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Is Covenant Marriage a Policy that Preaches to the Choir? A Comparison of Covenant and Standard Married Newlywed Couples in Louisiana

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Is Covenant Marriage a Policy that Preaches to the Choir? A Comparison of Covenant and Standard Married Newlywed Couples in Louisiana

Recently, concern about relatively high non-marriage and divorce rates encouraged policymakers to focus marriage and welfare law reforms on marriage promotion initiatives. The creation of the 1997 covenant marriage law in Louisiana grows out of this context and is an historically unprecedented innovation. The provisions of covenant marriage make entering and exiting marriage marginally more difficult, and are a firm step toward a return to fault-based divorce. The law provides a social experiment by creating a two-tier marriage regime. Never before have citizens had the option between two sets of laws to govern their marriages. In this study, we use demographic and social-psychological data from the first wave of a panel study of 538 newlywed couples who married in Louisiana in 1999-2000, shortly after the implementation of covenant marriage. We compare covenant and standard marriages to examine whether spouses who have characteristics that predispose them to marital stability self-select into covenant marriage. Covenant and standard married couples share similar childhood and economic histories, but differ in most other measured respects. Covenant married couples have less complicated union and parenthood histories, are far more religious and traditional in attitudes, and engage in more premarital counseling and more positive conflict resolution strategies. Most important, they have substantially different attitudes about gender, the centrality of marriage, and the social duty to bear children, net of self-selection characteristics.

Marriage and divorce rates have changed considerably in the United States over the past several decades (Bumpass 1990; Bennett, Bloom and Craig 1993; McLanahan and Casper 1995; Teachman, Tedrow and Crowder 2000). Estimates indicate that 40 to 50% of all marriages will end in divorce and some suggest that more marriages will end in divorce than in death or widowhood (Watkins, Menken and Bongaarts 1987). Research also indicates that the proportion who never marry may be increasing (Teachman, Tedrow and Crowder 2000).

These fundamental changes in marriage formation and dissolution fueled a widespread debate about whether marriage as an institution is failing (Glenn 1996; Furstenberg 1994; Popenoe 1993; Schneider 1996; Whitehead 1997). At one extreme, some scholars perceive a loss of marriage as a bedrock institution and note what they see as a concomitant rise in immorality and value-free lifestyles devoid of respect for enduring bonds (Kass 1997; Mattox 1995). The other extreme often argues that perhaps marriage should be aided in its demise because the legal, social and economic benefits that favor married couples stigmatize and disadvantage non-married people and alternative families (Struening 1999; Rauch 1999; Fineman 1995; Robson 1994).

The middle range of this debate contains a wealth of perspectives about whether there are benefits to encouraging marriage (Waite and Gallagher 2000) or not (Okin 1989, Solot and Miller 2002). The more important veins of research address the potential social and psychological costs of divorce to children (Amato 2000, 1996; Amato and Gilbreth 1999; Morrison and Coiro 1999), the economic costs of divorce for women and children (Holden and Smock 1991; Smock 1993; Bianchi, Subaiya and Kahn 1999; Funder and Kinsella 1991; Seltzer and Garfinkel 1990; Kurz 1995; Morgan, Kitson and Kitson 1992; Smock, Manning and Gupta 1999), and the economic and social costs to society and the welfare state, if marriage as an

institution is so disorganized that it is unable to financially support, emotionally nurture and socialize into citizenship its family members (Furstenberg, Hoffman and Shrestha 1995; Teachman 1994; Seltzer and Bianchi 1988; McLanahan and Booth 1989; Furstenberg and Harris 1992; Rogers and Amato 1997).

At the same time, social welfare advocates and policymakers are placing great emphasis on developing public programs and legal reforms intended to encourage marriage formation, strengthen marital unions, and discourage divorce (Bogenschneider 2000; Galston 1996; Popenoe 1999). Thus, the past few years witnessed the Federal Defense of Marriage Act (DoMA), revisions of welfare laws to promote marriage as a route out of poverty (Besharov and Sullivan 1996), and many state and local initiatives to offer marriage communication education as a part of school curricula and marriage license application procedures (Bogenschneider 2000; Hawkins et al, 2002).

Among these initiatives, covenant marriage stands out as an historically unprecedented outlier. In August 1997, Louisiana became the first state to pass this legislation and Arizona and Arkansas followed suit soon after. In 1998 alone, more than 17 states considered similar covenant marriage bills (Nichols 1998). In total, 20-30 states either considered or are considering covenant marriage bills (<http://www.divorcereform.org/cov.html>). Covenant marriage proponents argue that no-fault divorce substantially reduces commitment to marriage and, therefore, weakens the legal and social protections available to family members under a more stringent marriage regime (Brinig 1998; Spaht 1998; Loconte 1998; Sanchez, et al 2001).

Louisiana's Covenant Marriage Law

Covenant marriage is remarkable because it paves the way for multiple forms of marriage (Nichols 1998). Covenant marriage proponents, of course, want to promote the sanctity and

permanence of a lifelong marriage. In seeking this objective, they have created a two-tier marriage regime. For the first time in history, citizens have the option between two sets of laws to govern their marriages.

Practical features of covenant marriage. Couples who choose this option face stricter limits on entering and exiting the marriage. First, they must undertake premarital counseling. The couple and their counselor must attest, with a notarized affidavit, that the counseling covered the seriousness of marriage, the lifetime permanence of marriage, and the obligation of the couple to seek marital counseling if problems arise later in the marriage. Second, the couple must also sign a *Declaration of Intent* that affirms the following: a marriage is an agreement to live together as a 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.

Covenant married couples who seek 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 are not grounds for divorce.

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 work on their marriages or will want an “easy out” when their marriages run into trouble. As Spaht (1998a) says, “covenant 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 “investment” in marriage, which allows them to behave in ways that build the stability of the union rather than “hedge their bets” by pursuing their own self-interests without regard to the costs to the union (Brinig 1998). Brinig (2000) further suggests that covenant marriage reinvigorates marriage by moving couples away from a contractual mentality toward their marriages to a belief in marriage’s permanent status implied by the concept of a covenant (i.e., a binding agreement). Spaht (1999, 1) believes that covenant marriage can help “Americans rebuild a marriage culture from the ashes of a ‘divorce culture.’”

Recent studies suggest that newly-marrying covenant couples and currently married covenant “upgraders” 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).

Controversies Surrounding Covenant Marriage Reforms

Since its inception, covenant marriage has created controversy. Supporters think covenant marriage inspires confidence in marriage, nurtures commitment, protects children, and counters a divorce culture (Spaht 1998; Brinig 2000; Loconte 1998). However, others argue that covenant marriage has created a variety of dilemmas for modern marriage and marriage law. The major issues of contention concern, first, whether covenant marriage actually strengthens marriage or possibly reinstates the worst problems of fault-based divorce. Second, does covenant marriage create a “conflict of laws” problem. That is, will Louisiana’s covenant marriage requirements be enforced when couples move to another state, or will laws in the host state

prevail? Third, does covenant marriage foster a greater splintering of American marriage patterns as individuals and groups pursue other forms of marriages or unions.

For the first issue, some legal scholars argue that “covenant marriage is good public relations but bad public policy” because it appears to portray the state as concerned about marital stability, but also reinstates the features of fault-based divorce that were the original catalyst for no-fault divorce (Stewart 1999, 17) . For example, Stewart (1999) suggests that the longer waiting period for divorce leaves women and children in uncertain economic circumstances before they can receive an alimony or child support award. Stewart (1999) also notes the possibility that covenant couples who want to divorce because of irreconcilable differences will be encouraged to fabricate a fault-based reason for the courts. Others suggest that marital counseling, extended waiting periods, and the expectation of a commitment to the marriage places women and children in danger in cases of domestic violence (Ellman and Lohr 1997; Biondi 1999). Biondi (1999) further argues that the focus on assigning fault or moral blame distracts the state and divorcing couples from far more pressing issues, like how ex-spouses will equitably divide their assets and personal resources, especially for children’s well-being.

