt. To accomplish this task, PREPARE must provide ways to join together the interests of both partners. In the various exercises and discourse in the manual, PREPARE helps to bridge the division between couples and reestablish identification or "consubstantiality" by offering, yet again, communication.

"Growing closer to each other," PREPARE explains, "requires sharing feelings" (p. 5). Here, and in other parts of PREPARE's discourse, identification through disclosure is emphasized. Couples are told to discuss and share to learn more about where each other stands regarding a certain issue. For example, the program devotes five of the 18 pages in the manual to the "Family-of-Origin" exercise. Aligning with PREPARE's focus on identification, this exercise was designed to help couples "become aware"

of "the similarities and differences in [their] families" (p.15). Only in discussing such issues can couples "become aware" of this and other issues in their relationship. The substance of the term, "becoming aware," reoccurs frequently in PREPARE's discourse, particularly in the inventory which serves to provide couples with "a summary of [their] feelings as presented in the PREPARE Computerized Report" (p. 2). According to PREPARE, if the relationship is to "grow," partners must disclose as much as possible information about their own personal and relationship issues.⁶⁷ In Burke's terms, the program is attempting to "de-mystify" the relationship. That is, PREPARE tries to strip away all that is unknown about the substances of each partner. Such an endeavor may lead directly to identification in that the interests of each partner becomes focused on "knowing" the other.

To combat the lack of homogeneity couples do not necessarily have to discover commonalties but similar interests. At the end of the "Family-of-Origin" activity the manual states: "It is important for each of you to develop as independent persons in order for your

⁶⁷ Black (1988) observes:
 The therapeutic technique of psychoanalysis requires the fullest possible exposure of personal secrets by the analysand to the therapist in the conviction that disclosure has purgative power, that what suppurates and corrupts in the darkness will heal in the light...The moment of psychoanalytic insight is also a terminal act in that the origins of neurosis are disclosed and its symptoms are put on a course of extinction. (p.137-138)

relationship to grow" (p. 15). Although similarity is the ideal scenario, couples still are encouraged to celebrate their differences. The key is knowing more about how each other feels, sharing the interest of the other, and thus, understanding and ultimately, "identifying" with the other.

As discussed earlier, mortification is not an easy process, and some couples may have trouble with the mortification process. PREPARE provides motivation for such couples by utilizing three strategies. First, the possibility of divorce is juxtaposed with the couple's ability to overcome divorce if they participate in the program. Basically, in the drama that PREPARE creates, if couples work towards purification, risks of divorce will be reduced. In fact, divorce reduction is equated with the act of using the ideas and resources suggested in the program.

Second, PREPARE makes mortification seem easy. The exercises in the manual, though somewhat cumbersome at times, offer systematic methods of improving couples' relationships. For instance, PREPARE claims conflict management skills can be improved through a ten-step conflict resolution exercise (see Table 6). The steps in this exercise make conflict management seem like an easy task, as reflected in Step 5 where couples are asked to list all possible solutions or Step 7 which tells couples simply to agree on one solution. The steps are so easy that at the beginning of the exercise, couples receive a

warning, "As simple as this Ten Step exercise looks, it is not a game. It may be hard for you to complete, so if you cannot finish, try again later" (p. 16). Attesting to the power communication, the program ends the exercise by telling couples to "use this exercise to overcome other problems" (p. 18).

Finally, in keeping with its overall appeal to scientific authority, PREPARE relies on the "scientification of marriage" to encourage couples toward purification. Specifically, the program suggests that the mystery and complexity of relationships can be decoded by science. Couples may prefer PREPARE's counseling than perhaps one which is not scientifically valid because science presumably provides more accurate and more effective results. After all, the manual states, "over 400,000 premarital couples have benefited from this highly successful program" (p. 1). Thus, whereas BYSID's appeal to religious authority relies on couples' faith in a familial connection with God, PREPARE's rhetoric is dependent on the couples' faith in the authority of science and its ability to produce accurate and effective results. The program assures couples that PREPARE is "scientifically reliable and valid" and is "one of the most rigorously and scientifically tested [emphasis in original] programs (p. 1). As a result, the advice and exercises PREPARE offers, though they entail mortification, seem justified because a

systematic scientific approach will surely produce productive results.

As the drama of rebirth revolves, guilt having been induced and hierarchies constructed, couples are led to a critical choice: how to react to the "order" that PREPARE has set before them. Some couples will "disobey" the hierarchy, succumbing to their own will. In keeping with PREPARE's drama, these couples have symbolically become the "weak marriages"--those bound for divorce. Others will "obey," saying "no" to the "seeds of divorce" and adhering to PREPARE's "thou shalt nots." These couples become the hero of the drama--they become the "strong marriages." These are the couples for whom redemption awaits.

Growth as a Mode of Redemption

Every scene that has taken place in the drama so far--negating the villain (negative), constructing an order of relationships (hierarchy), inducing guilt by identifying "seeds of divorce" (pollution), and killing the guilt through discussion (purification)--PREPARE has put into action so that the drama will lead to and culminate in redemption. In this scene, PREPARE meets its fundamental goal--helping couples get their marriage off to a good start. Having delineated the methods of purification, in this third phase in the cycle of rebirth, the program provides couples a way to move from where they are to the

place where they should be. This place involves a new perspective, a change in personhood, a different and better view of life. In PREPARE's drama, redemption entails "building a strong marriage." Of course, such building requires not brick and mortar but reconceptualizations of identity through language. Dramatistically speaking, redemption requires not the physical force of humans, but occurs solely through language--the realm of symbols.⁶⁸ The term, "marriage" itself is merely a constructed symbol with certain attached meanings for each married couple. So when PREPARE tells its clients that it will help them get "marriage off to a good start," the program has revealed its aim to move couples toward a point where "good" marriages can begin to "grow." This involves not physical action but "symbolic action"--that is acting through words. This power of language is manifested in the process whereby PREPARE builds hierarchies of relationships for couples, and then, gives them ways to move up the hierarchy.

