The Uncharted Journey: Understanding the Experience of Engaged Young Adult Bahá'ís

by

Nura C. Mowzoon

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Approved:

_____   _____

Date of Final Defense   Pat Cole, Ph.D.
                                     Chair

                                     _____

                                     Jim Hibel, Ph.D.

                                     _____

                                     Shelley Green, Ph.D.

_____   _____

Date of Final Approval   Pat Cole, Ph.D.
                                     Chair

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Abstract

Marriage and spirituality are two very popular issues on the minds of many religious young adults in today's society. Most world religions place emphasis on the significance of marriage, yet very little research has focused on what the experience is like for the believers of these religions when they implement religious guidance on their journey for their spouse. Additionally, little to no research exists to analyze the usefulness of premarital assessments with specific religious groups. In this study, members of the Bahá'í Faith between the ages of 20 and 35 were interviewed to get an intimate look at their journey of marital preparation, both in the sphere of applying religious principles as well as analyzing the usefulness of a premarital assessment. It was found that the participants in this study were stuck in a difficult predicament, in that they felt they were under harsh scrutiny by both members of their religious community and mainstream society. Additionally, they felt that the evaluated questionnaire offered little useful perspective. The information garnered from this grounded theory study will hopefully provide the first stepping stones toward understanding the relationship between religiosity and marital preparation.

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

The topic of marriage is one that permeates the lives of many individuals on a regular basis. For some, it occupies their thoughts on a personal level, often causing a mixture of feelings including concern, excitement, confusion and even fear. For others, such as therapists who work with clients seeking assistance individually or as part of couples, it is a regular part of their professional sphere. In an attempt to ensure the best outcome, people often make the effort to consciously prepare for marriage; this preparation can take a variety of forms, including praying, meditating, reading self-help books, or seeking professional guidance.

For many couples, a major factor influencing their premarital preparation is the guidance offered to them through their religious belief system or community. Various world religions contain teachings that shed light upon the institution of marriage—its purpose and its importance, as well as ways in which one should treat his or her spouse. However, a common feeling among many religious individuals is that religious practice and virtue are not valued in North American society, and it can often be tricky trying to navigate the waters of the dating world while holding firmly to one's religious beliefs.

So what is it like to be religious and looking for, or maybe even getting to know, one's future spouse? Are there practical, effective tools available that can facilitate this process? The purpose of this study is to explore and understand two topics: (a) the experience of religious individuals applying religious guidance to marital preparation, and (b) their analysis of a widely used and respected premarital assessment, in an effort to evaluate its applicability and usefulness. To further clarify, this study explores this experience for members of the Bahá'í Faith, and gathers their personal critiques of the

questions listed in the assessment to determine whether or not they find this assessment to be a useful and thought-provoking tool in guiding their premarital investigation process.

Personal Background Inspiring the Study

Growing up in a multicultural family, I was raised with a keen awareness of how cultural backgrounds strongly affect understanding and communication between two people. My parents spent a great deal of time working through their differences, and needless to say at times it was difficult for them. My mother came from an Iranian background, and my father was raised in the United States; this blending of East and West in their marriage was beautiful, but within that beauty came some struggles that took a great deal of effort and dedication to work through. My parents modeled for me a strong commitment to marriage, and I witnessed the ceaseless energy that was poured into finding common ground and mutual respect, despite the occasional clashing of cultural backgrounds and norms. Watching my parents work and grow together taught me the value of dedication and commitment to marriage, and I realized that when a couple shares the same unified vision—that of a happy, healthy marriage—true marital satisfaction can be achieved. This experience growing up fostered in me a genuine interest in marriage and inspired me to become a marriage and family therapist. I became passionate about understanding the marital dynamic and helping couples find their happiness.

Religion played an integral role in my life and the lives of my family members. Being a member of the Bahá'í Faith, a religion that provides guidance in many facets of life, my faith is not just a part of my life; it is completely blended with every aspect of my identity. The teachings of the Bahá'í Faith inform every element of my day-to-day life,

from the way I interact with others to the perspective I choose to have on life's various issues. The Bahá'í writings concentrate a great deal on the loving approach one should have when interacting with others and the need for maintaining an intention of unity and fellowship with everyone whose path we cross.