Proponents of covenant marriage, on the other hand, argue that covenant marriage secures women and children’s economic well-being, by giving them greater protection against unilateral and/or hasty divorce (Brinig 1998). Spaht (1998) argues that rather than increase the chance of greater domestic abuse, covenant marriage should hinder that possibility because batterers will be shamed as they go through mandated counseling with a respected authority, such as the couple’s pastor. Spaht (1998) further argues that fault is a key concept in divorce and should be extended to further family law reforms, including those pertaining to the moral fitness of parents. Thus, rather than weaken parents’ ability to negotiate about childrearing, proponents

of covenant marriage feel that the law will encourage couples to stay together first, and then, failing that, will give the non-faulty parent greater leverage in custody and support rulings.

Another controversy is whether the law will actually reinvigorate a cultural vision of lifelong, permanent marriage or instead encourage a proliferation of marriage forms. For instance, although DiFonzo (2000, 882) perceives a “no-fault counter-revolution” as beneficial, he argues that the “supervows” of covenant marriage will “pose extraordinary problems for courts called upon to interpret and enforce the new wave of domestic agreements...as couples may increasingly contour their marriages to suit their needs and aspirations.” He argues that “customized marriage will not prove the panacea for the ills of modern marriage (DiFonzo, 2000, 882). Illustrating DiFonzo’s concern, Nichols (1998, 27) perceives the proliferation of marriage forms as beneficial and argues that

“While America has long been known as a pluralistic nation, our law of marriage and divorce has not squared with that claim. Louisiana’s covenant marriage law moves toward recognizing that people desire and choose different paths for their own lives, both individually and communally. This is a salutary move. We should build upon Louisiana’s lead and move toward an even more robust pluralism in marriage and divorce law – a pluralism which allows multiple groups (like Catholicism, Islam and Judaism) to co-exist within society and to regulate marital issues with only minimal state involvement.”

This potentially unintended consequence of using covenant marriage to justify the creation of multiple marriage is noted in another controversy – the problem of migratory or “suitcase” divorces.

Some opponents argue that the law is unenforceable because spouses who want a divorce can bypass the waiting periods by filing for divorce in another state (Macke 1998). Proponents hope that such legal challenges will encourage states to consider developing their own covenant marriage laws to avoid these legal conflicts (Spaht 1999). Further, Spaht (1999) suggests that

no-fault states should recognize covenant marriages and apply the divorce laws of Louisiana, instead of their own divorce laws, because of the *declaration of intent* the covenant couples filed at marriage. She perceives this document as a legal contract binding the couple to the covenant marriage restrictions based on their freely-made choice and despite their knowledge of less restrictive divorce laws in other jurisdictions.

Among its detractors, Macke (1998, 3) argues that this conflicts of law problem renders covenant marriage a “poorly-planned means of placing limits on the no-fault regime.” She suggests that states may not recognize Louisiana’s covenant marriage divorce provisions and may find the *declaration of intent* exceeds its limits as a binding contract. In this case, covenant marriage has an “unfair impact on Louisiana’s poorest citizens” who are unable to pack a suitcase and move to another state for the convenience of less stringent divorce laws (Macke 1998, 22). Moreover, Macke (1998, 3) suggests that if covenant proponents appeal to the full faith and credit clause as a means of enjoining states to recognize covenant marriage, a possible outcome may be that “interstate recognition of marriage via full faith and credit may also require interstate recognition of same-sex marriage, a result which most supports of covenant marriage do not want.” It was the possibility of same-sex legal marriage (in Hawaii and Alaska) and its implications for states that did not allow such unions that prompted Congress to pass the Defense of Marriage Act, and the U.S. Supreme Court would be the final arbiter on whether such federal intervention is Constitutional.

Who wants a covenant marriage?

Thus, the debate about the effectiveness of covenant marriage as a policy to reform modern American marriage is underway. However, we know nothing about the characteristics of the actual innovators who chose this form of marriage. A basic question is who selects

covenant marriage? Preliminary research, using convenience samples and information from marriage license records in a few select parishes, suggests that covenant married couples do not necessarily differ from standard married couples in previous marriage histories, education, or age, though they do differ in their religious affiliation, religious intensity and centrality, and views on gender roles (Rosier and Feld 2000; Sanchez, Nock, Wright, and Gager 2001).

We expand on these very preliminary studies by examining the first data to address selection effects into covenant and standard marriage. Our paper fills a gap by presenting demographic and social-psychological information from the first wave of a panel study of Louisiana couples marrying in 1999-2000, under the new two-tier marriage regime. Our data are rich in indicators about courtship, marital dynamics, demographic characteristics, and social-psychological personality and communication items. We address the policy question of whether covenant marriage is an option of broad or limited appeal to the general populace. This question is important, given that only 2% of all newly-formed marriages were covenants in the years immediately following the law's passage in 1997.

We especially focus on whether those who choose covenant marriage already are predisposed to more stable marriages. We examine, with a representative sample, whether the innovating couples who self-select into covenant marriage have a variety of characteristics indicative of marital success, and whether they are sufficiently different from the standard married populace that we may expect little diffusion of ideas about the value of the covenant distinction. We cannot yet know whether the legal terms of covenant marriage add anything to the personal traits brought to marriage by those who elect this form of marriage. Still, we are able to compare the two types of individuals to determine whether they differ in ways that would

be expected to lead to lower divorce rates regardless of the legal terms of their unions.

Hypotheses

We formulated hypotheses based on our research in focus groups, studies of the implementation of the law, and other less structured methods. Based on this early work, theories about the sanctification of marriage from social-psychological studies of religiosity seem best able to reflect some of the qualities we saw in covenant marriages. Sanctification refers to the psychological processes and interpersonal psychosocial dynamics by which individuals and couples imbue their marital relationship with a sense of great spiritual character, deep purpose and supernatural transcendence (Emmons and Crumpler 1999; Mahoney et al, 1999, 2001; Pargament and Mahoney 2001). Theoretically, couples who cognitively sanctify their relationship should share great confidence in the union because of beliefs that their marriage is a divine vocation, and great psychological rewards arising from the validation associated with participation in a sacred realm of conduct.

Research on the sanctification of marriage suggests that this process requires that partners develop their core identities with the centrality and saliency of marriage as a foundation, and demonstrate great moral discipline when preparing for marriage, great concern about preserving the uniqueness of marriage as the privileged relationship for sexual relations and intimacy, great endorsement of the belief that a husband's or wife's spousal conduct expresses reverence, and wholehearted selfless investments of effort, time and resources into the union (Mahoney et al, 2001). Empirical studies suggest that couples who sanctify their marriage have greater marital happiness, perceive greater benefits, express less conflict, and adopt more cooperative communication and conflict resolution strategies (Mahoney et al., 1999). The psychological concept of sanctification differs from general indicators of religiosity or spirituality which define

an individual's reflections or feelings about the meaning of God or life. Instead, sanctification concretely focuses an individual's energies on the psychological task of transforming a relationship into a sacred object, an object requiring respectful, deliberate, thoughtful action – action involving unending, altruistic tasks associated with care and sacrifice. The immediate personal and relationship-bonding benefits of this cognitive transformation are hypothesized to be considerable (Mahoney et al, 2001).

We argue that covenant marriage stands as a substantial tool that motivated couples can use to attain the psychosocial goal of the sanctification of their marriage. The rationale for this legal option perfectly accords with the intentions behind sanctification. Our theoretical premise is that covenant marriage may attract couples with aspirations of making their marriages a protected, sacred relationship set distinctly apart from what the partners perceive as other, less-exalted marriages.