⁶⁸ Rueckert (1963) illuminates this point:
 In attempting to build an individual character--to find its real self and live purposely in the external world, satisfying its permanent fundamental needs by conforming to the sources of its being--the self if almost continually in crisis-conflict situations. In some situations the choice is simple and obvious and [sic] the conflict can be solved by direct physical action; but in others the self confronts "overlapping contradictions," where the choice is enormously complex and direct physical action seems impossible... [therefore humans] use the symbolic action which language makes possible to effect some of the transformations necessary to its continued moral growth toward final unity of being. (p. 46)

Through it all, the couples have remained physically the same. But symbolically, they have experienced worlds of change. Thus, examining the terms surrounding PREPARE's redemption process not only illuminates this process of transforming couples into better individuals, but also provides a glimpse at central images of marriage toward which PREPARE attempts to move these people.

In this program, a change of identity involves first the creation of a symbolic hierarchy against which couples are placed. PREPARE constructed such a hierarchy with the dialectic terms "divorce" and "strong marriage" and the inventory's terms "strength" and "growth area." In this phase the couple's current identities as well as their insufficiencies ("seeds of divorce") were revealed. As a result couples not only discovered their place in the hierarchy of relationships but realized that their place was unsatisfactory. To bring about redemption, PREPARE now attempts to instill within couples an upward movement toward the top of the hierarchy--the ideal marriage--mainly through the use of the term, "growth."

PREPARE's term "growth area" drives couples upward to reach higher levels in the hierarchy. That is, couples must "grow" in certain areas to become a "strong marriage." This relationship between "growth" and "strength" allows for the possibility of redemption. In premarital counseling, couple's "growth areas" can be addressed and perhaps modified to become "strength areas." "Growth

areas" are serious in that they represent seeds of divorce; however, PREPARE reminds couples that the presence of such seeds does not mean couples must give up on their relationship. Instead, premarital couples are encouraged "to use the ideas and resources suggested" by PREPARE. If couples do so, they can achieve redemption.

However, redemption is only a temporary state of relief. That is, after couples arrive at a better point in the hierarchy and achieve a state of rest, as a principle of "hierarchic psychosis," couples soon are goaded by guilt once again, knowing that they can still improve their status in the hierarchic order. For some couples--those PREPARE would consider more "Vitalized"⁶⁹--redemption occurs when the inventory reveals to them their many "strength areas." Because they have less "seeds" to remove, these couples' purification and redemption process is easier, aligning with the guilt-purification ratio. However, even with these couples, redemption is merely a temporary rest. After all, the term, "strength," implies that couples can become even stronger. The negative appears once again.

⁶⁹ The makers of PREPARE claim that the inventory categorizes couples into four premarital couple types: Vitalized, Harmonious, Traditional, and Conflicted. Conflicted couples are most prone to divorce because they receive the most "growth areas" and least "strength areas" of the four types. Vitalized couples, who have the most "growth areas" and the minimum "strength areas" are least likely to separate or divorce. For a more detailed discussion on this topic, see Fowers, Montel, and Olson (1996).

As discussed earlier in the chapter, the inventory has an internal mechanism that detects "idealistic distortion" and thus, ensures couples do not reach too high of a position in the hierarchy. Thus, most couples fall beneath PREPARE's standards for a "strong marriage."⁷⁰ At this point, the term "growth" becomes quite significant. Couples who may never reach "strength" can still be redeemed if they are described as "growing." As long as couples know that they are in constant upward motion toward the "god-head" ("strong marriage"), they achieve a state of redemption. This corresponds with Foss, Foss, and Trapp's (1991) description of redemption as "a feeling of 'moving forward, towards a goal [emphases in original]" (p. 197). Because of the directional substance of the term, "growth," couples are always pointing toward a better direction than the place where they are presently. In effect, the program aims to keep couples in constant upward movement defining the ideal marriage as "being in motion." For instance, PREPARE portrays marriage as "alive" and thus, always needing to "grow." Also, PREPARE uses phrases such as "growing together as a couple" or "growing closer to each other," all of which promote relationships which are in motion toward an ideal.

⁷⁰ In a recent study testing the ability of PREPARE to "predict marital success," most couples (72%) fall below the "vitalized" couple type standard. In fact, "Conflicted" couples was the most common relationship type, consisting of 29% of the overall subject population (Fowers, Montel, & Olson, 1996).

The reoccurring terms, "prevent" and "prepare," provide modes of "growth." These terms appear under the headings, "Prepare for Your Marriage--Not Just the Wedding" and "Preventing Future Problems and Potential Divorce" in which couples are asked to "prepare for a successful marriage" or to "prevent problems from happening" or "prevent divorce." Even the program's name, "PREPARE" suggests the centrality of these terms. The two terms are related in that they both have the suffix "pre-" meaning before--in this case, actions done "before." With the term, "prepare," couples are asked to work on the foundation of the relationship so that it will grow, much like one prepares soil for plants to grow. The term, "prevent," is used to ensure couples that such "preparation" will help control future marital distress ("To help prevent problems and keep your relationship growing, we recommend..."). In both terms is an element of the negative in the form of inevitability of crisis--something which must be prevented or for which couples must prepare. In effect, present efforts to improve the premarital relationship will help control the future; or in Burkean terms, couples become powerful agents acting against and overpowering the scene before the scene has a chance to overpower them.

Such empowerment of couples demonstrates PREPARE's effective rhetoric. By framing growth as "prepare" and "prevent" couples do not actually know whether or not their

actions have done anything to improve their marriage or to prevent divorce. They only need to know that they are "growing" because of their acts. In this, couples experience redemption as they realize they are in motion toward becoming "better people" with "better lives." The use of "prepare" and "prevent," then, allows PREPARE to offer an enticing type of redemption. Couples are given the power to overcome themselves (their own pollution) by acting against such things before they actually occur. When they do, they take a step toward the right direction, toward the ideal--"strong marriage."

The term, "growth," also leads us to conclusions about what PREPARE views as the "ideal marriage." Because of its directional substance, "growth" implies a point toward which something must grow. That is, "good" premarital couples "grow" to become "ideal marriages." PREPARE's image of the "ideal marriage" is quite easy to extract because the program is so blatant in describing what it considers "strong" personal and relationship characteristics. PREPARE provides the criteria for scoring each section in the manual. In the area of "Financial Management" for example, the program presents "strong couples" as having "a realistic budget, agreeing on financial matters" (p. 9). Consequently, in the Computerized Report, "High Scorers...have realistic plans and attitudes about their budget and agree on financial matters," while "Low Scorers...have not yet decided how to

handle their finances and/or are concerned about their financial situation." Thus, simply by examining PREPARE's criteria for "strong" we derive an image of the "ideal marriage." According to PREPARE, a "strong" marriage is made up of couples who are realistic about demands and difficulties; like each others' personality and habits; feel understood by the other partner and are able to share feelings; feel they are able to discuss and resolve differences; have a realistic budget and agree on financial matters; share interests and enjoy time together and apart; feel comfortable discussing sexual issues and preferences; agree on number of children and child rearing responsibilities; have a good relationship with parents, in-laws, and friends; agree on how to share decision-making, responsibilities; and agree on religious values and beliefs.