My parents are also members of the Bahá'í Faith, and it was through their incorporation of religious beliefs and teachings that I became aware of how much religiosity can affect the marital union. I saw the way in which they would incorporate their beliefs into their consultations with one another, as well as the way it was reflected in their individual dispositions and characters. It became clear to me that the Bahá'í Faith played a fundamental role in helping them overcome differences and create a unified vision within their marriage.

The Intersection of Marriage and Religion in Adulthood

As a 30-something adult, I now find myself in a peer group filled with friends either hoping or planning to get married. It is fascinating to observe them preparing for marriage, and to see the differences and commonalities in their respective journeys. I started to notice, however, that there was a difference in approach between my friends who are religious and those who are not. Those who are religious incorporate a more spiritual element into their preparation process, which made me wonder how their spirituality influenced their experience. Many of my religious friends, who belong to a variety of faiths, incorporate religious teachings into their lens when critically evaluating their readiness for marriage or their compatibility with their potential future spouse. Realizing this made me begin to question what the experience is like for religious individuals—particularly those in my religious group—who are preparing for marriage.

This study intertwines the three most predominant aspects of my present life: religion, marriage, and therapy. Taking these rather broad topics and narrowing them down into the specifics that intrigue me the most makes for a study that I feel is not only interesting to me personally, but also a useful addition to anyone interested in religiosity and marital preparation. By studying the experience of Bahá'ís preparing for marriage, I hope to glean helpful information that will be a valuable contribution to both the field of marriage and family therapy and my religious community. In the following sections I offer a brief overview of the development of and relationship between marriage and religion in a general sense; I then bring a sharper focus onto this relationship within the Bahá'í community.

The Evolution of Marriage and Religion

Very few things can be traced so far back in recorded history that we do not know when or how they actually originated. However, two things that have been around from as far back as we know, in one form or another, are the traditions of marriage (Squire, 2008) and religion (Idinopulos, 1998). While marriage has taken many different shapes and definitions—from being purely for practical purposes to becoming love-driven, and from being perhaps a less formal and institutionalized scenario to being what it is today— people have always sought companionship and have coupled together, forming families and perpetuating their lineage (Squire, 2008).

Historical evidence suggests that humanity has always believed in some sort of Higher Power (Ellwood, 1996; Idinopulos, 1998). Various anthropologists have developed different theories on the origin of religion. Some advocate the animist theory, which contends that a belief in the soul stems from the individual's first experience of

dreams; others argue that magic came before religion, and that there is a connection between sorcery and a belief in gods; and Freud's psychoanalytic perspective claims that religion is a reflection of the sickening crime of patricide (Ellwood, 1996). However, it has became increasingly clear that one can never know with absolute certainty how exactly religion originated; therefore, many scholars gave up on their quest for origins and decided to describe religion as it is (Ellwood, 1996).

The notion of God (or gods) has evolved from being represented in material things, such as rocks and statues, to becoming a more abstract belief. Evidence has shown that a broad variety of cultures have worshipped a deity (or deities) in various ways. Historically, many of these cultures were, and still are, completely removed from other societies; yet an overwhelming number of them convey a belief in spiritual guidance (Ellwood, 1996).

The evolution and development of marriage and religion over the ages are indicative of the progress of civilization. However, a paradox exists: Although civilization has advanced by leaps and bounds in a multitude of ways—technologically, scientifically, and socially—the deference given to the institution of marriage in the United States is at an all-time low. Never before have things like cohabitation, unmarried sex, having children outside of wedlock, or opting for singlehood late into life been so common (Campbell & Wright, 2010; Cherlin, 2004). People who do choose marriage often opt to get married much later in life, and divorce is often seen as a simple, relatively convenient solution to getting out of an unpleasant situation.