Thus, in general, we expect that Louisiana's first covenant marriage innovators are likely to be couples who are well-situated with respect to personal resources and access to sources of information about the legal option. More important, we also expect that they are likely to be highly motivated to self-select into covenant marriage because their previous choices in behaviors, experiences and attitudes resonate with the principles of covenant marriage. They are likely to be individuals whose previous behaviors suggest a commitment to monogamous, lifelong enduring relationships and whose previous intimate experiences are not as "complicated" as an individual choosing standard marriage. Moreover, not surprisingly, we expect covenant married couples to have more traditional attitudes and be significantly more religious in belief and behavior than standard married couples. We expect that the covenant married are likely to differ most on indicators associated with behavioral and cognitive choices,

rather than familial background or demographic indicators, as sanctification involves a high-level of personal intentionality and will, and not necessarily a particular array of background characteristics.

Human capital hypotheses. We expect covenant married couples to have greater educational attainment and income than standard married couples. We also expect covenant husbands to show greater attachment to the labor force than standard married husbands, and covenant wives to show lesser attachment.

Family capital hypotheses. We expect covenant married couples to bring far less “baggage” from previous relationships to their marriages than standard couples. Thus, we expect that covenant married couples are less likely to have been previously divorced, less likely to have cohabited, and far less likely to have children from previous relationships or children together than standard couples.

Hard-living hypotheses. We expect that spouses in covenant marriages will have far “rosier” childhood histories than spouses in standard marriages, including a greater likelihood of growing up in a household with above average income, lower likelihoods of relying on welfare or experiencing parental divorce, and far lower likelihood of experiencing a variety of dysfunctional family relationships, such as sexual abuse, violence, verbal abuse, drug or alcohol addictions, etc. We also expect that spouses in covenant marriages will bring far fewer material problems into their marriages, by having fewer debts and more assets. Last, we expect spouses in covenant marriages to have had a less stressful courtship than spouses in standard marriages, with fewer instances of high conflict, infidelity, and premarital breakups.

Preparations for marriage and support network hypotheses. We expect that covenant married spouses will have prepared for marriage in ways significantly different than standard

married couples. We hypothesize that they will be more likely to have discussed their expectations about childbearing intentions, future plans, political and religious views, and their perceptions of the responsibilities of marriage. We also expect, whether as a function of the requirement to get a covenant marriage or based on their own choice, that covenant married couples will be more likely to have had premarital counseling and to have covered a broader range of topics in that counseling than standard married couples. We also hypothesize that covenant married couples will experience greater approval of their marriages from wider social support networks than will standard married couples.

Marriage communication skills hypotheses. We hypothesize that covenant married spouses will employ an array of communication skills and conflict resolution strategies that are more conducive to marital harmony than will standard married spouses.

Religion and religiosity hypotheses. We hypothesize that covenant married spouses are likely to have more religious childhood histories, greater attachment to traditional religious denominations or biblical or religious canon interpretations, greater perceptions of the centrality of a religious life for self-actualization, and more active, frequent participation in religious services than standard married spouses. We further expect that covenant married spouses are more likely to have met each other through their churches than are standard married spouses. We also hypothesize that the gender gaps in participation in church activities will be smaller among covenant than standard spouses. Last, we expect that standard married couples are more likely to be Catholic than covenant married couples. In the first few years after passage of covenant marriage, the Catholic Church in Louisiana was opposed to covenant marriage because of the original requirements that counselors must explain to couples the legal grounds for

divorce. However, the law has been changed so that counselors no longer need to discuss divorce or the fault-based criteria for divorce.

Attitude hypotheses. We expect covenant married spouses to have significantly more traditional attitudes than standard married spouses across a broad range of domains, including attitudes about the value of children, the duty to bear children for society, the centrality of marriage for a good life, and gender attitudes. Further, we expect a smaller gender gap in attitudes between covenant married spouses than standard married spouses. Last, we expect covenant married couples to have substantially more traditional attitudes than standard couples across these domains, net of selection effect characteristics.

Data

The data are from the first wave of a three-wave, 5-year panel study of newlywed couples in Louisiana (Marriage Matters, 1999-200, University of Virginia). We faced two initial problems in sample selection. First, since only 2% of newly-marrying couples elected the covenant option, selecting a random sample of all new marriages was prohibitive. Second, the 60 parishes in Louisiana do not uniformly forward their marriage license information to the State Vital Registrar, so we could not select a sample of licenses from a centralized agency.

Thus, we chose a multi-step sample selection procedure. First, we used population figures and probability proportionate to size sampling techniques to select 17 parishes out of 60, randomly representing 25% of the Louisiana population. Second, every few months over the time frame of July 1999 through April 2001, we regularly gathered all the covenant marriage licenses filed in these 17 parishes and a matched sample of standard marriage licenses filed before or after each covenant license. The covenant marriage licenses are thus a census or total

enumeration for those parishes, while the sampled standard marriage licenses may be considered more or less random within any parish.

Of the 1,714 licenses that were validly part of our sampling frame, 218 couples were never found or confirmed and 105 refused to participate in the study. We eventually confirmed 1,310 couples for a confirmation rate of 76.4%. Our response rate for the mail survey is 55%. For this study, we use a sample in which both partners completed questionnaires and both partners agree about whether they are covenant or standard married. Our effective sample is 538, with 241 covenant married couples and 295 standard married couples. The mean ages of covenant husbands and wives are 30 and 28 respectively, while the mean ages of standard husbands and wives are 33 and 30. The difference in age is statistically significant. The racial/ethnic composition of our covenant married sample is that 9.5% of the couples have spouses who are both black, 80.1% are both white, and 10.4% are couples with other racial/ethnic combinations. For our standard married sample, 12.9% spouses are both black, 74.9% are both white, and 12.2% are other racial/ethnic combinations. The difference in racial composition between the covenant and standard married couples is not significant.

Variables

Human Capital Characteristics. We measure each spouse's education, income, and work activity. Education is measured at the individual-level by the following categories: less than high school, high school, some post-secondary, college degree and missing information. At the couple-level, education is measured by the following categories: both high school, both post-secondary, wife high school or some post-secondary and husband does not have a high school diploma, husband high school or some post-secondary and wife does not have a high school diploma, wife has some post-secondary experience and husband has less education, husband has

some post-secondary experience and wife has less education, both have college degrees, and missing information. Income is measured by several indicators, including categorical measures, the husband's and wife's yearly income, and the couple's averaged income, and dummy variables measuring whether the wife earns more income than her husband, the husband earns more income than his wife, or both partners earn the same range of income. The income measure is categorical, with 13 categories ranging from no income to \$100,000 or more, thus we present a collapsed version of these categories as well as means based on coding the categories to their mid-point value. Work activity includes several indicators, including dummy variables measuring whether the husband and wife are full-time employed, and continuous measures of husband's and wife's weekly work hours, weeks worked last year, and expected weeks of work in the coming year.

Family capital characteristics. We measure family characteristics using the partners' cohabitation, marriage and parenthood histories. Union history information includes a dummy variable measuring whether either partner is previously divorced. Cohabitation history has multiple measures, tapping whether either partner ever-cohabited with a variety of potential partners, including the current spouse, an ex-spouse, or other partners. Parenthood history includes several dummy variables measuring whether the spouses have biological child/ren together, whether either partner has children from previous relationships, whether any children from previous relationships currently live with the spouses, whether the couple is currently expecting a birth or in the process of closing adoption procedures, whether the couple is attempting to become pregnant or initiate an adoption, and whether the couple has any children under age 5 or age 5-18 in the household.

