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Race And Gender Differences In Attitudes

Toward Marriage Success, Divorce, And Covenant Marriage Law Reform

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The marriage revitalization movement in the United States arises out of perceptions that marriage has become devalued. Two policy concerns are the economic and social welfare costs of divorce to women and children and the rise in non-marriage among Blacks. Growing from this movement, Louisiana=s 1997 covenant marriage law is an unprecedented innovation meant to improve couples=readiness for marriage, lower divorce rates and promote marriage. This study uses a 1998 random sample of Louisiana residents to examine overall approval of the law, with specific attention to gender and race differences. Our results indicate that most perceive divorce as a serious problem and highlight causes of divorce that correspond with the views of covenant marriage advocates. However, while the majority agree with the principles of covenant marriage, only a small percentage had ever heard of the law. A majority felt the law is pointless because couples still could find ways to divorce. We find few gender differences, but document race gaps in perceptions of problems in marriage and anticipated benefits from covenant marriage.

In 1997, Louisiana became the first state in U.S. history to pass covenant marriage legislation. This legal feat is remarkable for two reasons. First, this law heralds an era in which marrying couples must choose which of two separate marriage laws will govern their union. Second, after several decades of divorce liberalization, covenant marriage is an initial, quiet step toward the reinstatement of fault-based divorce. Covenant marriage law arises from a marriage revitalization movement that concerns itself with the presumed demise of the traditional, nuclear married family. However, we know little about the attitudes of important stakeholders in marriage reform and covenant marriage policy debates. Thus, this paper addresses Louisiana residents= attitudes about marriage, divorce and marriage law reform, and specifically examines gender and race differences in approval of covenant marriage. We use a 1998 random sample of 540 Louisiana residents interviewed approximately a year after the passage of the covenant marriage law to explore their attitudes about what makes for a successful marriage, the causes and problems of divorce, and the perceived utility of covenant marriage. Below we detail a brief history of the rise of the marriage revitalization movement and our hypotheses about gender- and race-based interests in contemporary marriage reform.

Introduction

Starting in the latter half of the 20th century, marriage law reform and marriage revitalization policy have grown as areas of research and discussion, in light of the rise in divorce rates in the 1960's and >70's and concern that a substantial proportion of marriages are headed for Athe dustbin of history@ as noted by a character in *The Ice Storm*, an Ang Lee film about marital malaise in 1970's suburban America. Sociologists and policy analysts are concerned because of evidence that suggests declines in marital quality, stability and happiness (Glenn 1996, 1991). For

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example, in a two generation study of a national probability sample of married couples, Rogers and Amato (1997) find that the more recently married cohort experienced lower marital quality and interaction, and higher conflict and problems than the later-married cohort, despite shifts in age at marriage and education. Thus, many decry that marriage has lost its ability to nurture, provide and protect its participants, and has lost its appeal as an institution (Carlson 1995; Kass 1997; Popenoe 1999; Whitehead 1996).

The central precursors of the marriage reform movement are the legal and policy debates of the 1970's and >80's about no-fault divorce. In this era, policymakers were concerned that fault-based divorce spurred protracted, bitter battles between spouses and that the court-fueled and legitimated battles impinged on parents= abilities to amicably coordinate child custody and support. Advocates of no-fault divorce also argued that divorce law should promote equality between partners to mirror the presumed gains in equality made by women in the public sphere (Fineman 1995). Thus, the laws and courts moved toward assigning relatively quicker, easier divorces and temporary support awards, in the hopes of allowing spouses the opportunity to end unsatisfying marriages, reducing conflicts in divorce procedures, and encouraging women=s economic self-sufficiency.

The 1970's no-fault divorce movement heavily influences marriage revitalization debates about the state of marriage and divorce in two main ways. The first addresses marriage revitalization advocates= concerns that perhaps no-fault divorce hurt families because the desired goal of equal treatment could not be attained in a society in which divorcing men and women are very unequal with respect to personal and social resources (Brinig 1998; Spaht 1998a). This vein of discussion largely addresses the economic and parental and child rights costs of divorce under

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no-fault (Sheppard 1990). The evidence is mixed. Some scholars find significant drops in

women=s and children=s financial well-being in a no-fault divorce regime (Weitzman 1987), others

do not (Jacobs 1989). Still others find the financial costs of divorce sensitive to how states

manage property division (Gray 1996), though the majority of custodial mothers have less than

$10,000 in accumulated assets awarded to them after divorce (Seltzer and Garfinkel 1990). Last,

some suggest that no-fault divorce did not reduce the bitterness of court proceedings. Glass

(1984) found that divorcing spouses find no-fault courts unsatisfactorily undergirded by

adversarial dynamics. Thus, the major point of contention in this debate is whether no-fault

divorce corrected the problems it was designed to redress (Spaht 1998b).

The second vein of argument addresses whether no-fault divorce discredits the social

purpose of marriage. Those scholars and advocates who answer in the affirmative argue that no-

fault divorce destroys family life, undermines marital commitment, and promotes a value-free

lifestyle devoid of respect for enduring bonds (The Council on Families in America 1996;

Schneider 1996; Waite and Gallagher 2000). Maggie Gallagher (1996, 243) exemplifies this

position by saying,

> If the purpose of our legal system is to create pleasant working conditions for lawyers,
> then no-fault has been a rousing success...Quietly, behind the scenes, with little public
> scrutiny, in state after state, legal insiders >reformed= marriage out of existence. As
> difficult as it sounds to believe, the historical record is fairly clear. In the early 1970s,
> marriage was radically transformed---indeed, the traditional marriage commitment was
> virtually outlawed---in a way which has endangered millions of women and children
> largely in order to make lawyers= jobs more comfortable.