This detailed characterization of the "ideal marriage" as proposed by PREPARE can be divided into two categories of reoccurring criteria for relationship "strength": communication and similarity. These two ideal characteristics are the dialectical oppositions of "poor communication" and "lack of homogeneity" which, as discussed in the purification stage, represent the pollution which PREPARE hopes couples will "kill." So it follows that communication and agreement appear as the ideal because according to the precepts of rebirth, after guilt has been cleansed, new identities must be offered as

replacement. As PREPARE promotes these two concepts, images of marriage emerge. Such images will be described and critiqued below.

First, the program praises couples who "feel" they exhibit effective communication skills such as conflict resolution and the ability to share feelings without feeling uncomfortable. Communication is particularly an important trait because the program finds purificative power in discussing issues and sharing feelings. However, redemption is not only for couples who feel they have excellent communication styles but also for those who are continually "growing" to be better communicators. So marriage, according to PREPARE, entails always aiming to be better listeners and better speakers, striving to feel more comfortable with sharing feelings with a spouse.

PREPARE's motive to encourage couples to become better communicators is certainly laudable in that it emphasizes humans' ability to connect or identify with one another through language, and thus, affirms what Burke asserts is the central characteristic of humans--symbolism. However, in the way PREPARE overemphasizes the power of talk, communication becomes the cure-all elixir that heals all types of diseases. Though communication is clearly important in a relationship, couples who are instilled with the notion that sharing feelings and discussing issues will always solve their problems may be equipped with dangerous

expectations--especially, that communication will prevent divorce.

Second, PREPARE's "ideal couples" are incredibly similar. They have similar expectations, parenting styles, and beliefs about financial management. They share the same perspectives regarding marital roles and the division of power in a relationship. They come from similar familial background and share the same religious faith. Clear throughout the program is the centrality of this concept of similarity to PREPARE's premarital counseling drama. As discussed earlier, couples' "strength" and "growth" scores are greatly dependent on couples' agreement; therefore, couples who are more alike receive better scores. In promoting similarity, PREPARE rejects such clichés as "opposites attract" and supports a more conservative ideology such as "finding the perfect match." In other words, "similarity" becomes a "god-term"--a term that represents good; and "dissimilarity" becomes a term that represents evil--a "devil-term." Characteristic of all devil terms, "dissimilarity" is portrayed as problematic and thus, unwanted. PREPARE, in effect, discourages marriages between people who are different, implying that such couples stand against more problematic issues. Therefore, to move couples toward similarity, PREPARE promotes identification or consubstantiality through discussion; that is, couples will grow to become

more alike by discussing their problematic (dissimilar) issues.

PREPARE's attempt to lead couples toward these images of the "ideal marriage"--marriage as "communication" and marriage as "similarity"--is effective only through scientific authority. PREPARE, like any other scientific measurement device, is only successful in as much as it is considered reliable and valid. So PREPARE utilizes scientific accuracy as its primary rhetorical device. The inventory places judgment on the substance of individuals and couples by attempting to quantify the couple's personalities, values, and beliefs based on a logical positivistic approach. In doing so, PREPARE promotes another key image of marriage, marriage as "scientific" or what I call, "the scientification of marriage."

According to PREPARE, science can accurately assess a premarital relationship by translating it into a set of numeric measurements. In making this assertion, PREPARE employs metonymy, which, according to Burke, (1969a) is one of the four "master tropes" of language: "The basic 'strategy' in metonymy is this: to convey some incorporeal or intangible state in terms of the corporeal or tangible" (p. 506). Burke believes that when metonymy is used by scientific behaviorists, a reduction of human substance occurs--a "reduction of some higher or more complex realm of being to the terms of a lower or less complex realm of being" (p. 506). In PREPARE, the complex nature of

premarital relationships and of individual characteristics are reduced to tangible numbers and corresponding graphs. Moreover, PREPARE quantifies grades of relationship qualities as well, translating various characteristics into percentages that reflect good ("strength") or bad ("growth"). In the end, the relationship has become scientific, and discussions about incorporeal states (i.e. satisfaction with a partner or expectations) are brought into the realm of exact tangible numbers. Perhaps the best example of this scientification process is the "Family Map" which attempts to reduce complex familial relations and leadership styles to two numbers which correspond to "family adaptability" and "family cohesion." The scores of each partner are then placed on a circular graph which has 16 different combinations of cohesion and adaptability.

Whereas couples in the past had to rely on a counselor's qualitative evaluation, tainted with human subjectivity and perhaps error, today's couples can turn to a computerized inventory which provides "objective," "accurate," and "scientifically valid" measurements of their relationship. Ultimately, science grants couples the power to detect "seeds of divorce." When PREPARE attempts to reduce relationships to numbers, it necessarily assumes that couples have an implicit faith in science and scientific reduction. Indeed, without such faith, the program's attempt to predict divorce and measure relationships would seem laughable. However, as revealed

by the popularity of PREPARE, couples have a strong faith not only in the authority of science, but also in the possibility of scientific reduction and prediction.

Science has power not only to identify but to remove "seeds of divorce." Discussing divorce prevention, the program explains: "Studies of couples have found that if small problems are not dealt with adequately, they will often become serious" (p. 4). Thus, PREPARE offers couples a systematic 10-step conflict resolution exercise, which the program warns is "not a game." In another example, discussion is described as a strategic event:

Dialogue means sharing your feelings about each other and your life together. Because this type of sharing is easy to forget, we encourage you to spend five minutes per day and 15 minutes each weekend sharing what you have most enjoyed and felt dissatisfied about in your relationship.

While you might find this to be somewhat awkward at first, this sharing will become easier and more enjoyable.

These exercises reveal PREPARE's appeal to systematic technique reflected in the program's proclivity to reduce complex marital interaction to "steps" and specific time increments. PREPARE attempts to affect couples' perspectives on marriage by claiming that this type of reduction is not only possible but pragmatic and in fact, crucial to a "strong marriage."