Hard-living characteristics. We measured whether the spouses had experienced hard-living with several indicators tapping the material assets or debts they brought to the marriage, courtship problems, experience of dysfunctional family problems as a child, and experience of parental divorce, poverty and welfare assistance as a child. For the *hardships or resources brought to marriage*, we measured whether each partner had savings of \$1,000, savings of \$10,000, owned a home, had credit card debt in excess of \$500, or had other significant debt. We also created a *hardship index* that summed these indicators for each spouse (i.e., no home, no savings of \$1,000, no savings of \$10,000, credit card debt, other significant debt, husband's $\alpha=.52$, wife's $\alpha=.41$). For *courtship problems*, we measured whether either spouse was ever romantically or sexually involved with someone else, they ever broke up, or they experienced high conflict.

We measured *childhood dysfunctional problems* experienced by the spouses in two ways. We measured whether they experienced major problems in various domains, and then coded whether they experienced major or minor problems. Spouses were presented with the following experiences: violence between your parents; violence directed at you; sexual abuse; severe depression; other mental illness; alcoholism; drug abuse; foul and abusive language; periods of unemployment; not enough money to make ends meet; serious physical illness; not enough love in the home; high conflict between your parents; and name-calling and sarcasm. These items were also summed to create childhood problems indices (husband's $\alpha=.86$, wife's $\alpha=.87$).

Partners' preparations for marriage and social support for the marriage. We measure husband's and wife's preparations for marriage with indicators of issues they discussed prior to the marriage, whether they received premarital counseling, and the breadth of that counseling.

For premarital discussions, spouses reported whether they had discussed the following topics “a lot” in the months leading up to their marriage: your political views, your religious beliefs, your plans or desires for children; your financial circumstances; other people you had dated; the chances you might get divorced some day; your dreams for the future; how you like to spend your leisure time; your feelings about your partner’s friends; your feelings about your partner’s family; your partner’s feelings about your friends; your partner’s feelings about your family; your feelings about your own family; your partner’s feelings about his/her own family; where you would like to live; whether to buy a house; marriage as an agreement to live together forever; and the possibility of divorce. These items were summed to create *preparatory discussion indices* (husband’s alpha=.85, wife’s alpha=.84).

We also measured whether the couple received premarital counseling and viewed that counseling as helpful, and how many hours they spent in counseling. Among those who received counseling, we measure whether the following topics were discussed: how to communicate; how to resolve conflicts; covenant marriage; grounds for divorce; marriage as a lifetime commitment; religious beliefs; having or raising children.

We measure spouses’ perceived support for their marriage with summed additive indices of whether the husband and wife felt that various peers and relations gave strong approval when the marriage was first announced (husband’s alpha=.89, wife’s alpha=.88) and now that the spouses have been married awhile (husband’s alpha=.95, wife’s alpha=.93). The husband and wife responded to the following support network list: your father; your mother; your partner’s father; your partner’s mother; your brothers and sisters; your partner’s brothers and sisters; your friends; and your partner’s friends.

Marriage communication skills. We measure the husband's and wife's communication skills with items assessing how they manage disagreements and conflicts in their marriage. We focus especially on dimensions of communication associated strongly with marital instability and divorce, such as communication strategies that cause extreme distress (Gottman 1994; Gottman, Coan, Carrere and Swanson 1998). The husband and wife were presented with the following list of disagreement strategies: I withdraw to avoid a big fight; I feel tense and anxious; I look at things from my partner's viewpoint; I just give in; I get physically violent; I feel unloved; I try to find the middle ground. I just want to kiss and make up; I get sarcastic; My partner gets sarcastic; I get hostile; and my partner gets hostile. We create two summed indices from a sub-set of these single items. The *Gottman indices* measure whether the husband or wife report that he or she withdraws to avoid a fight, feels tense and anxious, gets physically violent, gets sarcastic or gets hostile (husband's $\alpha=.53$, wife's $\alpha=.53$). The *perceived sarcasm/hostility indices* measure whether the husband or wife report that he or she feels that the partner reacts with sarcasm or hostility (husband's $\alpha=.65$, wife's $\alpha=.62$).

Religious affiliation and religiosity. We measure religious affiliation and participation with a range of items. We measure the partners' religious denomination, whether they met in church, how often they attend religious services, whether they always attend services together, how frequently they pray, whether they perceive themselves as religious fundamentalists, the perceived importance of their religious faith, the felt importance of the spouses feeling the same way about religiosity, and whether their childhood homes were very religious.

Social and political attitude indices. We measure the spouses' attitudes toward the value of children, marriage, and gender attitudes with six separate indices. We measure attitudes toward the *financial costs of children* with indices summing the husband's ($\alpha=.81$) and wife's

($\alpha=.78$) responses about whether the following items are very important considerations in the decision to have a child: uncertainty about ability to support a child; stress and worry of raising children; being able to make major purchases; and being able to buy a home or better home.

We measure attitudes about the *worries of childrearing* with indices summing the husband's ($\alpha=.84$) and wife's ($\alpha=.80$) responses about whether the following items are very important considerations in the decision to have a child: uncertainty about how fairly parenting tasks will be shared; uncertainty about whether my marriage will last; being able to have an equal division of household tasks; having someone to care for me in my old age; having time and energy for my career; and being appreciated and respected.

We measure views about the *prestige in childrearing* with indices summing the husband's ($\alpha=.80$) and wife's ($\alpha=.77$) responses of whether the following items are very important considerations in the decision to have a child: being appreciated and respected; living according to the rules of my faith; having a complete and happy family life; having someone to love; my partner's thoughts about having children.

We measure perceptions of the social *duty to bear children* with indices summing the husband's ($\alpha=.80$) and wife's ($\alpha=.81$) agreement with the statements "it is my duty to society to have children" and "it is my religious obligation to have children.

We measure attitudes about the *centrality of marriage in life* with indices of husband's ($\alpha=.82$) and wife's ($\alpha=.79$) agreement with the following statements: no matter how successful a man is, a man is not truly complete as a person unless he is married; no matter how successful a woman is, a woman is not truly complete as a person unless she is married; and one of the main reasons to get married is to have children.

Last, we measure *gender attitudes* with indices of husband's ($\alpha=.79$) and wife's ($\alpha=.81$) support of the following statements: a husband's job is to earn money, a wife's job is to look after the home and family; all in all, family life suffers when the wife has a full-time job; taking care of children should be mainly a woman's responsibility; by nature, women are better than men at making a home and caring for children; it works best when the man earns the money and the woman takes care of home and family.

Analysis Plan

With bivariate analyses, we compare differences and similarities between covenant and standard married couples, using simple analysis of variance tests to compare covenant and standard husbands, wives and couples. Within covenant and standard couples, we test for gender differences. The tables also present the descriptive (average) statistics for the samples.

With multivariate analyses, we further compare covenant husbands and wives found to differ (in bivariate analyses) from standard couples in social attitudes, net of characteristics relevant to self-selection into one or the other form of marriage. Essentially, these equations allow us to compare standard and covenant spouses (who were found to differ on various dependent variables) while controlling for background variables also found to differ between the two types of marriages. The social attitudes consist of items that address (a) the financial costs of childrearing, (b) the worries and strains of childrearing, (c) the perceived prestige associated with parenting, (d) beliefs about the duty to bear children for society, (e) the centrality of marriage to a useful, good life, and (f) gendered attitudes about breadwinning and homemaking. These equations are estimated with seemingly unrelated regression models due to the likelihood of cross-equation correlated.

Results

Human Capital Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics for human capital characteristics. Covenant married husbands, wives and couples have significantly higher educational attainment than standard married couples. Within marriage option choice, covenant married husbands and wives have similar levels of educational attainment, while standard married wives have significantly higher levels of education than standard married husbands. The majority of covenant husbands and wives have at least a college degree, and in 1 out of 4 covenant couples, both have a college degree. For standard married couples, 1 out of 5 couples have a college degree. Standard married husbands and wives are three times more likely to have less than a high school degree than covenant married husbands and wives.