The proponents of this view feel that the past decades ushered in a Aculture of divorce@

(Whitehead 1997).

Responses to the debates are plentiful and varied (Mattox 1995; Stacey 1996, 1993), and

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we will not cover them here. Instead, we focus on the legal and social policies growing out of these debates. In our contemporary era, policymakers now consider methods to temper the perceived negative effects of no-fault divorce, by developing policies to encourage marriage incentives, promote marital quality and happiness, and discourage divorce (Bogenschneider 2000). The policy suggestions are numerous and range from acts like airing public service announcements about the importance of family formation and preservation within marriage, to mid-range goals like providing marriage education classes and counseling, and even ambitious goals like fanning a societal-wide spiritual awakening about the importance of marriage (Galston 1996; Popenoe 1996). Furthermore, policymakers also link this marriage revitalization movement to welfare reform by encouraging low-income women and men to consider marriage rather than public aid (Besharov and Sullivan 1996; Horn and Bush 1997; Thomas 1995). In this climate, we see the rise of the covenant marriage movement. Three states now have covenant marriage laws, and 20-30 other states either considered or are considering covenant marriage bills (Divorce Reform 2001).

Louisiana=s Covenant Marriage Law

What is covenant marriage? Covenant marriage allows marrying couples to choose which of two separate sets of marriage laws will govern their union. On August 15th, 1997, Louisiana became the first state to pass this law, and couples choosing this option face stricter limits on entering and exiting the legal marital union. Therefore, covenant marriage stands in direct contrast to no-fault divorce by providing a fault-based marriage option.

In Louisiana, couples who want to covenant marry must undertake premarital counseling. The couple and their counselor must attest, with a notarized affidavit, that the counseling

covered topics about the seriousness of a covenant marriage, the lifetime permanence of marriage, and the obligation of the couple to seek marital counseling if problems arise later in their marriage. The couple must also sign a *Declaration of Intent* that affirms the following: a marriage is an agreement to live together as husband and wife forever; the partners chose each other carefully and disclosed to each other everything about their personal histories that might hurt the marriage; the couple received premarital counseling from a priest, minister, rabbi, or state-recognized marriage counselor; and that the partners agree to take all reasonable efforts to preserve their marriage if they experience marital difficulties.

Covenant married couples who want to divorce must undertake marital counseling and either prove fault in the traditional sense of that term (court-substantiated infidelity, physical or sexual abuse of a spouse or child, a felony life- or death-penalty conviction, or abandonment of at least one year) or live separate and apart for two years. Irreconcilable differences or general Aincompatibility@ are not grounds for divorce for covenant married couples.

The intent of covenant marriage is to encourage couples to enter marriage with a spirit of serious, undiluted commitment. Legislators want newly-marrying couples to stop and answer to each other whether they will Awork@ on their marriages or will want to retain an Aeasy out@ when their marriages run into difficulty. As Katherine Shaw Spaht (1998a), the Law Professor who co-drafted this legislation, says, Acovenant marriage strengthens the institution of marriage by restoring legal efficacy to the marital vows.@ Legal advocates believe that covenant marriage allows couples security in their Ainvestment@ in marriage, which allows them to behave in ways that build the stability of the union rather than Ahedge their bets@ by pursuing their own self-interests without regard to the costs to the union (Brinig 1998). Brinig (2000) further suggests

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that covenant marriage reinvigorates marriage by moving couples away from a contractual

mentality toward their marriages to a belief in marriage=s covenant, exalted permanent status.

Spaht (1998b) feels that this move is imperative:

> Permitting one spouse to effectively destroy a family unit of five persons without good
> reason and without significant consequences has had a corrosive effect on our society.
> As evidence mounts of the social destruction in the wake of surging divorce rates and
> now surging cohabitation rates, responsible policymakers can no longer simply wring
> their hands in despair and helplessness. Action is required. Covenant marriage
> legislation, hopefully, is only the beginning of the resurgence of interest in and protection
> of the institution of marriage C the foundation upon which the ›family= is built.

Recent studies suggest that newly-marrying covenant couples and currently married covenant

Aupgraders@ agree with this view and feel that the covenant distinction is not just symbolically

important to themselves in their own unions, but stands as a political and moral statement to their

communities and to a political and social culture they see as poisonous to enduring marriage

(Loconte 1998; Rosier and Feld 2000; Sanchez, Nock, Wright and Gager 2001).

Based on this review, we know that a body of scholarship concludes that creating

marriage promotion policies is critical. We also know that, in Louisiana, lawmakers believe that

covenant marriage is a good way to reinforce the aim to change the cultural rhetoric and practices

around marriage laxity and easy breakups (Perkins 2001). What remains unknown is whether

citizens are receptive to these goals. One especially important issue to study is whether people

think divorce is a social problem warranting attempts to restrict it, and whether they see covenant

marriage as a viable solution. We use a probability sample of Louisiana residents drawn a year

after passage of covenant marriage to explore attitudes about what makes for a successful

marriage, approval of covenant marriage legislation, and views on its potential utility as a

marriage reform. We address overall levels of approval, but focus especially on differences in

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approval based on gender and race.