Redemption in PREPARE's drama is manifested in the various images of marriage which PREPARE promotes, either implicitly or explicate which ultimately, become the final destinations of couples' journey toward perfection--"the ideal marriage." Couples attain such redemption not only in reaching this point, but through their consistent attempts to "grow" toward the ideal. Even after participating in premarital counseling, the program advises couples to continually "seek out opportunities to enrich [their] marriage":

It is important to mention that this is only the beginning. For most couples, the first year of marriage is sometimes difficult and can be frustrating. Now more than ever, your marriage demands open communication and a real commitment to involve yourselves in further marriage enrichment.
(p. 5)

To help couples "continue to strengthen [their] marriage," PREPARE encourages them "to participate in various types of marriage enrichment programs" such as "Growing Together," a program produced by the makers of PREPARE. Such enrichment programs "can be very helpful for a couple in focusing on how their relationship has changed and grown" (p.5). Thus, couples' quest up the hierarchy of relationships becomes a never-ending process. In the end, marriage itself becomes a continuous effort to "grow." There are some places of rest along the way during which couples can examine places of change and celebrate improvements. But couples can

never rest for too long but must continually improve on their relationship. Only then can they become authentic participants in "building a strong marriage."

Conclusion

In the beginning of the program, PREPARE tells couples that it "provides a wealth of information about your relationship. This information is designed to be relevant and useful to you as a couple" (p. 3). Indeed, the information PREPARE has to offer is not only unique and psychometrically sound but also practical. With this information, couples can determine which areas in their relationship need "growth" and then rely on the program to help them attain such growth. As this rebirth drama unfolds, a transformation occurs solely through the use of terms, thus demonstrating Burke's concept of symbolic action and the purificative power of language.⁷¹

Richard Weaver (1985) asserts that "all social science rests upon the assumption that [humans] and society are improvable" and that such betterment comes through "the application of scientific laws, or through some philosophy finding its basic support in them" (pp. 197-198). Indeed, PREPARE falls directly under this description in that it blatantly attempts to improve premarital couples through

⁷¹ According to Burke, human relationships are wrought with division which ultimately can be attributed to language (Rueckert, 1963, pp. 131-132). Language creates humans' fallen state but also provides the means for redemption.

the "application of scientific laws." Through a rhetoric of rebirth, the PREPARE premarital counseling program succeeds in the rhetorical construction of marriage. First, PREPARE induces guilt by identifying pollution within couples as the "seeds of divorce." In this stage the program utilizes a scientific inventory to create a hierarchic order of relationships which ranks couples with the terms "strength" and "growth" area. This hierarchy is driven by the dialectical tension between "divorce" and "strong marriage." In the second phase, purification, PREPARE asks couples to kill their "seeds of divorce" through the act of discussion. In this process of mortification, couples give up of their time and deny aspects of their substance which may be destructive to the relationship. Discussion emerges as couples' primary act which has the power to improve poor communication and enable couples to deal with their lack of homogeneity. Finally, PREPARE utilizes the term "growth" to portray redemption as a moving upward toward a goal. "Growth" becomes fully potent when couples have "prepared" for marriage and thus "prevented" future dilemmas. The three phases of the cycle of rebirth not only explain the relations of terms within the discourse of PREPARE but reveal a masterful rhetorical strategy that enables PREPARE to manipulate the mindsets of couples in hopes of helping them achieve marital success.

Unlike BYSID, PREPARE refrains from using Christian terminology or religious proof to make its point. Instead, the program is ruled by another type of "supreme being"--namely, science. Throughout the program, science is used to drive key moments in the drama. For instance, the inventory establishes the key hierarchy in the pollution stage. Later, in the purification stage, science is used to provide couples with systematic methods of discussion. If BYSID attempted to "convert" couples into the religion of marital preparation, PREPARE attempts to "covert" couples on the idea of the scientific treatment of marital relationships. Specifically, the program claims that its scientific inventory can accurately describe the critical aspects of the relationship. If couples accept PREPARE's claims, then they have, in a sense, also accepted the scientification of marriage.

For over two decades rhetorical theorists have questioned the dichotomization of science and rhetoric. Historically, rhetoric and science have been presented as antithetical modes of human activity:

Science, we have been taught, deals with "facts"; rhetoric with "informed opinions." The aim of science is to describe the world; the aim of rhetoric is to reform or regenerate it. Science propounds general truths in the form of lawlike statements; rhetoric applies socially approved values to specific cases requiring choice or decision. The scientist can produce a discourse expressive or generative of knowledge without engaging another mind; for the practitioner of rhetoric the presence of an audience is essential. (Ehninger, 1992, p. 491)

However, scholars have argued that science itself is a social institution that utilizes rhetoric to gain adherence from the general public (Ehninger, 1992; Weaver, 1985). Thus, science--once viewed as objective and value-neutral--now becomes a target for criticism.

Moreover, according to Burke (1969), the scientific treatment of human behavior poses a significant ethical concern. Burke argues that in regards to understanding human behavior, science will always be restricted in the sense that it attempts to reduce the complexities of human behavior to the "anomistic simplicities" (p. 510). Science, to Burke, is insufficiently concerned with "substance" and thus cannot appropriately account for human motivation; it can only make correlations based on natural laws. Science, which according to Burke inherently reduces substance to mere motion, in effect, has the potential to dehumanize. Given Burke's charge against the scientific treatment of human relationships, PREPARE, which attempts to quantify relationships, becomes ethically suspect.

Scientific measurement is not inherently unethical. One can measure the height or weight of a person with scientific tools and be accountable to no ethical judgment. However, in attempting to measure more complex "substance", such as the "strength" of relationships, PREPARE's rhetoric attempts to quantify couples' substance. Substance, according to Burke, can only be evaluated through

dialectic. Thus, the "strength" of a couple is a subjective, culture-bound, dynamic concept that cannot, or should not, be reduced to numbers, but discussed in terms of a dialogue between individuals. PREPARE, however, attempts to employ the scientific reduction of human substance, limits and devalues dialectic, and ultimately, takes a step toward dehumanization.