[Table 1 here]

Covenant married and standard married couples have similar levels of income, full-time employment, and hours worked last week, though some evidence indicates that standard wives earn more than covenant wives. Approximately 80% of husbands are employed full time, 60% of wives. Covenant married husbands had significantly greater attachment to the labor force in the year before the marriage than standard married husbands, and expect significantly greater attachment in the coming year. The differences suggest that covenant married husbands worked about a month per year longer than standard husbands in the past and expect to work that much longer than standard husbands in the future. Within marital status, significant gender differences consistently show that wives earn less, work fewer hours per week, and fewer weeks per year than husbands, in both covenant and standard marriages.

Family Capital Descriptive Statistics

Table 2 presents family capital descriptive statistics. About 25-30% of husbands and wives experienced a divorce before their current marriage, with no significant differences by marriage option choice. However, we find significant differences in cohabitation histories. Standard married couples have far more extensive cohabitation experiences than do covenant married couples. Whereas 27% of covenant couples cohabited with each other prior to the marriage, the majority (63.7%) of standard married couples cohabited. Standard married spouses are also twice as likely as covenant married spouses to have cohabited with an ex-spouse or with someone they never married. The proportion with no cohabitation experience is more than twice as large for covenant compared to standard married couples. In 51% of covenant marriages, neither partner ever-cohabited, compared to 22.7% of standard marriages. The majority of covenant husbands and wives never cohabited, while only a much smaller proportion of standard husbands and wives never cohabited (approximately 60% and 27% respectively).

[Table 2 here]

Similarly, the parenthood histories differ greatly. Standard married couples are three times more likely to have biological children than covenant married couples (16% and 5% respectively). Standard married husbands and wives are also significantly more likely to have children from previous relationships than are covenant married husbands and wives, about 32% compared to 20%. The likelihood of having any of the husband's children from a previous relationship living with the couple is not significantly different for covenant and standard marriages. However, standard married couples are significantly more likely to have children living with them from the wife's previous relationships than are covenant married couples.

While there are no significant differences by marriage option choice in the likelihood of being currently pregnant or in the final stages of adoption, standard married couples are

significantly more likely to be trying for a pregnancy or adoption than are covenant married couples. Last, 42% of standard marriages have children in the household in the early months of their marriage, compared to 24% of covenant marriages. Moreover, standard marriages are almost four times more likely than covenant marriages to have children under age 5 living in the household, 22.3% and 6.7% respectively.

Hard-Living Descriptive Statistics

Table 3 presents descriptive statistics about problems during courtship, childhood family dysfunction problems, and material assets or debts brought to the marriage. We find that covenant and standard married couples have similar levels of assets and debts upon marriage. Half the husbands had savings of at least \$1,000, while only 20% had savings in excess of \$10,000. Wives were less likely to have significant savings, with only approximately 10% having more than \$10,000. About one-fourth of the couples owned a home before marriage. Further, a fairly large proportion carried significant debt. Approximately 30 to 45% of husbands and wives had significant debt other than a house or more than \$500 in credit card debt.

[Table 3 here]

We also find no differences in courtship problems. Approximately 9% of husbands and wives indicated they had a romantic or sexual relationship with someone other than their current spouse, during their courtship. One-third of both covenant and standard couples experienced breakups, and only approximately one-third of couples reported experiencing no conflict, during the courtship.

For reports of dysfunctional problems in childhood, we find no significant differences between covenant and standard husbands and wives, with the sole exception that standard married husbands were more likely than covenant married husbands to perceive a lack of money

in childhood as either a major or minor problem (not shown). The patterns uniformly indicate that for both single item measures (not shown) or childhood problems indices, husbands and wives in both types of marriage options experience the same family background conflict. However, we find significant gender differences, and the differences are similar for both covenant and standard married couples. Wives are significantly more likely than husbands to report having experienced sexual abuse, severe depression, family alcoholism, high parental conflict, and name-calling and sarcasm as problems in their youth (not shown), as well as significantly more likely to have experienced a greater number of childhood dysfunctions.

Last, we find no significant differences between covenant and standard married couples in family background. One-third of husbands and wives experienced the childhood divorce of their parents, and among approximately 12 to 16% of couples, both spouses experienced the divorce of their parents. Almost 40% of husbands and wives experienced some form of parental breakup, if separation is included. Further, approximately 10 to 15% of husbands and wives recall that their family relied on welfare assistance at some point in their childhood. We find a sole significant effect that suggests that standard married husbands came from poorer families than covenant married husbands, but the difference is small.

Preparations and Support for the Marriage Descriptive Statistics.

Table 4 presents results for preparations and support for the marriage. For preparatory discussions during courtship, we find, in unshown analyses, that covenant and standard married couples were similarly like to discuss a range of topics, like their political views, financial circumstances, previous relationships, future dreams, preferences about leisure, feelings about friends, and the chance or possibility of divorce. However, covenant married spouses were significantly more likely to discuss religious beliefs, plans for children and whether marriage is a

lifetime agreement. Further, covenant husbands were significantly more likely than standard husbands to perceive that spouses discussed their families. Last, Table 4 shows that covenant married husbands' mean number of discussed topics was significantly higher than that for standard married husbands.

[Table 4 here]

The most striking finding is that 99% of covenant couples engaged in premarital counseling, compared to 46% of standard married couples. Among those who undertook counseling, covenant married couples were significantly more likely than standard couples to have both spouses report that they discussed all of the listed topics – communication, conflict resolution tactics, covenant marriage, grounds for divorce, marriage as a lifetime commitment, religious beliefs, and raising children. Further, among those with premarital counseling, covenant married couples were more than twice as likely to perceive that the counseling was beneficial than were standard married couples, 47% and 22% respectively.

Last, covenant married couples perceive significantly greater initial support from their peer and family networks when they first announced their engagement and greater current support for their marriage than standard married couples.

Marriage Communication Skills Descriptive Statistics

Table 5 presents marriage communication skills descriptive statistics. We find few differences in ways of handling conflict between covenant and standard married couples. They are similarly likely to withdraw, get tense or anxious, take the partner's point of view, feel unloved, seek the middle ground, or want to kiss and makeup. However, standard married couples are more likely to report that they react with violence and that they perceive their partner as sarcastic.

[Table 5 here]

The Gottman indices measuring whether the spouses use very high conflict, stress-producing ways of managing disagreement indicate no significant mean differences between covenant and standard married husbands and wives. However, within marriage options, wives are significantly more likely than husbands to engage in stress-producing communication strategies, such as being hostile, sarcastic, or getting tense. Compared to covenant married spouses, standard married husbands and wives are significantly more likely to report that their partner reacts to disagreements with hostility and sarcasm.

Religion and Religiosity Descriptive Statistics

Table 6 presents religion and religiosity descriptive statistics. Like the findings for union and parenthood histories, these religion indicators show the largest, most dramatic differences between covenant and standard married spouses. Standard married couples are significantly more likely to be Catholic, while covenant married spouses are significantly more likely to be Baptist or Protestant. Approximately 30% of standard spouses are Catholic compared to only 6-9% of covenant spouses. Half the covenant spouses are Baptist, as opposed to one-third of standard married spouses. These denominational differences are very likely tied to the Catholic church's initial opposition to covenant marriage because of the legal requirement that counselors discuss grounds for divorce, during premarital counseling.

[Table 6 about here]

Besides denominational differences, the couples differ greatly in religiosity and intensity of participation in religious activities. This difference appears even in how the couples met. Approximately 20% of covenant couples said that they first met each other in church, as compared to 6% of standard couples. Compared to standard married couples, covenant married

couples are uniformly more likely to attend religious services, always attend together, pray frequently, perceive themselves as religious fundamentalists, perceive religious faith as of key importance, and perceive the necessity of a mutual faith. Within marriage option choice, we find that wives are significantly more religious than husbands.