Expectations about Women=s and Men=s Views

A primary sociological argument for why women and men may have different attitudes is their differing financial-based interests in marriage. Research persistently shows that divorce is associated with severe declines in women=s and children=s economic well-being. In a review of 25 years of research on the costs of divorce, Holden and Smock (1991, 74) conclude that Athe evidence suggests prolonged economic hardship for women and, if present, their children...and [the fact] that remarriage remains the only clear means to recovery among divorced women merely underscores women=s economic vulnerability.@ Smock=s (1994, 1993) research on contemporary cohorts of divorcing women indicate that declines in economic well-being still prevail, despite women=s greater educational and occupational attainment, later ages at marriage and first childbearing, and fewer births. Smock, Manning, and Gupta (1999, 794) empirically document that Awomen=s economic vulnerability outside of marriage is ubiquitous.@

Thus, women may have a greater interest in making marriages last and greater approval of policies that help with that goal. They may be more likely than men to think that a prime purpose of marriage is to assure economic security, more willing to work on marriage via counseling, and certainly more likely to consider divorce a serious problem. The base issue of marital security may be more salient and central to women than men. Thus, covenant marriage may be seen as a way to reinforce trust, reducing women=s worries about the greater, faster depreciation of their Amarriage marketability@ compared to their husbands.

Expectations about Blacks= and Whites= Views

In Louisiana, Blacks are 32.4% of the population as compared to the national average of

12.8% (Census 1999). Thus, it is important to assess whether Blacks and whites equally endorse or reject covenant marriage law. Several demographic processes indicate that covenant marriage may be less salient to Blacks than whites. Blacks are less likely to marry than whites and recent first marriage rates declined more steeply for Black women than white women (Bennett, Bloom and Craig 1989). Koball (1998) finds that since World War II, Black men=s age at first marriage rose significantly higher than that of white men=s. Studies also indicate that lack of mate availability and mate economic attractiveness, and neighborhood and childhood socioeconomic disadvantage reduce women=s likelihood of marriage, especially Black women=s (Manning and Smock 1995; Lichter, McLaughlin, Kephart and Landry 1992; Lichter, LeClere and McLaughlin 1991). Some research suggests that poor Black and poor white women have equally low likelihoods of marrying, after controlling for economic independence, mate availability and background characteristics (McLaughlin and Lichter 1997). Others find that controls for socioeconomic disadvantage do not explain fully the race gap in non-marriage (Lichter, LeClere and McLaughlin 1991; South and Crowder 1999).

Not only do Blacks have a stronger behavioral Aretreat from marriage@ than whites, Blacks= attitudes about the desirability of marriage differ considerably, as well. South (1993) finds that compared to whites, Blacks are less likely to desire marriage, though the gap between Black and white men is larger than the race gap between women. He further finds that Black men are the most likely to anticipate declines in friendship networks and the quality of sex life upon marriage, which South hypothesizes may be tied to imbalanced sex ratios in Black communities that favor men. South (1991) also finds that Blacks are less likely to want to marry someone with non-normative (i.e., non-sex-stereotypical) characteristics, placing a strong burden on Black

women to find an adequate breadwinner. Bulcroft and Bulcroft (1993) substantiate this research by showing that Black women expect financial security among eligible mates prior to marriage and resist marrying partners with few economic resources. These quantitative findings corroborate Edin=s (2000) qualitative research on low income single women, in which both Black and white women, but particularly Black women, emphasized the importance of steady income, stable employment, and a strong work ethic for men and felt that, unless those qualities could be guaranteed, marriage would only be Aplaying house.@

These behavioral and attitudinal differences between Blacks and whites indicate that Blacks may be less likely to see divorce as a problem and more likely to emphasize the financial security dimensions of marriage as important for marital success, and less likely to see covenant marriage as an effective policy.

Hypotheses

Four basic questions guide this research:

1.   What are Louisiana residents= attitudes about what makes for a successful marriage?

2.   Are they generally supportive of social policy or legal reforms to strengthen marriage and reduce divorce? Specifically, do they perceive covenant marriage to be a useful family law reform?

3.   Do women and men have significantly different attitudes about marriage, divorce and covenant marriage and do the differences suggest gender-based interests in specific outcomes of the marriage reform debates?

4.   Do Blacks and whites have significantly different attitudes about marriage, divorce and covenant marriage? Are Blacks less supportive of initiatives to strengthen marriage?

Data

The data are from a 1998 telephone survey of a random sample of 540 Louisiana residents. As part of a larger study of the effect of covenant marriage on couples (Marriage Matters, 1997), the Gallup Organization conducted a telephone survey, addressing attitudes about marriage and divorce in contemporary America and knowledge and approval of covenant marriage. The response rate was 59%. The topical modules include views about the seriousness of divorce as a national problem and what makes for a successful marriage, explanations for the rise in divorce, knowledge and approval of covenant marriage, and whether covenant marriage can improve marriage as an institution.

Dependent Variables

The dependent variables for this paper cover 4 major topics.