This rhetoric of science is certainly a powerful force--one which transforms couples' views of marriage. The latter half of the 20th century has seen an incredible metamorphosis of the traditional institution of marriage. Brehm (1992) explains:

The acceptance of and enthusiasm for marrying for love has been complete in North America. Perhaps because of the absence of an aristocratic class and the force of egalitarian ideas, the notion that individuals (not families) should choose marriage partners because of emotional attachment (not economic concerns) has become the dominant principle in our society. (p. 96)

Marked by a continuing high rate of marital dissolution, the contemporary version of marriage has become tainted with stark realization that perhaps love is just not enough. This point is clearly demonstrated in the scientific rhetoric in the PREPARE program. Unlike BYSID which devotes a whole chapter on the topic of love, PREPARE does not mention love at all throughout the program. Additionally, whereas, BYSID displayed at the beginning of chapters, romantic photographs of couples, the only picture

PREPARE offers is an abstract, mosaic-like drawing of two sober-faced persons facing forward. Of the 13 areas PREPARE covers, love is missing. It seems, according to PREPARE, marriage is no longer about romance but scientific identification of strength and growth, systematic planning, and strategic exercises that improve interaction. Here, the rhetorical construction of marriage occurs by omission.

In considering the different rhetoric PREPARE directs toward its multiple audiences, it is very possible that what occurs in PREPARE's drama is not what the makers of the program intended to happen. For example, in an article directed toward other scholars, Olson and his colleagues explain that "Computer identification of Strength and Work Areas⁷² are not [emphases in original] intended as final judgments but rather as initial assessment to be explored and verified or modified in discussion with couples" (Fournier, Olson, & Druckman, 1983). However, in the manual, the inventory is described as "scientifically reliable and valid" and having the ability to "summarize" couples' feelings." As described to couples, the instrument is not something that "may be effective" or "may identify relationship characteristics" but something that "does identify strength and growth areas." Thus, in the drama that PREPARE's discourse puts into action, the program makes more than just "initial assessments" but

⁷² Since this article's publication, term "work areas" has been replaced with "growth area."

rhetorically potent "judgments." So this dramatic analysis allows the power of PREPARE's discourse (symbolic action) to lead us to its motive.

CHAPTER V: CONCLUSIONS

Summary

Premarital counseling continues to be a social phenomenon as increasing masses of couples turn to it to prevent future interpersonal problems, and as communities and churches across the United States deem it necessary to require them to do so. Though the message of preventive premarital preparation has become an important force in contemporary views of marriage, a review of literature on premarital counseling from 1950 to the present revealed that most studies of premarital counseling focus on the efficacy, applicability, and scientific validity of these programs; as of yet, the "message" has been left unexamined. To help fill this gap, this thesis has considered the rhetorical dimension of premarital counseling, analyzing the messages embedded in materials used in two national premarital counseling programs, Before You Say "I Do" (BYSID) and PREPARE.

Premarital counseling takes place during a crucial time in couples' lives--a time when they have decided to participate in the social construct of marriage. In general, premarital programs attempt to modify a couple's behavior and attitudes by addressing dysfunctional interpersonal habits and damaging beliefs about marriage and marital roles. In doing so, these programs, through therapeutic or educational discourse, explicitly or

implicitly construct an image of the "good marriage." As such, the printed material for premarital counseling offers a place to observe what I have called the "rhetorical construction of marriage"--the creation of meaning about marriage.

In the first chapter, I established the rhetorical nature of premarital counseling, arguing that such discourse falls under a larger category of psychological or psychotherapeutic rhetoric, which seeks to mold the attitude and behavior of individuals by defining and reinforcing meanings of marriage. The view of marriage promoted in this study was drawn from constructivist perspectives which claim that social definitions, such as the meanings of marriage, do not just exist but are "constructed" and constantly revised. Extending this notion, I proposed that, especially in premarital counseling, such construction of meaning occurs through rhetoric.

Justifying rhetorical significance of these programs, I identified the rhetoric of premarital counseling as "a mode of altering reality, not by the direct application of energy to objects, but by the creation of discourse which changes reality through the mediation of thought and action" (Bitzer, 1978/1995, p. 60). I argued that premarital counseling is a critical "response" to the "exigence" of marital breakdown and divorce.

In Chapter II, I delineated and defended the rhetorical approach endorsed in this study and explained that such an approach deviates from more common scientific analyses of premarital counseling practices in that it focuses not on efficacy or scientific validity but on the creation of meaning. As I proposed at the start of this research and demonstrated in the preceding analyses, premarital counseling constructs particular images of the "ideal" and the "antithetical" marriage through rhetorical means. In doing so, the rhetoric in these programs encompass an epistemic function. Scott (1967) claims that rhetoric has at least two functions. In one sense, people utilize rhetoric to give validity to truth or a perspective, attempting to persuade others toward a certain action or perspective. However, rhetoric is also a "way of knowing;" it is used to create truth or a new perspective. Thus, rhetoric is both persuasive and epistemic. In premarital counseling rhetoric, rhetors not only attempt to persuade couples toward some sort of action, but also attempt to create with couples a new "way of knowing"--in this case, a new perspective on the social construct of marriage.

Two questions were at the heart of this research: (a) what meanings are created in premarital counseling programs?; and (b) how do these programs persuade couples to adhere to such meanings. Applying a Burkean dramaturgical perspective, which views language as

"symbolic action," I proposed that a more complete understanding of premarital counseling can be advanced if such discourse is treated as "drama." Elements of generic and traditional perspectives were intermingled with Burke's theories to form a multi-faceted method for rhetorical criticism which treated premarital counseling as a genre of rhetoric; attempted to identify fundamental parts of the rhetorical act (i.e. structure, strategies, context, constraints, etc.), and viewed discourse in premarital counseling materials as embodiments of human motives. Finally, criteria for program selection were established and two specific programs were chosen.

Chapters III and IV formed the center of the thesis and were structured in a similar fashion to add continuity to the study. Both chapters were divided into three major sections: constraints, structure, and dramatistic analysis. Chapter III identified the central contextual constraint of Before You Say "I Do" as various characteristics and implications of "the church setting." This program's discourse was characterized by its use of invitation, inquiry, and discussion as forms argument. Chapter IV examined a non-religious, scientific program, PREPARE. In this program, science was the overriding contextual constraint, and the techniques of measurement and instructions helped promote this scientific appeal. Dramatistic analysis of both programs revealed that a

"rhetoric of rebirth" best explains the process of persuasion that occurs in these programs.