Family-Building, Marriage and Gender Attitude Descriptive Statistics.

Table 7 presents attitude indices descriptive statistics. First, we find no significant differences between covenant married and standard married couples, nor between husbands and wives within marriage options in attitudes about the financial costs of children. Second, we find no significant differences between covenant and standard married husbands in views on the worries of childrearing, but find that standard married wives are significantly more likely to have greater worries about childrearing than covenant married wives. Third, covenant married husbands are significantly more likely than standard married husbands to perceive prestige in childrearing. Fourth, covenant married husbands and wives are significantly more likely than standard married husbands and wives to perceive childbearing as a social duty and marriage as central to a good life. Fifth, covenant married husbands and wives are significantly more traditional in gender role attitudes than standard married husbands and wives.

[Table 7 here]

We find that covenant married husbands and wives share similar attitudes across the domains. However, covenant married husbands are significantly more likely than wives to perceive marriage as central to a good life. There are greater gender gaps in attitudes in standard marriages. Among standard married couples, wives are more egalitarian than husbands, and less likely to perceive childbearing as a duty and marriage as central to a good life.

The patterns indicate that the standard married wives are the most distinct in attitudes compared to their husbands and covenant couples. They rate the worries of childrearing the highest, rank the highest in egalitarian gender attitudes, and are the least likely to perceive childbearing and marriage as central key duties or functions of life. However, the results also indicate that though they may not be as likely to perceive childbearing as a social duty, they are no different than their husbands or covenant married wives in perceiving childrearing as prestigious.

Multivariate Analyses of Social and Political Attitudes.

Last, we used seemingly unrelated regressions to examine whether covenant husbands and wives differ in social attitudes, net of wife's age, couple's race, couple's education, husband's income and spouses' comparative income ranges, partners' divorce and cohabitation histories, their parenthood histories from previous relationships and together in their marriage, their experience of parental separation or divorce as children, their religious denomination, whether they perceived themselves as fundamentalists and a scale of how important religion is in their lives.

Table 8 presents coefficients for the effects of covenant marriage across the six domains of attitudes, net of the previously mentioned indicators. The findings are similar to the bivariate associations. Covenant and standard married couples are no different in attitudes about the financial costs of children, the practical worries of rearing them, or the general prestige of parenthood. However, covenant husbands and wives are significantly more likely to perceive childbearing as a social duty, marriage as essential to a good life, and traditional gender roles as beneficial, net of other characteristics. Constraints tests indicate that covenant husbands and wives share similar views about the duty to bear children and the centrality of marriage, but that

covenant wives are significantly more traditional in gender role attitudes than covenant husbands, net of other characteristics.

Conclusions and Discussions

We find support for all of our hypotheses, except two. Contrary to our expectations, the spouses in covenant marriages are not richer than couples in standard marriages, and no less likely to have material debts, childhood family disorganization or childhood traumas. These exceptions are important because they tentatively suggest that people who choose covenant marriage are not doing so as a reaction to a markedly rosy or bleak childhood. Moreover, we find no evidence that they select covenant marriage as a means of securing their far greater material assets.

Aside from these two important exceptions, covenant married couples are substantially different from standard married couples. The overall patterns of findings show three important points about covenant married spouses. First, people who choose covenant marriage are much less likely than others to have cohabited or had children with someone other than their current marriage partner. Not only does this indicate that they bring far fewer demands, issues or obligations from previous relationships to their marriages, it suggests that they really are standing outside of some of the more common relationship and family trends noted over the past few decades.

Second, people who choose covenant marriage have different beliefs than those who select standard marriage. They have a unique combination of characteristics: covenant married husbands and wives are more educated *and* hold more traditional attitudes. More telling, their attitudes indicate that they believe they have a social responsibility to marry and have children. Not surprisingly, they widely differ from standard married couples in religiosity. Covenant

couples are markedly more religious in both faith and practice than standard married couples, and this greater religiosity and traditionalism in attitudes is far more likely to be a unified front between husbands and wives. Gender gaps in attitudes and religiosity are smaller for covenants than standards.

Third, while covenant and standard married spouses share similar negative emotional reaction to conflict in their marriages, such as feeling unloved or wanting to kiss and make up, covenant married spouses are far more likely to choose communication strategies that do not revolve around attacking or belittling their partner. They are less likely to respond to conflict with sarcasm or hostility, two communication strategies that Gottman (1994) indicates are particularly strongly associated with poor marriage outcomes. Moreover, compared to standard married couples, covenant married couples, whether as a function of the covenant marriage licensing requirements or their own motivation, are far more likely to take premarital classes and address a greater number and broader range of issues in those classes, and more likely to feel that they benefit from those classes.

Thus, our findings from the first wave of a panel study of newlyweds married shortly after the passage of covenant marriage indicates that those who elect the option are different from other newlyweds. Most relevant, the nature of their differences seems born out of conscious, deliberate choice. These spouses are disavowing cohabitation and non-marital fertility. Further, they have attitudes that are not merely traditional in nature, but more radically traditional, as they are tied to feelings about social duty and responsibility to maintain a marriage to foster a better society. These findings are consistent with research on the psychological processes and choices involved in sanctifying marriage (Mahoney, et al., 2001).

Thus, our initial findings tentatively suggest that covenant marriage may be associated with lower divorce rates, but perhaps not due to legal requirements. The large selection differences suggest that such couples will have more stable marriages regardless of the terms of their legal unions. This is speculation, at the moment, and will be verified after additional waves of data are available. In effect, covenant marriage self-selects those least likely to divorce. Second, the “diffusion” effect whereby other non-married, engaged or standard married individuals will come to favor covenant marriages as they interact with covenant married couples will depend (among other things) on the extent to which this unusual group of individuals comes into contact with those more likely to select standard marriages. On many dimensions, the two types of individuals were found to be indistinguishable. On some, however (especially religious life, social and gender attitudes) there are notable differences.

Covenant married couples, indeed, may be marriage innovators, but their role as ambassadors of a new form of marriage may be limited, at least in the short term. At the moment, covenant marriage appeals to a small, distinct group who differ in important ways from the average person approaching marriage. Based on the evidence we have at the moment, there is little to suggest that covenant marriage will soon appeal to a larger, more diverse population.

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Table 1. Human Capital Descriptive Statistics by Marriage Option Choice

	<u>Covenant</u>	<u>Standard</u>		
Education measures				
<i>Husband's Education</i>				
Less than high school	3.3 %	9.8 %	*	
High school	33.2	41.7		
Some post-secondary	23.2	17.6		
College or more	37.8	29.5		
Missing	2.5	1.4		
<i>Wife's Education</i>				
Less than high school	2.5 %	6.8 %	*	b
High school	27.4	36.9		
Some post-secondary	27.4	22.0		
College or more	39.8	30.8		
Missing	2.9	3.4		
<i>Couple's Education</i>				
Both high school	14.9 %	22.4 %	*	
Both post-secondary	11.2	8.5		
Wife post-secondary or H.S./ Husb less	11.6	14.9		
Husb post-secondary or H.S./ Wife less	9.1	9.5		
Wife college, husband less	14.5	12.2		
Husb college, wife less	12.4	10.8		
Both college or more	25.3	18.6		
Missing	.8	3.1		
Income measures				
<i>Husband's Income</i>				
\$0-\$5,000	4.2%	8.7%		
\$5,000-\$9,999	6.7	3.1		
\$10,000-\$19,999	20.9	19.0		
\$20,000-\$29,999	25.1	19.0		
\$30,000-\$39,999	21.8	20.4		
\$40,000-\$49,999	8.8	13.1		
>\$50,000				