Attitudes about what makes for a successful marriage. Ten items address respondents= attitudes about what are very important requirements of a successful marriage. The dimensions include: @Both partners agree on who should do which chores,@ @The couple has a good income,@ @The partners are deeply in love with each other,@ @The partners are sexually faithful to each other,@ @The partners share their religious values,@ @The partners have a lifetime commitment to their marriage, no matter what,@ @The couple is free of debts,@ @The couple has counseling about marriage before the wedding,@ @The partners agree whether or not to have children,@ @The partners agree in advance to seek counseling if they are unable to resolve problems that come up in their marriage.@

Perceived explanations for the rise in divorce. Five items address respondents= reports of whether certain issues are very important reasons for the rise in divorce. The statements

include: AOne reason for the increase in divorce is that there has been a rise in irresponsibility, selfishness, and the loss of family values in our culture,@ AWomen have gotten more interested in careers and self-advancement than in families and children,@ AMen can=t make commitments any more to their families, wives, and children,@ APeople have little respect for the spiritual importance of marriage,@ APeople put too much emphasis on their own self-interest and not enough emphasis on the needs of their partners and children.@

Knowledge and approval of covenant marriage. A set of items taps respondents= knowledge and approval of the covenant marriage law. Respondents are asked whether they ever heard of covenant marriage and whether they remember the passage of the law in 1997. After responding to these questions, the interviewers explained the details of the law to the respondents and asked about their general approval. They were asked whether they would react favorably or unfavorably to their child choosing a covenant marriage and whether they viewed covenant marriage as a bad or good idea. Respondents were also asked whether churches should encourage currently married couples to Aupgrade@ to covenant marriage and whether churches should encourage that all engaged couples choose covenant marriages.

Attitudes about covenant marriage. Last, a set of seven questions address respondents= views on the quality of covenant marriage and whether covenant marriage will improve married life. The likert-scale items include: ACovenant marriage is a more traditional form of marriage in which men are the head of the household,@ ACovenant marriage will strengthen family life,@ AA covenant marriage will be better for children than a standard marriage,@ ACovenant marriages will last longer than standard marriages,@ ASpouses in a covenant marriage will be less likely to cheat on each other,@ ACovenant marriage is pointless because people who want to get divorced will

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always find a way to do so,@ and AIf Louisiana is going to be serious about covenant marriage, the state should offer free or low-cost counseling for married couples who can≠ afford it.@

Independent Controls

We control for demographic, social and economic characteristics associated with marriage and divorce attitudes. Life course and family status indicators include marital status, parental status and age. Socioeconomic measures include educational attainment, employment status, and income. Social and political measures address political orientation and religious preference. Our focal measures are gender and race (i.e., Blacks, whites and all other races/ethnicities). Appendix Table A presents descriptive information for the independent controls. In our analyses, we focus solely on differences in gender and race effects without testing interactions between gender and race. Some of the interaction categories contain so few cases that meaningful interpretation of interaction effects is not possible.

Findings

We begin by noting that the vast majority of Louisiana residents perceive divorce as a serious national problem, with 69% viewing divorce as a Avery serious problem@ and another 25% rating divorce as a Asomewhat serious problem.@ Logistic regressions indicate that women are significantly more likely than men to perceive divorce as a very serious problem, but we find no race differences (analyses not shown).

Attitudes about what makes for a successful marriage.

Table 1 presents descriptive information about what makes for a successful marriage. A large majority of respondents agree that all of the items are at the very least somewhat important. Some items show near universal support. For example, of ›very important= factors that make for

successful marriages, respondents reported that spouses should be deeply in love (88%), sexually faithful (94%), share religious values (75%), agree about childbearing (82%), agree to marital counseling if their relationship is in trouble (68%), and make a lifetime commitment to each other, no matter what (78%).

Table 1. Attitudes about what makes for a Successful Marriage

	Not Important at All	*Not Very Important*	*Somewhat Important*	*Very Important*	*Mean*	*N*
Spouses Agree about Division of Chores	7.3%	15.8%	40.8%	36.1%	3.06	532
Couple has a Good Income	4.1	18.3	40.5	37.1	3.11	536
Spouses are Deeply in Love	.7	.6	10.8	87.9	3.86	536
Partners are Sexually Faithful	.7	.9	4.7	93.6	3.91	535
Spouses Share Religious Values	2.1	5.4	18.0	74.5	3.65	533
Make Lifetime Commitment, No Matter What	2.6	3.6	15.5	78.3	3.70	535
Couple is Free of Debts	8.3	17.3	39.5	34.8	3.01	531
Couple has Premarital Counseling	6.2	12.9	25.6	55.4	3.30	536
Spouses Agree about Childbearing	2.6	2.4	13.5	81.5	3.74	535
Spouses Agree to Marital Counseling, If Troubled	3.6	4.1	24.8	67.5	3.56	533

Source. Louisiana Covenant Marriage Survey, 1998.

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Half the respondents believe that a very important factor insuring a successful marriage is that the couple seeks premarital counseling. Issues surrounding role responsibilities and economic security are perceived as less important, though still the majority of respondents perceive them as at least somewhat important. Approximately one-third (35-37%) of respondents report that very important factors favoring marital success are that the spouses agree about the division of chores, that they have a good income, and are free of debts.

Table 2 presents logistic regressions predicting perceptions of Avery important@ factors favoring marital success. Note that we do not present regressions predicting perceiving the requirements of deep love and sexual fidelity as very important because the descriptive statistics indicate the near universal acceptance of those factors as necessary. The findings indicate few gender differences, though women are more likely to think that a successful marriage requires agreeing about childbearing and seeking marital counseling, when troubled. Other than those two items, women and men share similar views about what fosters successful marriage.

Table 2. Logistic Regressions Predicting Attitudes about what Makes for a Successful Marriage.