Rebirth as a Model of Premarital Counseling Strategy

According to Burke (1965) a fundamental aspect of humanness is the concept of "guilt" and the "hierarchical motive." He argues that if research about human relations as proposed by social science is to be complete, scholars should not neglect these aspects of people. Whereas other research in this area generally emphasize program efficacy and ignore the implications of messages embedded in programs, this study focuses primarily on the power of premarital counseling discourse. In doing so, this thesis uncovers the strategic attempts of programs to direct a drama of rebirth through which couples' identities can be modified. Further, we discover that for this drama to succeed, couples motivation must be driven by an acute feeling of guilt. As such, programs attempt to intensify anxiety and feelings of inadequacy.

Although conclusions about these two programs may not apply to all premarital counseling programs, this study enables us to extract characteristics from the types of established premarital counseling programs which have gained and maintained widespread popularity. Moreover, this research is an example of how these programs can be analyzed from a fresh perspective--namely, premarital

counseling as rhetoric. This analysis has framed premarital counseling as a systematic, orchestrated process of "constructing images" which enforce and redirect attitudes and behaviors. Treating the counseling materials in these programs as embodiments of collective "rhetors," this analysis views these materials as "scripts" which direct "action" in the "drama" of premarital counseling. Elevating specifically the discourse in these programs enables one to employ Burke's complex and diverse theories on language and human symbolicity. In the end, this study leads to a new way of explaining how these programs attempt to modify couples' beliefs and actions.

From a Burkean perspective, the rhetoric of premarital counseling is a drama wherein the characters embark on a journey to find improved identities. As Rueckert (1963) explains, "The drama of the self in quest is an extraordinarily complex life-long ritual of death and rebirth, rejection and acceptance, purification and change, disintegration and reintegration; essentially, it is the drama of moral choice..." (p. 46). Premarital counseling demonstrates how this process of death and rebirth is integrated with individuals' search for better selves. According to the counseling programs studied, for couples to become better individuals, they must give up of themselves, kill the inadequacies within them, and devote themselves to work. Only then can couples begin their transformation toward the "ideal marriage." As

demonstrated in Chapters III and IV, this drama revolves around three phases in the cycle of rebirth: guilt, purification, and redemption.

In the guilt or pollution stage, a premarital counseling program detects what is wrong with couples' present relationship. Unlike marital and other types of counseling which deal with problematic individuals who have admitted their insufficiencies by the act of seeking counseling, premarital counseling, labeled as a "preventive" practice, involves couples who do not necessarily view their relationship as faulty but are merely taking precautions. Thus, for a program to be persuasive it must "create" problems and put clients in a state of unrest.

Programs may vary in their approach to creating such problems. For instance, whereas BYSID uses religious guilt, PREPARE utilizes a scientific instrument. However, in both cases, guilt is produced by the creation of hierarchies, made possible by the principle of the negative. Programs focus on revealing to couples individual and relationship inadequacies, couples' ignorance, and current problematic issues. In effect, couples are told "who they are not" according to a ranked set of "good" and "bad" relationships; and in knowing "who they are not," couples may experience anxiety. As rhetorical counseling strategies artfully intensify this anxiety, couples are ultimately goaded with guilt.

Programs rely on the couples' sense of guilt and search for perfection to drive couples through the second phase in rebirth, purification. To be rhetorically successful, programs must provide a way to remove or purge the guilt it has induced within couples. Purification in premarital counseling depends heavily on correlations between the present and future. According to these programs the future "success" of marriages is based on the quality of the present relationship. As such, efforts put into the premarital relationship can improve marriage.

In general, these efforts involve "mortification" as couples attempt to symbolically "kill" the pollution within them by denying themselves and working toward perfection. A program may offer various types of work including exercises, workbooks, discussion, goal-planning, conflict resolution, etc. The program develops direct correlations between these types of work and the elimination of pollution. Villainization also occurs when programs target certain characteristics or couple-types as the sources of pollution, telling couples to kill these aspects of themselves. In utilizing both mortification and villainization, the programs in this study made certain that couples were active agents in the process of purification. The program may serve as "instructor" or "guide," but couples, themselves, must do the work to alleviate guilt.

In the third phase of rebirth, couples achieve a state of rest, what Burke calls, redemption. In this stage, guilt has been purified and new identities forged. Critical to this phase is the program's ability to convince couples that change has actually occurred--that couples have truly become better individuals. Because this task, if taken to its fullest extent, may pose difficult issues of proof, programs may attempt to frame redemption as a process. In both BYSID and PREPARE, redemption is portrayed as a continuous process--a never-ending quest for improvement. As such, if couples are consistent with their efforts toward perfection, they achieve redemption.

According to Burke (1965) language and the principle of the negative makes possible the existence of hierarchies and thus division between people and the chaos that subsumes this disunity. However, language also enables humans to make sense of life's circumstances, to put things in place, and ultimately, to bring order to chaos.⁷³ The study of premarital counseling as a rhetoric of rebirth

⁷³ Foss, Foss, & Trapp (1991) write:
 While Burke sees rhetoric as having a number of functions, one function it always performs is the naming or defining of situations for individuals...It sizes up the situation and names its structure and outstanding ingredients...But rhetoric does not simply provide a name for a situation. It also represents a creative strategy for dealing with that situation or for solving the problem inherent in the situation. It gives us commands or instructions of some kind. Rhetoric in other words, helps us maneuver through life, directs the movements and operations of life, and helps us feel more at home in the chaos of the modern world. (p. 177)

demonstrates this seemingly paradoxical nature of language, revealing the process by which counseling rhetoric can both create and manage crisis through language.

Ethics of Premarital Counseling

Brock, Scott, and Chesebro (1990) assert that rhetorical criticism encompasses three primary dimensions: description, interpretation, and evaluation. "These dimensions tend to merge into one another. Each shapes the next and reflects back on the other" (p. 16). Interspersed throughout Chapters III and IV, the descriptive and interpretive dimensions of this rhetorical analysis have described contextual constraints, rhetorical structure, and forms of argument; and interpreted the discourse of premarital counseling as a rhetoric of rebirth. Though preliminary evaluation has been offered throughout the previous chapters, this dimension is still to be developed.