Marriage, Religion, and the Individual: A Systemic Relationship

Systemic theory promotes an understanding of individuals in relationship to all facets of their lives, rather than in isolation; these different facets are constantly influencing and affecting one another (Becvar & Becvar, 1999). When therapists work with religious individuals, it is wise for them to recognize that their religion and their marriage are very likely two large parts of their system, which will have a strong impact on their lives. Religion frequently plays a large role in the way people view marriage. Many religions view marriage as a divinely ordained institution (Abbás, 1973), something their Higher Power desires for them, and also the appropriate means by which children should be raised. Often it is the individual's religious belief that has the strongest influence on his or her attitude toward marriage; such beliefs can encourage individuals to seek out a life partner, weather some of the difficult storms that can occur during marriage, and even provide helpful counsel for contributing to the happiness and success of a marriage (Lambert & Dollahite, 2006).

While society's approach to marriage has changed drastically over time, religion has maintained a constant, ever-present, significant source of influence for many people. Various religions throughout the world offer guidance in the institution of marriage, and interestingly, enough much of that advice is the same across religions and across centuries. The scriptures of different faiths often refer to marriage as a sacred institution, teach fidelity, and discourage separation and divorce (Bahá'u'lláh, 1992; Carroll & Prickett, 1997; Dawood, 2006). They encourage love, patience, and kindness toward all, including one's spouse (Abbás, 1982; Carroll & Prickett, 1997; Dawood, 2006; Lal,

1967). Yet people often reject religious guidance, and in the name of free will call it repressive or intrusive.

In the understanding of the relationship between religiosity and marriage lies a potentially surprising finding: Individuals with high levels of religiosity actually report the highest marital satisfaction and have the lowest divorce rate (Campbell & Wright, 2010; Lambert & Dollahite, 2006). When times get difficult in their marriages, religious people are more likely to seek counsel from a member of clergy rather than consult a mental health professional (Halford, Markman, Kline, & Stanley, 2003). It would seem that despite society's resistance, religious teachings may actually provide valid insight and guidance.

While many systemic clinicians recognize that religion can play a major role in the system of an individual's life, a large number of these clinicians are hesitant to actually incorporate religion and spirituality into therapy. Some may believe that religion can be viewed as repressive or authoritative, while others argue that it is simply not scientific enough to be considered integral to the therapeutic process (Stander, Piercy, MacKinnon, & Helmeke, 1994; Wolf & Stevens, 2001). However, if religion or spirituality is important to the client, then it should be the client's decision as to whether or not it should be brought into the therapy room.

Integrating spirituality into therapy could not only be useful to the client, it could also be beneficial to the therapist, in that her or she would be exposed to a variety of belief systems that might otherwise remain foreign or simply unknown to them. In a study conducted by Post and Wade (2009), the researchers found that a therapist's lack of familiarity with the religious beliefs of his or her clients could result in altered clinical

judgment, with an increased likelihood of the therapist labeling unfamiliar belief systems as pathological. Lack of exposure to various faiths could lead to inadequate clinical treatment, ultimately being to the detriment of the religiously inclined client. The present study attempts to shed light on the beliefs and practices of members of the Bahá'í Faith, in hopes of making a faith that may seem obscure become somewhat more familiar.

Understanding Religion and Marital Preparation Within the Bahá'í Community

Members of the Bahá'í Faith would not only say that religious teachings offer crucial advice for the well-being and prosperity of the institution of marriage, but they would also take it one major step further: Bahá'ís believe that the global decay of society exists *because* humanity has lost touch with God (Abbás, 1985). Materialism has become the primary focus, and spirituality has taken the back seat. According to the Bahá'ís, this disconnect with God and His guidance is the source of the major ills of the world. Famine, war, racism, classism, and the breakdown of the family unit, just to name a few, quite simply would not exist if human beings were tapped into their higher natures, acknowledged their spiritual interconnectedness with one another, and followed the guidance offered to them in every major religion of the world—guidance such as loving one's neighbor, preferring others before ourselves, not speaking ill of others, practicing forgiveness, and being truthful, just to name a few (Abbás, 1985). Every major world religion has taught these teachings, and many would contend that if society truly put these teachings into practice, the world would not be in the state it is in today.

This is not to imply that a religious society is automatically free from divisive phenomena such as war, racism, inequality, or oppression, or that a secular society cannot be peaceful and progressive. In fact, many would argue that highly religious communities

are the most corrupt. However, a counter-argument could be made that these societies are not truly in alignment with the actual teachings of the faith to which they claim adherence. It would seem that the implementation of the religious *principles*— and not simply the label of the religion—is the crucial factor. These principles are applicable to, and often practiced in, both secular and non-secular societies.