	Female	Black	Other Race	Intercept	log-likelihood	N
Spouses Agree about Division of Chores	-.19 (.21)	.57 ** (.25)	.99 ** (.49)	-.79 (.58)	-331.59	532
Couple has a Good Income	-.19 (.23)	1.33 *** (.26)	1.11 ** (.51)	-.50 (.60)	-299.84	536
Spouses Share Religious Values	.29 (.23)	.26 (.29)	.35 (.54)	-1.06 * (.64)	-276.17	533
Make Lifetime Commitment, No Matter What	-.16 (.25)	.59 * (.31)	.39 (.61)	1.39 ** (.66)	-268.54	535
Couple is Free of Debts	.02 (.22)	.48 * (.25)	-.62 (.56)	-1.28 ** (.61)	-310.59	531
Couple has Premarital Counseling	.11 (.21)	.83 *** (.25)	.73 (.49)	-.59 (.57)	-338.43	536
Spouses Agree about Childbearing	.55 ** (.26)	-.39 (.30)	-.09 (.59)	.38 (.70)	-236.32	535
Spouses Agree to Marital Counseling, If Troubled	.46 ** (.22)	.79 *** (.28)	1.44 *** (.58)	-.00 (.61)	-307.51	533

*** p=.002, ** p=.05, * p=.10
Source. Louisiana Covenant Marriage Survey, 1998.
Note. Control variables include age, marital status, parental status, education, employment status, religion, liberalism, income, and income missing

Race differences are more apparent than gender differences. Blacks are more likely to think that a successful marriage requires that the couple agree about the division of chores, have a good income and are free of debts. Blacks also are more likely to believe that a very important factor is that the couple has made a lifetime commitment to marriage, no matter what. Compared to whites, Blacks are significantly more likely to report that it=s very important for couples to have premarital counseling and seek marital counseling for success in marriage.

Perceived explanations for the rise in divorce.

Table 3 presents descriptive statistics about perceived explanations for the rise in divorce. About half of the sample perceives a generalized ethic of irresponsibility, selfishness, and undermined family values as one of the most important reasons for divorce. Half the respondents also identify a decline in respect for the spiritual importance of marriage and an overemphasis on self-interest to the detriment of partners and children as most important reasons for divorce. Moreover, the vast majority of Louisiana residents identify these three areas as at the very least important, if not most important, reasons (85-90% report these to be important). When we examine two gender-specific causes for divorce, we find more disagreement among Louisiana residents. About 60% perceive some responsibility for the rise in divorce to be tied to women=s expanded interests in careers rather than in families and children. Fifty-four percent perceive that a cause for divorce is men=s inability to make commitments to families, wives, and children.

Table 3. Perceived Explanations for the Rise in Divorce.

	Not a Reason at All	Not an Important Reason	An Important Reason	One of Most Important Reasons	Mean	N
Divorce Is Due to Cultural Lack of Family Values	6.2%	8.7%	34.3%	50.8%	3.30	531
Divorce Is Due to Women's Self-Interests	18.8	21.8	36.0	23.4	2.64	531
Divorce Is Due to Men's Lack of Commitment	26.1	20.1	35.1	18.7	2.47	518
Divorce Is Due to Lack of Spiritual Importance	5.3	6.1	37.7	50.9	3.34	528
Divorce Is Due to Personal Selfishness	4.7	8.3	41.6	45.4	3.28	527

Source. Louisiana Covenant Marriage Survey, 1998.

Table 4 presents logistic regressions predicting perceptions of Aone of the most important@ reasons for the rise in divorce. We analyzed these perceptions with three different models. We analyzed two sets of logistic regressions testing comparisons of perceptions that the statement is Aone of the most important@ reasons for divorce against all other responses and then comparisons of the collapsed categories of Aone of the most important@ and Aimportant@ against all other responses. Last, we tested a multinomial logistic regression comparing Aone of the most important@ against the category of Aimportant@ and the collapsed categories of Anot a reason@ and Aa reason, but not important.@ (Contact first author for tables.) Across equations, the results are robust for our focal indicators, so we present the logistic model comparing Aone of the most important@ against all other responses because we want to distinguish those who feel very strongly about the issue compared to all others.

We find little evidence of gender differences. A tentative effect suggests that women are more likely than men to think that a loss in cultural family values is a very important cause for the rise in divorce. Blacks are significantly less likely than whites to think that a decline in family values is the most important cause. Tentative effects also suggest that Blacks are more likely than whites to think that very important causes are women=s interests in careers rather than families and men=s lack of commitment to families.

Table 4. Logistic Regressions Predicting Perceived Explanations for the Rise in Divorce.

	Female	Black	Other Race	Intercept	log-likelihood	N
Divorce Due to Cultural Lack of Family Values	.38 * (.21)	-.64 *** (.24)	-.37 (.48)	-.76 (.57)	-346.12	531
Divorce Due to Women's Self-Interests	-.36 (.25)	.49 * (.28)	.69 (.55)	-1.11 (.67)	-272.77	531
Divorce Due to Men's Lack of Commitment	.47 (.29)	.49 * (.30)	-.40 (.72)	-2.50 *** (.75)	-227.37	518
Divorce Due to Lack of Spiritual Importance	.13 (.21)	.02 (.25)	-.16 (.49)	-1.21 ** (.58)	-334.01	528
Divorce Due to Personal Selfishness	-.09 (.21)	-.01 (.24)	.72 (.50)	-1.13 * (.58)	-344.06	527

*** p-=.002, ** p=.05, * p=.10

Source. Louisiana Covenant Marriage Survey, 1998.