In evaluating discourse, a critic may possibly discuss the effects of the rhetorical act. However, because of the nature of this study, such an evaluation is inappropriate. A focus on effects examines how successful the rhetoric is in actually persuading the audience toward certain goals. For instance, a critic may evaluate Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "I Have a Dream Speech" by investigating the effects the speech had on King's audience and arguing whether or not King accomplished his goals. In evaluating the effects

of premarital counseling, we would ask: "Do premarital couples truly change their ways because counseling has told them to do so?" Though this question is certainly noteworthy, it does not fall into the scope of this study which focuses not on efficacy but on means. Correlations between program efforts and behavior or attitude change cannot be derived without direct testing of couples. And even in such scientific investigations, proving that a program has directly modified behavior or attitude is a difficult if not impossible task.

This study advances a different type of evaluation, one based not on effects but on ethics. Unlike the scientist who works with chemicals or machines, social scientists, in as much as they attempt to "improve" the state of human affairs (Weaver, 1985), should answer to questions of "right" and "wrong." And because, premarital counseling utilizes symbols to induce cooperation among couples, evaluating the ethics of these programs points again to rhetorical theory.

The ethical dimensions of rhetoric has been an enduring concern for rhetorical critics and theorists.⁷⁴ Burgchardt (1995) explains that:

⁷⁴ For an excellent examples of work related to the ethics of persuasion see: Minnick (1980); Ehninger, D. (1968). Validity as moral obligation. Southern Speech Communication Journal, 33, 215-222; Diggs, B.J. (1964). Persuasion and ethics. Quarterly Journal of Speech, 50, p. 359-373; Black, E. (1970). The second persona: . Quarterly Journal of Speech, 56(2), 109-119; Evaluating the ethics of a speaker in a democracy. Quarterly Journal of Speech, 45, 419-425; Condit, C.M. (1987). Crafting virtue: The rhetorical

Many speech communication scholars took up the call for ethical criticism when the intellectual climate of the 1960's moved rhetorical analysis away from the objective consideration of persuasive techniques to a more subjective treatment of values, politics, and ethics. (p. 187)

However, ethical criticism takes root in ancient times as early philosophers such as Aristotle brought attention to the fundamental moral responsibilities of "good" rhetors (see Flynn, 1957). Weaver (1985) insists that the acts of rhetoricians are value-laden:

No one can live a life of direction and purpose without some scheme of values. As rhetoric confronts us with choices involving values, the rhetorician is a preacher to us, noble if [she or] he tries to direct our passion toward noble ends and base if [she or] he uses our passion to confuse and degrade us. (p. 212)

Weaver further claims that the particular pattern of arguments that distinguish discourse reveal much about the character of the speaker. Thus, in examining the ethics of rhetoric, the critic must look not so much at what the rhetor is saying but how she or he says it.

When philosophers discuss ethics, they necessarily uphold certain criteria for determining moral from immoral

construction of public morality. Quarterly Journal of Speech, 73, 79-97; Lower, F.J. (1982). Kohlberg's moral stages as a critical tool. Southern Speech Communication Journal, 47, 178-191; McGuire, M. (1980). The ethics of rhetoric: The morality of knowledge. Southern Speech Communication Journal, 45, 133-148; Wienman, H.N., & Walter, O.M. (1957). Toward an analysis of ethics for rhetoric. Quarterly Journal of Speech, 43, 266-270.

acts (i.e. "the ends justify the means," honesty, good intentions, utilitarianism, etc.). Rhetorical theorists, too, have established various standards for evaluating the ethics of rhetoric. As reflected above, Weaver's (1985) Platonic view suggests that rhetors are "noble" if they lead their audience toward "noble ends." Weaver also argues that arguments rooted in universal principles are more ethical than situational or contextual arguments. Offering a different perspective, Hochmuth (1954) asserts that truthfulness of arguments must be the primary criteria; whereas, Minnick (1980) claims that the effects of rhetoric should be the focus of evaluation.

Because dramatistic theories have driven much of the analysis in this study, it seems most appropriate to utilize Burke's theories in discussing ethics. Crable (1978) explains Burke's view by describing humans as free-willed beings who act rather than just creatures who move. As such, "a person--is largely outside the realm of necessity and totally within the scope of 'choice'. . . ." (p. 25). In making this claim, Crable establishes criteria for ethical criticism in which a rhetoric is morally accountable for the way it treats the audience. To the extent that rhetoric manifests discourse that devalues the audience's humanness (reducing their action to motion), it is ethically suspect. Following a dramatistic perspective, such ethical criticism focuses beyond the actual effects of

rhetoric, to the possible internal realities and potential symbolic ramifications the rhetoric espouses.

Applying this criteria for ethical criticism, the rhetoric of premarital counseling seems to waffle between right and wrong. In one sense, these programs create a situation in which couples can make a moral choice. As discussed in Chapter III and IV, the principle of hierarchy, in that it constructs rules for behavior, points to a concept of order. However, as Burke (1968/1992) observes, "'order,' being a polar term implies a corresponding idea of 'disorder'" (p. 241). Some humans will possess an attitude of "humility," which leads to the act of obedience or abiding by the order; others will have "pride" which leads to disobedience or rejecting the order. Ultimately, the consequences of the negative and hierarchies makes possible the existence of moral choice in human experience. In knowing that there are rules which delineate "good" and "bad" acts, humans can choose to say "no" or "yes" to these rules.

In creating hierarchies of "good" and "bad" relationships (based on either religious or scientific authority), premarital counseling makes moral choice possible. That is, when couples become aware that particular attitudes and behaviors are "bad," they have the choice to act morally or not (to obey or disobey the rules). Couples have the chance to be protagonists in the drama by accepting the hierarchies the program creates and

working to reach higher levels in the hierarchy. Also, the importance of purificative activities are elevated; they are not merely routine exercises but moral actions that will lead to marital success. In the end, creating hierarchies that lead to moral choice upholds couples' humanity--their proclivity toward action rather than motion. The program seemingly salutes couples' freedom of choice.

However, programs also display a tendency to limit such choice by constructing extremely concrete meanings of marriage that cannot be swayed. For instance, programs presume that divorce is always a negative concept and urges couples to work at preventing divorce at all costs. Emphasizing the epideictic function of rhetoric above deliberative functions, programs leave no room for rational debate; divorce is simply wrong. Other fixed images include heterosexual marriage as ideal, marital longevity as ideal, and monogamy as ideal. Though practical problems exist with this epideictic approach,⁷⁵ the focus of evaluation here is rhetorical consequence. When premarital counseling enforces these concepts of marriage without allowing any type of dialectical exchange, programs suppress couples' intrinsic capacity to "act," to make moral choices. Thus, these programs limit the full

⁷⁵ For instance, this demonized view of divorce, in an extreme case, may teach partners that divorce is wrong even in abusive relationships. Even then couples presumably must work at resolving the issues instead of terminating the relationship.

potential of couples. Applying Burke's concept of "action" and "motion," we discover that such limitation is ethically questionable.