	<u>Covenant</u>		<u>Standard</u>		
Wife's Income					
\$0-\$5,000	18.8%	a	22.1%		b
\$5,000-\$9,999	15.4		11.9		
\$10,000-\$19,999	24.8		20.7		
\$20,000-\$29,999	24.8		16.5		
\$30,000-\$39,999	10.7		16.5		
\$40,000-\$49,999	3.4		5.3		
>\$50,000	2.1		7.0		
<i>Income Recoded to Mid-Point Values</i>					
Husband	\$30,366		\$32,552		
	(19,672)		(21,583)		
Wife	\$18,184	a	\$21,263	*	b
	(14,277)		(18,426)		
Spouses' Income Averaged	\$24,115		\$26,829	*	
	(13,693)		(16,854)		
<i>Wife Earns More Income</i>	13.7%		15.9%		
<i>Husband Earns More Income</i>	61.4%	a	59.0%		b
<i>Both Partners Earn Same Range</i>	21.6%		21.0%		
Work activity measures					
<i>Activity last week</i>					
Husband Full-Time Emp	81.3 %		78.3 %		
Wife Full-Time Emp	60.6 %	a	61.2 %		b
<i>Hours Worked Last Week</i>					
Husband	42.1		40.3		
Wife	29.8	a	29.5		b
<i>Weeks Worked</i>					
Last Year					
Husband	44.8		41.2	*	
Wife	33.9	a	33.2		b
Expected in Coming Year					
Husband	46.7		42.8	*	
Wife	36.0	a	35.5		b
N=	241		295		

Source. Wave 1, Marriage Matters, 1999-2000. University of Virginia.

Notes. * Significant difference at .05 level in means comparing CM's and Standards
a Significant at .05 level in means comparing husbands and wives for covenants
b Significant at .05 level in means comparing husbands and wives for standards

Table 2. Family Capital Descriptive Statistics by Marriage Option Choice

	Covenant	Standard	
Union History			
<i>Previously Divorced</i>			
Husband	25.7%	31.5%	
Wife	24.5%	31.5%	
<i>Cohabitation History</i>			
Husband's cohabitation history			
No cohabitations	57.7%	26.4% *	
Cohabitation with spouse only	13.7%	28.8%	
Cohab with spouse and an ex-spouse	6.2%	14.9%	
Cohab with spouse and a non-spouse	7.1%	20.0%	
No Cohab with spouse, but another	15.4%	9.8%	
Wife's cohabitation history			
No cohabitations	58.9%	27.8% *	
Cohabitation with spouse only	15.4%	30.8%	
Cohab with spouse and an ex-spouse	5.4%	16.3%	
Cohab with spouse and a non-spouse	6.2%	16.6%	
No Cohab with spouse, but another	14.1%	8.5%	
Couple's combined cohabitation history			
Neither ever cohabited	50.6%	22.7% *	
They only cohabited with each other	8.7%	17.6%	
All other cohabitation histories	40.7%	59.7%	
Parenthood History			
Have biological child/ren together	5.0%	15.9% *	
Has Child/ren from previous relnship			
Husband	19.1%	30.5% *	
Wife	20.7%	33.9% *	
Previous child/ren live with them			
Husband's	6.6%	6.8%	
Wife's	16.2% a	24.7% *	b
Couple is expecting/adopting	6.6%	9.2%	
Couple is trying for birth/adoption	7.9%	14.6% *	
Couple has children in household	24.3%	41.8% *	
Have kids under age 5 in hhold	6.7%	22.3% *	
Have kids age 5-18 in hhold	19.7%	25.7%	
N=	241	295	

Source. Wave 1, Marriage Matters, 1999-2000. University of Virginia.

Notes. * Significant difference at .05 level in means comparing CM's and Standards.

a Significant at .05 level in means comparing husbands and wives for covenants

b Significant at .05 level in means comparing husbands and wives for standards

Table 3. Hard-Living Descriptive Statistics by Marriage Option Choice

	Covenant	Standard	
Hardships or resources brought to marriage			
<i>Had Savings \$1,000</i>			
Husband	51.5%	51.2%	
Wife	42.7% a	38.0%	b
<i>Had Savings \$10,000</i>			
Husband	18.8%	18.6%	
Wife	10.5% a	10.1%	b
<i>Owned a Home</i>			
Husband	25.8%	30.6%	
Wife	25.1%	28.0%	
<i>Had Credit Card Debit \$500+</i>			
Husband	45.0%	44.6%	
Wife	45.0%	48.1%	
<i>Had Other Significant Debt</i>			
Husband	39.3%	40.3%	
Wife	31.7%	34.2%	
<i>Hardship Index</i>			
Husband	2.86 (1.44)	2.95 (1.23)	
Wife	2.81 (1.34)	3.01 (1.27)	b
Courtship problems			
<i>Infidelity</i>			
Husband	8.8%	11.5%	
Wife	7.1%	9.8%	
<i>Experienced Breakup/s</i>			
	31.5%	29.5%	
<i>Couple-level conflicts</i>			
Both agree none	37.8%	30.8%	
No or little	20.3%	23.1%	
Both agree a little	29.9%	30.8%	
Someone says Lots	12.0%	15.3%	
Childhood Problems			
<i>Major problem index</i>			
Husband	.87 (1.70)	1.02 (2.10)	
Wife	1.44 (2.41) a	1.63 (2.46)	b
<i>Any problem index</i>			
Husband	2.56 (2.93)	2.85 (3.02)	
Wife	3.30 (3.29) a	3.53 (3.47)	b
Family Background			
<i>Parental divorce</i>			
Husband	30.3%	33.5%	
Wife	31.3%	33.8%	

	<u>Covenant</u>	<u>Standard</u>
<i>Couple-level parental divorce</i>		
Neither exp. Divorce	46.5%	44.8%
Husband only	20.0%	19.9%
Wife only	21.7%	19.9%
Both exp. Divorce	11.7%	15.5%
 <i>Parental separation/divorce</i>		
Husband	36.0%	37.4%
Wife	35.7%	39.0%
<i>Couple-level parental divorce</i>		
Neither exp. sep/divorce	42.3%	38.8%
Husband only	22.6%	22.4%
Wife only	21.8%	23.8%
Both exp sep/divorce	13.4%	15.0%
Family Well-being		
<i>Below average income</i>		
Husband	17.6%	23.4% *
Wife	20.7%	20.4%
<i>Ever-on-welfare</i>		
Husband	9.6%	14.2%
Wife	12.9%	14.9%
N=	241	295

Source. Wave 1, Marriage Matters, 1999-2000. University of Virginia.

Note 1. * Significant difference at .05 level in means comparing CM's and Standards
a Significant at .05 level in means comparing husbands and wives for covenants
b Significant at .05 level in means comparing husbands and wives for standards

Table 4. Preparations and Support for the Marriage by Marriage Option Choice

	<u>Covenant</u>		<u>Standard</u>			
Discussions before marriage						
<i>Preparatory discussion additive index</i>						
Husband	7.53	(3.77)	6.48	(4.14)	*	
Wife	8.22	(3.63)	7.68	(4.03)		b
Premarital Counseling						
<i>Couple received counseling</i>	99.2%		46.4%		*	
<u><i>Among couples who received counseling</i></u>						
<i>Hours in counseling</i>						
Husband	8.01	(8.73)	7.08	(9.55)		
Wife	7.65	(7.37)	7.12	(9.92)		
<u><i>Topics covered (both spouses mention)</i></u>						
<i>Communication</i>	90.8%		69.9%		*	
<i>Conflict resolution</i>	84.5%		61.0%		*	
<i>Covenant marriage</i>	97.5%		35.3%		*	
<i>Grounds for divorce</i>	47.3%		17.6%		*	
<i>Marriage as lifetime commitment</i>	96.2%		77.2%		*	
<i>Religious beliefs</i>	89.1%		76.5%		*	
<i>Raising children</i>	77.4%		64.0%		*	
<i>Counseling very helpful</i>						
Both said yes	46.6%		21.5%		*	
Strong approval from support network						
<i>Support additive index</i>						
<u><i>At first</i></u>						
Husband	4.20	(2.91)	3.45	(3.03)	*	
Wife	4.51	(2.72)	3.73	(2.85)	*	b
Couple	8.71	(4.91)	7.18	(5.16)	*	
<u><i>Now</i></u>						
Husband	5.61	(2.86)	4.73	(3.25)	*	
Wife	5.89	(2.54)	5.14	(2.98)	*	b
Couple	11.49	(4.64)	9.86	(5.46)	*	
N=	241		295			

Source. Wave 1, Marriage Matters, 1999-2000. University of Virginia.