Note. Control variables include age, marital status, parental status, education, employment status, religion, liberalism, income, and income missing.

Knowledge and approval of covenant marriage.

In Table 5, we turn specifically to items addressing knowledge and approval of covenant marriage. Approximately one year after passage of the legislation, only 44% had heard of covenant marriage, and only 36% remembered the passage of the law in August 1997. After examining their exposure to covenant marriage, we explained the actual legal provisions, and then addressed their views of whether covenant marriage should be encouraged. When asked to suppose that they had a child who was about to be married and who had decided to have a covenant rather than standard marriage, a full 55% said they would react favorably, with a 25% saying that they would react very favorably. Another quarter said that the type of marriage their child selected would have no effect on their reaction, while 17% reported that they would react negatively. The range of responses for Louisiana residents=views about whether covenant marriage is a good idea are similar. Thus, the majority perceive covenant marriage favorably, but a large percentage are indifferent and a small contingent of about one-fifth perceives covenant marriage unfavorably.

Table 5. Knowledge and Approval of Covenant Marriage.

	Yes	No		Mean
Ever Heard About Covenant Marriage	44.1%	55.9%	524	
Remember Passage of Covenant Marriage Law	36.0%	64.0%	519	

	Very Unfavorable	Unfavorable	No Difference	Favorable	Very Favorable	Mean	N
Reaction to Child's Decision to Choose Covenant Marriage	7.5%	9.6%	27.1%	29.3%	26.5%	3.58	532

	Very Bad Idea	Bad Idea	Neither	Good Idea	Very Good Idea	Mean	N
Is Covenant Marriage a Good Idea?	5.1	9.3	23.6	27.8	34.2	3.76	529
Good for Churches to Urge Covenant Marriage Upgrades	7.0%	18.1%	31.6%	32.0%	11.3%	3.23	531
Good Idea for Churches to Urge Covenant Marriage Marriages	10.4	21.0	26.7	29.3	12.7	3.13	529

Source. Louisiana Covenant Marriage Survey, 1998.

Note the greater range of opinion for questions about how the church should manage covenant marriage. When asked whether churches should urge their married members to upgrade their standard marriages to covenant marriages, about 40% said it was a good idea, one-third thought it was neither good nor bad, and approximately 25% reported that it was a bad idea. Approximately 40% felt that churches should perform all future marriages as covenant marriages, one-quarter thought this endorsement would be neither good nor bad, and one-third thought this endorsement would be a bad idea.

Table 6 presents logistic and multinomial logistic regressions predicting knowledge and approval of covenant marriage. We analyzed multinomial logistic regressions for questions about approval of covenant marriage, comparing disapproval against approval and neutrality; we present results only from the former comparison. The results indicate no gender differences in having heard of covenant marriage or in perceiving the law to be a good idea and one that churches should endorse. We also find no race differences, with the exception of one just significant effect that indicates that Blacks are less likely to remember passage of the law.

Table 6. Logistic Regressions Predicting Knowledge and Approval of Covenant Marriage.

	Female	Black	Other Race	Intercept	log-likelihood	N
Ever Heard about Covenant Marriage	.20 (.22)	-.24 (.25)	-.80 (.55)	-2.52 *** (.61)	-320.26	524
Remember Passage of Covenant Marriage Law	.19 (.22)	-.47 * (.27)	-.59 (.54)	-2.05 *** (.61)	-308.14	519
	Female	Black	Other Race	Intercept	log-likelihood	N
(Unfavorable)/Favorable						
Reaction to Child's Decision to Choose Covenant Marriage	-.30	-.59 (.31)	-.84 (.36)	1.89 ** (.70) (.84)	-489.60	532
(Bad Idea)/Good Idea						
All Things Considered, Covenant Marriage is a Good Idea	.07 (.31)	-.27 (.36)	-.66 (.67)	1.54 * (.85)	-443.51	529
Good Idea for Churches to Urge Covenant Marriage Upgrade	.36 (.25)	.08 (.29)	.44 (.60)	1.34 * (.72)	-538.00	531
Good Idea for Churches to Urge Covenant Marriages	.25 (.24)	-.08 (.29)	.64 (.60)	.72 (.70)	-530.02	529

*** p=.002, ** p=.05, * p=.10

Source. Louisiana Covenant Marriage Survey, 1998.

Note. Control variables include age, marital status, parental status, education, employment status,

religion, liberalism, income, and income missing.

Attitudes about covenant marriage.

Table 7 presents descriptive information about attitudes toward covenant marriage. Overall, we find Louisiana residents divided in their views and fairly circumspect. Respondents were reluctant to select the more extreme response categories. In general, 50-60% of respondents feel that compared to standard marriages, covenant marriages are more traditional, strengthen family life, are better for children, make marriages last longer, and reduce infidelity. However, 25-41% disagree, reporting that covenant marriage is not necessarily more traditional, but, more important, that covenant marriage does not necessarily have far more pro-social consequences inherent in its provisions than standard marriages. While many perceive favorable gains to marriage, family and children because of covenant marriage, the majority of Louisiana residents (60%) perceive covenant marriage as pointless because Apeople who want to get divorced will always find a way to do so.@ The only item with substantial agreement concerned state subsidies for marriage counseling. Eighty-nine percent reported that the state should offer free or low-cost marital counseling for couples.