According to the Bahá'í Faith, the family is the nucleus of society. If the core of civilization is unhealthy and struggling, it will undoubtedly have a ripple effect on the overall progress of the world (Bahá'u'lláh, 1992). The best way to ensure a strong core is to establish a strong foundation for that core, and that foundation starts to be laid during the courtship process, prior to the marriage even happening. By understanding the experience that Bahá'ís have when they are in this preparation process—whether they are part of a couple or single and preparing for marriage—we can begin to have an awareness of the detailed process of marriage preparation, and can potentially identify themes and patterns within that process.

The Bahá'í Faith is a religion whose main purpose is to bring about world unity. The Bahá'í writings view the family as the bedrock of the entire structure of human society (Bahá'u'lláh, 1992); therefore, the well-being of the family has a direct impact on the welfare of the globe. Since the family is given such significance, there is a great deal of guidance in the Bahá'í writings on how one should view marriage, the care and consideration one should take when getting to know potential spouses, and the various facets of the interpersonal dynamic that should take precedence over others. These will be elaborated upon in future chapters.

Significance of the Proposed Study

Research has established the positive effect of religiosity on marital satisfaction (Campbell & Wright, 2010; Lambert & Dollahite, 2006). However, few researchers have actually explored the experience of religious individuals *preparing* for marriage. The research that does exist focuses on the usefulness of premarital assessments within some religious groups (Busby, Ivey, Harris, & Ates, 2007; Williams & Jurich, 1995), but still does not specifically analyze the application of religious guidance to mate selection, as described by the participants. The purpose of the present study is to gain an in-depth understanding of the experience of Bahá'ís who are preparing for marriage, in an effort to contribute both to the therapy world and the Bahá'í community. Since many religions have similar prescriptions for behavior, this research could be a valid tool for any therapist curious about religiosity and marital preparation.

Premarital assessments are often used with couples to give them insight into their dynamic, to bring their strengths and weaknesses to the forefront, and to create a space in which these can be discussed to evaluate their compatibility and create a stronger relationship (Murray & Murray, 2004; Yilmaz & Kalkan, 2010). While a wide variety of premarital assessments exist, it is important to find one that is applicable and useful to the couple who will be utilizing it. For couples who are religious or spiritual, the effectiveness of a premarital assessment can be quite limited if it does not address religion or spirituality (Sullivan & Karney, 2008).

Risch, Riley, and Lawler (2003) remind therapists that it is important for the premarital assessment to focus on what is of most interest to the couple, not the therapist. If the couple taking the premarital assessment is religious, part of the assessment should

address their religious beliefs in some way (Sullivan & Karney, 2008). However, while some assessments have been designed to work with members of particular religions, I found that research was lacking regarding the effectiveness of premarital assessments with specific religious groups (Busby et al., 2007; Larson et al., 1995). Part of the focus of the current study is to have the participants evaluate an established premarital assessment and offer input as to what aspects of the assessment they find relevant to themselves and what other questions and topics they feel would be beneficial to include in the assessment. By gleaning input from religious individuals as to the content they feel is applicable to them, therapists can learn to tailor their assessments when working with couples in which one or both members are religious.

Preview of Chapters

In the current chapter I discussed my personal interest in the present study, established the connection between religion and marriage, briefly discussed the Bahá'í Faith and its perspective on marriage, and brought to light the void in research that examines religiosity and premarital preparation. In Chapter II I discuss the teachings of the Bahá'í Faith as well as literature regarding marriage, premarital preparation, and the relationship between religion and marriage. In Chapter III I detail the methodological design of the study and explain the reasoning behind using a grounded theory approach towards my research. I also discuss the sample size, data generation techniques, processing and analysis of the data, and overall generalizability and validity of the study. In Chapter IV, I present the results of the research and the analysis of the data, and in Chapter V I discuss the findings and address the implications for future research.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

The Bahá'í Faith

The writings of the Bahá'í Faith offer a great deal of guidance on a multitude of topics, and an area which has been given much importance is that of marriage and family life. In this chapter I will offer a brief overview of the general tenets of the Bahá'í Faith, as well as specific writings regarding marriage. Research regarding marriage, premarital therapy, and premarital assessments will also be highlighted, as well as literature that focuses on the connection between religiosity and marital satisfaction.