Contributions

This thesis marks an interdisciplinary attempt to contribute to three fields of study: rhetorical theory, interpersonal communication, and family studies.

To contribute to rhetorical theory, this research continues to widen the applicability of rhetorical criticism and justifies the use of such methodology in counseling settings. Secondly, this study begins to point toward a "rhetoric of prevention." The power of such rhetoric lies in its ability to motivate action by intensifying the probability of impending crisis. Further inquiry into such a rhetoric strategy may lead to a broader understanding of how language is used to manipulate others. Finally, this study extends Burke's theory by developing the connection between the negative and guilt. Specifically, I've discovered an instance where rhetoric is used to intensify guilt by appealing to individuals' tendency to perceive that "which is not."

To contribute interpersonal communication, this study offers a method by which researchers may be able to examine interpersonal interactions by analyzing not the interaction itself but the discourse that shapes and describes the

interaction. Though some may argue that such a rhetorical approach diverts from the interests of interpersonal communication theory, I propose that for that meeting of these two interconnected fields may yield didactic results. Such an interdisciplinary approach, as this study exemplifies, may point to the connections between rhetoric and interpersonal relationship development--specifically, how rhetoric can potentially shape the interaction of couples.

Finally, this thesis contributes to the field of family studies and specifically, to the ongoing research on premarital counseling. Other research have identified and evaluated the rhetorical dimensions of marital counseling, co-dependency therapy, addiction counseling, and psychotherapy. This study adds premarital counseling to the list. Doing so, reestablishes the validity of treating therapeutic situations as rhetorical activity and develops further the concept of marriage as a constructed phenomena and argues that such construction occurs through rhetorical strategies. This rhetorical view of marriage may help future research in this area by offering a different view of marriage. Moreover, this study offers family studies scholars a model for the rhetoric of premarital counseling which may explain how premarital counseling helps couples deal with the shift from singlehood to marriage.

Limitations and Future Research

This thesis is merely the starting point in understanding the full scope of the rhetoric of premarital counseling. In many ways I see this study as being limited by what I call the "tyranny of time" and the "despotic tendencies of human necessities." Simply put, there is always too much to do and too little time; and in the end, our earthly bodies deny us of what our far-reaching imagination is eagerly capable. Fortunately, such limitations lead to exciting areas of inquiry for future research.

This thesis explores the rhetorical dimension of premarital counseling by focusing on programs' attempt to construct meanings of marriage for couples. Though insightful, this scope is limited. In future research, different rhetorical perspectives can unearth numerous other aspects of such rhetoric. For example, a feminist approach to rhetorical criticism may reveal the delineation of gender and sex in programs and provide a different way of assessing the ethics of rhetoric. Metaphorical criticism can provide deeper and more developed insights into the complex relationships between varying metaphors used in premarital programs (i.e. marriage as "building" or marriage as "success"). A more post-modern approach may

treat premarital counseling as a force that attempts to instigate and preserve hegemonic ideals.

To explore the rhetorical construction of marriage, this study focused on the counseling materials that programs produce. Though using these materials as artifacts was probably more feasible than transcribing actual premarital counseling sessions, I encountered several limitations with this methodology. First, I could not gain access to some counseling materials. For example, PREPARE/ENRICH Inc. refuses to distribute the actual premarital inventory to people who are not trained counselors. Second, though extensive rhetorical analysis of two programs was a challenging process, using only two programs limits generalizability. Future research should attempt to include a wider sampling though such an endeavor may yield less extensive analysis. Third, forgoing transcripts of actual sessions and focusing on the message of counselors, the voice of clients was diminished. Sharf (1976) observed that both counselors and clients employ rhetorical strategies. Future research can attempt to examine the discourse of premarital couples to glean their points of view.

A primary purpose of this thesis was to provide a more complete understanding of premarital counseling by analyzing the discourse of programs. Such a claim is grounded upon the proposition that premarital counseling is rhetorical. However, this thesis is limited to conclusions

about premarital counseling. Future research can examine other types of counseling and therapy, focusing perhaps on how such services use guilt, purification, and redemption as modes of healing.

Having explored the rhetorical dimensions of a preventive service, this thesis shows potential for applying rhetorical analysis beyond counseling to other types of discourse that involve the notion of prevention. For instance, future research can focus on the rhetoric of insurance companies; preventive medicine; and even political appeals to prevention such as "the arms race." Such research can shed more light on the paradoxical power of language to induce and remove guilt.

At the outset of this thesis, I proposed that a rhetorical perspective of premarital counseling can provide deeper insight into the practice. And indeed, the research has led to a developed model of how premarital programs persuade couples to think and to behave in a particular way. Moreover, we have caught glimpses of ideal marriages embedded in the discourse of these programs. Understanding how premarital counseling works and discovering some of its effects, we should continually keep watch of these types of "helping" services that teach us what and who is "good." Black (1970) reminds us that "few of us are born into an identity that was incipiently structures before our births... The quest for identity is the modern pilgrimage.

And we look to one another for hints as to whom we should become" (p. 113).

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APPENDIX

Components of the PREPARE-ENRICH Computer Printout
(Fournier, Olson, & Druckman, 1983).

<u>Title</u>	<u>Description/Purpose</u>	<u>Length</u>
Cover page	Identifies inventory used, couple ID, user ID, and date	
Background page	Summarizes 18 couple demographics.	1 page
Summary analysis	Summarizes all individual scores, couple scores, and item scores; individual scores (54 for ENRICH, 48 PREPARE), couple scores (80 for ENRICH, 68 for PREPARE).	1 page
Couple profile	Provides a visual chart of couple scores.	1 page
Expanded couple profile	Provides summary of key scores for each category plus a tentative relationship description to be explored with couple.	2 pages
Item summary: Issues for discussion	Provides comprehensive listing of items by content category and indicates how each partner responded to the item	8-10 pages
Couple feedback sheets	Provides a condensed summary that can be given to couple	1-2 pages