Table 7. Attitudes about Covenant Marriage.

	Disagree Strongly	Disagree	Neither Disagree nor Agree	Agree	Agree Strongly	Mean	N
Covenant Marriage Is More Traditional with Male as Head of Household	4.0%	32.3%	16.3%	41.6%	5.7%	3.13	526
Covenant Marriage Strengthens Family Life	3.4	21.6	12.5	51.5	11.0	3.45	528
Covenant Marriage Better for Children	4.3	24.3	13.0	48.6	9.8	3.35	531
Covenant Marriage Will Last Longer	3.2	25.2	13.0	49.6	9.0	3.36	532
Covenant Marriage Spouses Less Likely to Cheat	7.4	33.8	10.2	39.9	8.7	3.09	529
Covenant Marriage Is Pointless	3.0	30.9	6.2	50.7	9.2	3.32	531
State Should Subsidize Covenant Marriage Counseling	1.3	6.3	3.4	66.7	22.3	4.02	537

Source. Louisiana Covenant Marriage Survey, 1998.

Table 8 presents multinomial logistic regressions and a logistic regression predicting attitudes about covenant marriage. We analyzed these attitudes with three different models. We tested logistic regressions comparing agreement against all other responses and multinomial logistic regressions comparing agreement against the categories of neutrality and disagreement. Last, we examined classical regression models that measured increasing agreement with the statements. The results are robust across items, except for the item addressing attitudes toward subsidized counseling. The item skewed so sharply that we could only examine a logistic regression comparing agreement against all other options. For the following discussion, we present the simple logit coefficients for the subsidized counseling item and coefficients for agreement compared to disagreement from the multinomial logistic regressions from the other items.

We find two gender effects. Women are more likely to think that covenant marriages will last longer and that the state should subsidize marriage counseling for the poor, if serious about covenant marriage. We find several significant race effects. Blacks are less likely to think that covenant marriage will strengthen marriage, be better for children or reduce cheating. Blacks are also more likely to say that the state should subsidize marital counseling for the poor. We find no gender or race differences in attitudes about whether covenant marriage is pointless.

Table 8. Logistic Regressions Predicting Attitudes about Covenant Marriage.

	Female	Black	Other Race	Intercept	log-likelihood	N
Covenant Marriage Is More Traditional with Male as Head of Household	-.18 (.23)	.05 (.27)	.23 (.53)	-1.02 (.63)	-477.84	526
Covenant Marriage Will Strengthen Family Life	.30 (.24)	-.47 * (.28)	.38 (.63)	.12 (.67)	-435.42	528
Covenant Marriage Better for Children	-.01 (.24)	-.54 ** (.27)	.12 (.57)	-.40 (.64)	-458.26	531
Covenant Marriage Will Last Longer	.48 ** (.23)	-.23 (.27)	1.09 (.66)	-.05 (.64)	-462.73	532
Covenant Marriage Spouses Less Likely to Cheat	.20 (.22)	-.45 * (.25)	.41 (.52)	.00 (.59)	-479.54	529
Covenant Marriage is Pointless	-.31 (.22)	.17 (.26)	-.41 (.51)	1.24 ** (.60)	-417.03	531
State should Subsidize Counseling	.56 * (.33)	.92 * (.51)	2.39 ** (1.21)	4.22 *** (1.12)	-156.87	537

*** p=.002, ** p=.05, * p=.10

Source. Louisiana Covenant Marriage Survey, 1998.

Note. Control variables include age, marital status, parental status, education, employment status, religion, liberalism, income, and income missing.

Conclusions

Most Louisiana residents perceive marriage as an institution that is ailing and seem willing to consider legal measures to bolster marital stability. They strongly feel that some of the most important reasons for the rise in divorce are a general decline in family values, an erosion of respect for the spiritual importance of marriage, and an overemphasis on personal self-interest over family commitment and sacrifice. Thus, their attitudes seem to correspond with those of covenant marriage legislators and marriage revitalization advocates. However, though they perceive divorce as a problem, the majority of Louisiana residents had never heard of covenant marriage. Most important, we find disagreement about whether covenant marriage will improve marital quality and increase marital stability, and whether covenant marriage will provide a healthier context for parenting and intimate relationships. Despite their concern about the costs of divorce, the majority feel that covenant marriage ultimately will be useless because motivated couples will be able to find ways to divorce.

Women are more likely than men to perceive divorce as a problem and to identify a decline in values as a cause. Despite women=s greater propensity to define divorce as a serious national problem, we find few gender differences in attitudes about what makes for a successful marriage, in knowledge and approval of covenant marriage, or in views of the potential benefits of covenant marriage. Our assessments of attitudes shortly after the passage of covenant marriage suggest that women are no more likely than men to think that covenant marriage will improve the quality of married life.

On the other hand, we find that Blacks have substantially different views than whites about the requirements for successful marriage and the utility of covenant marriage. Blacks are

more likely to feel that structural and psychological factors are both important for marital success. They are more likely to think that agreeing about the division of chores, having a good income, being free of debts, being willing to seek premarital and marital counseling, as well as having a psychological predisposition to lifetime marital commitment are very important factors in marital success. These findings suggest that Blacks should approve of covenant marriage, especially the counseling requirements.