Notes. * Significant difference at .05 level in means comparing CM's and Standards
a Significant at .05 level in means comparing husbands and wives for covenants
b Significant at .05 level in means comparing husbands and wives for standards

Table 5. Marriage Communication Skills During Conflict by Marriage Option Choice

		Covenant		Standard		
<i>Withdraw</i>						
Very true	Husband	18.7%		19.7%		
	Wife	16.3%		14.7%		b
<i>Tense and anxious</i>						
Very true	Husband	21.2%		22.6%		
	Wife	30.3%	a	35.6%		b
<i>Take partner's POV</i>						
Very true	Husband	23.8%		24.9%		
	Wife	19.1%		22.9%		
<i>Give in</i>						
Very true	Husband	10.4%		8.5%	*	
	Wife	6.2%	a	6.8%		
<i>Get physically violent</i>						
Very true	Husband	0.0%		1.4%	*	
	Wife	0.0%		1.7%	*	
<i>I feel unloved</i>						
Very true	Husband	3.3%		6.5%		
	Wife	4.6%		10.0%		b
<i>Seek middle ground</i>						
Very true	Husband	32.8%		27.7%		
	Wife	23.3%	a	26.7%		
<i>Wants kiss/makeup</i>						
Very true	Husband	36.5%		34.7%		
	Wife	24.7%	a	27.4%		b
<i>I get sarcastic</i>						
Very true	Husband	7.5%		12.9%		
	Wife	15.4%	a	19.0%		b
<i>Partner gets sarcastic</i>						
Very true	Husband	10.4%		19.5%	*	
	Wife	11.6%		18.1%	*	
<i>I get hostile</i>						
Very true	Husband	2.1%		7.5%		
	Wife	8.7%	a	13.0%		b
<i>My partner gets hostile</i>						
Very true	Husband	5.4%		12.9%		
	Wife	5.4%		9.2%		
<i>Gottman index</i>						
Very true	Husband	.49	(.72)	.63	(.94)	
	Wife	.71	(.96)	.83	(.98)	b
<i>Perceive sarcasm/hostility index</i>						
Very true	Husband	.37	(.70)	.55	(.87)	*
	Wife	.47	(.72)	.63	(.84)	*
	N=	241		295		

Source. Wave 1, Marriage Matters, 1999-2000. University of Virginia.

Notes. * Significant difference at .05 level in means comparing CM's and Standards.

a = Significant at .05 level in means comparing husbands and wives for covenants;

b = Significant at .05 level in means comparing husbands and wives for standards

Table 6. Religion and Religiosity Descriptive Statistics by Marriage Option Choice

	<u>Covenant</u>		<u>Standard</u>		
<i>Religious denomination</i>					
Both spouses Catholic	3.3%		18.3%		*
Both spouses Baptist	44.0%		20.7%		*
Both Protestant/not Baptist	20.3%		8.1%		*
Other combinations	32.4%		52.9%		*
<i>Met each other in church</i>	21.6%		6.1%		*
<i>How often attend religious services</i>					
Husband	5.52	(1.47)	3.30	(2.06)	*
Wife	5.65	(1.40) a	3.62	(2.00)	* b
<i>Always attend services together</i>					
Husband	68.8%		44.7%		*
Wife	66.8%		36.3%		* b
<i>Frequency of prayer</i>					
Husband	4.08	(1.16)	2.97	(1.65)	*
Wife	4.24	(1.10) a	3.51	(1.46)	* b
<i>Perceive self as a religious fundamentalist</i>					
Agree/Strongly Agree					
Husband	48.3%		25.9%		*
Wife	46.8%	a	20.6%		* b
Strongly Agree					
Husband	17.6%		5.8%		*
Wife	19.3%		5.5%		*
<i>Importance of religious faith</i>					
Husband	4.55	(.75)	3.72	(1.12)	*
Wife	4.71	(.57) a	4.01	(.99)	* b
<i>Importance of spouses feeling same way about religion</i>					
Husband	4.42	(.89)	3.28	(1.25)	*
Wife	4.56	(.78) a	3.52	(1.20)	* b
<i>Childhood family was very religious</i>					
Husband	36.7%		29.5%		*
Wife	38.6%		28.6%		
N=	241		295		

Source. Wave 1, Marriage Matters, 1999-2000. University of Virginia.

Notes. * Significant difference at .05 level in means comparing CM's and Standard
a Significant at .05 level in means comparing husbands and wives for covenants
b Significant at .05 level in means comparing husbands and wives for standards

Table 7. Attitude Indices Descriptive Statistics by Marriage Option Choice

	<u>Covenant</u>		<u>Standard</u>			
<i>Financial Costs of Children</i>						
Husbands	13.07	(4.36)	13.04	(4.47)		
Wives	13.43	(4.09)	13.31	(4.54)		
<i>Worries of Childrearing</i>						
Husbands	14.75	(6.24)	15.58	(6.42)		
Wives	14.94	(5.51)	16.16	(6.38)	*	
<i>Prestige in Childrearing</i>						
Husbands	18.56	(4.86)	17.41	(5.81)	*	
Wives	18.72	(4.58)	17.95	(5.57)		
<i>Duty to Bear Children</i>						
Husbands	4.84	(2.05)	4.40	(2.13)	*	
Wives	4.63	(1.99)	4.10	(2.04)	*	b
<i>Centrality of Marriage in Life</i>						
Husbands	7.91	(2.87)	7.08	(2.86)	*	
Wives	6.79	(2.74)	a	6.23	(2.53)	* b
<i>Gender Attitudes</i>						
Husbands	14.69	(3.79)	12.89	(3.99)	*	
Wives	14.57	(4.29)	11.68	(3.88)	*	b
N=	241		295			

Source. Wave 1, Marriage Matters, 1999-2000. University of Virginia.

Note 1. * Significant difference at .05 level in means comparing CM's and Standards
a Significant at .05 level in means comparing husbands and wives for covenants
b Significant at .05 level in means comparing husbands and wives for standards

Table 8: Seemingly Unrelated Regressions of Social Attitudes, Net Effects of Covenant Marriage

	<u>Husband</u>		<u>Wife</u>	
Financial Costs of Children	0.24 (0.45)		0.36 (0.44)	
Worries of Childrearing	-0.47 (0.62)		-0.84 (0.62)	
Prestige in Childrearing	0.28 (0.52)		0.27 (0.51)	
Duty to Bear Children	0.34 (0.21)	*	0.40 (0.20)	**
Centrality of Marriage in Life	1.04 (0.29)	***	0.49 (0.27)	*
Gender Attitudes	0.95 (0.40)	***	1.91 (0.41)	***

Source. Wave 1, Marriage Matters, 1999-2000. University of Virginia.

Note 1. * Significant at .05 level
 ** Significant at .025 level
 *** Significant at .001 level