However, we find that Blacks are less likely than whites to attribute the rise in divorce to an overarching decline in family values which is important because it notes a possible disagreement between Blacks and covenant marriage advocates about the prime justification for marriage law reform. Also, Blacks are less likely to think that covenant marriage will strengthen family life, be better for children or reduce infidelity.

Our attitude findings indicate that race, perhaps even more than gender, should become more important in discussions of marriage policy reform. Most policy pieces on the strengthening marriage movement perceive covenant marriage as an opportunity to reverse a general tide of cynicism about marriage or reduce gender conflicts in marriage (Brinig 2000; Loconte 1998; Spaht 2000). This focus on gender is sensible given that covenant marriage is a soft pedal reinstatement of fault-based divorce and grows out of the widespread concern about the gendered costs of divorce under no-fault regimes (Spaht 2000). This overemphasis on gender differences is unfortunate because race clearly looms large in demographic studies of changing family and marriage patterns.

The Acounseling subsidies@ item may be capturing some of what might be going on in Blacks= attitudes to generate these findings. Blacks are more likely to feel that a state serious

about covenant marriage would provide counseling for the poor. The result tentatively suggests that Blacks may feel that marriage reformists may be better off addressing the financial instability facing many Louisiana Black communities rather than rehabilitating marriage preparation and communication classes.

Not only are Blacks more negative about the possible effects of covenant marriage, but suggestive findings imply that creating a marriage reform of general appeal to Blacks will be much more difficult than for whites. Blacks are more likely than whites to identify women≠s pursuit of careers rather than investment in families and men≠s lack of commitment to families, wives and children as very important reasons for divorce. These two findings suggest that gender roles may be demanding, confusing issues in Black communities. For example, Hayne≠s (2000) qualitative interviews with 34 middle class Black men and women show that while Black women endorsed egalitarianism as a general principle, they confounded this principle by wanting Black men to serve as the chief authority and financial core of the family, a belief that both women and men felt was necessary for men≠s self-worth. In her review of attitude research, Kane (2000) finds evidence that Black men are more traditional than whites and Black women in attitudes about men≠s family headship prerogatives and gender roles in the family. Thus, current divisiveness between Black men and women about expected marital obligations may make the desirability of marriage, the quality of marriage, and the propensity to divorce more intractable to covenant marriage reforms.

We find important gender and race differences in views about problems in marriage and the usefulness of covenant marriage. One limitation in our study that should be addressed in future research is the moderating effects of income. We treated income as a mediating control

variable, but the high number of refusals to provide income undermined our ability to successfully categorize the income of respondents beyond the broad categories of under $40,000, $40-60,000, and over $60,000.

Discussion

After years of research, we still know comparatively little about why marriage rates are declining among Blacks or why race gaps in marriage formation and attitudes appear. If policymakers cannot understand the mechanisms behind these trends, it is unlikely they can create policy that effectively will change marriage formation trends. Over the past few decades, poor communities witnessed massive changes in family policy and law that greatly increased the monitoring of mothers, fathers and children via child support enforcement and paternity laws, learnfare and workfare requirements, fertility cap limits on public aid, as well as the law=s use in the cutting of public aid for housing, income maintenance, food subsidies, health insurance, and child care. Poor communities may view this legal and policy trend as a wide scale crackdown on families. Thus, Blacks may view welfare reforms that attempt to reduce marriage disincentives and policies to enhance marriage revitalization as efforts to dictate a family form through strictures that bear little relation to Blacks= experiences and circumstances.

Marriage reform policymakers would benefit from addressing why Blacks differ in views of the purpose of marriage and what they want from family and marriage policy. Many poor white and Black women say that men=s inability to secure stable, gainful employment is a severe impediment to marriage (Edin 2000). Indeed, the situation of Blacks in Louisiana is significantly different than that of whites, with 56.5% of all Black children in Louisiana poor, as opposed to 15.4% of white children (Louisiana Agenda for Children 1996). Moreover, research shows that

education decreases white women=s chances of marrying, but increases Black women=s chances

(Bennet, Bloom and Craig 1989). Thus, Black women may not want to Abuy out@of marriage,

they may very well rather have help attaining financial security, so that Black women and men

can Abuy in.@

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Appendix Table A. Descriptive Information for the Independent Variables

Focal indicators

Female	66.1 %
(White)	70.0 %
Black	25.2
Other race/ethnicity	4.8

Life course and family status

(Married or Widowed)	58.1 %
Separated or Divorced	20.6
Never married	21.3
Any child/ren	72.8 %
Two or more children	57.0
Mean Age in Years (S.D.)	42.68 (15.74)

Socioeconomic status

Education
Less than high school	12.8 %
(High school)	36.7
Some college	20.9

Trade school   5.6

College experience	15.9
Graduated from college or university	8.1

Employment
Full-time employed	54.6 %

Yearly family income last year
Under $40,000	52.2 %
$40,000-60,000	22.9
Over $60,000	15.6
Income information missing	9.3

Social and political view measures

Political orientation

Very conservative   10.2 %

Conservative	33.3

Moderate	33.1
(Liberal)	18.3
Missing information on political orientation	5.0
Religious preference	
(Catholic)	34.3 %
Baptist	31.3
Protestant	20.9
Other religion	7.8
No religious preference	5.7
N=	540

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Source. Louisiana Covenant Marriage Survey, 1998.

Note. Three cases missing marital status information were categorized into the Married or Widowed category. Four cases missing education information were coded into the High School category.