History

The Bahá'í Faith is the youngest independent world religion (Bahá'í International Community, 2013). Originating in 1863 in former Persia (modern-day Iran), the founder of the Bahá'í Faith was a man by the name of Bahá'u'lláh, an Arabic title meaning *the Glory of God* (Abbás, 1918). Bahá'ís believe that Bahá'u'lláh is a Manifestation of God, sent by God to the world to bring divine guidance to humanity for this age (Bahá'í International Community, 2013). According to Bahá'í belief, Manifestations of God have appeared at intervals throughout history—each with a particular message to meet the needs of humanity in the time in which they came—and have founded the world's great religious systems (Abbás, 1982; Universal House of Justice, 2005). Bahá'ís believe that each Manifestation of God—including Abraham, Buddha, Krishna, Moses, Christ, Mohammed, and the Báb—has been sent by God to enable us to know our Creator, to worship Him, and to bring human civilization to higher levels of achievement and progress (Abbás, 1982).

When Bahá'u'lláh passed away in 1892, he appointed his eldest son 'Abdu'l-Bahá Abbás as his successor in his Will and Testament and put the trust of the Bahá'í Faith in his hands, making him the sole interpreter of his writings (Bahá'u'lláh, 1992). When 'Abdu'l-Bahá died in 1921, he appointed his grandson, Shoghi Effendi Rabbani, as the head of the Faith, and Bahá'ís were instructed to turn to him for guidance (Abbás, 1990; Esslemont, 1980). When Shoghi Effendi died in 1957, the Universal House of Justice came into existence. The Universal House of Justice is a body of nine individuals who are elected every five years by Bahá'ís around the world, and who serve as the administrative head of the Bahá'í Faith that guides the activities of the Bahá'ís globally and is seen as an instrument of divine guidance (Bahá'u'lláh, 1988; Taherzadeh, 2000). Because of the careful and intentional guidance given regarding successorship within the Bahá'í Faith, there was no room for other people to claim to be the head of the faith; therefore, there was no opportunity for schisms to form. There is no clergy within the Bahá'í Faith, however there are governing bodies of nine elected individuals, known as Local and National Spiritual Assemblies, who deal with the administrative affairs of Bahá'ís on local and national levels (Bahá'í International Community, 2013).

In just over 140 years, the Bahá'í Faith has gone from being a small, unknown faith to becoming one of the fastest growing religions in the world, the second most geographically widespread, and the single most culturally diverse faith in the world (Bahá'í International Community, 2013). Bahá'ís literally come from all religious and cultural walks of life and view themselves as part of a global community, working together to help bring about world unity.

Central Beliefs

The teachings of different religions can be categorized into two types: social and spiritual (Taherzadeh, 1974). Bahá'u'lláh explained that the spiritual truths of every faith are fundamentally the same; all religions teach us to love, be kind, and be selfless, and not to kill, lie, cheat, or steal. These are spiritual truths that will never change and will always be necessary for humankind. However, the social laws change depending on the needs of society and the capacity of the people in that era. Guidance regarding things like food, marriage, and burial differ because society is constantly evolving and progressing; therefore, social laws must be progressive and attributed to the various needs of the age in which they are revealed (Bahá'u'lláh, 1976).

A second reason the Bahá'í writings offer for the need of the renewal of religion is the fact that over time humanity perverts the purity of the original teachings, to the point where the way the religion is represented in modern-day is quite different from the way it was originally intended and brought to civilization (Abbás, 1976). Individuals apply their own understandings and interpretations to divine revelation, and often the influence of ego and the craving of power causes people to manipulate religion for their personal gain. The essential realities that the prophets of each faith worked so hard to establish—and *every* founder of every major world religion faced intense persecution and suffering—have vanished and been replaced by dogmatic imitations (Abbás, 1976). This distortion of religion, combined with the need for progressive social teachings, is the reason why Bahá'u'lláh taught that religion must be renewed and refreshed every few centuries.

While the Bahá'í Faith reinforces the importance of long-standing spiritual laws, it also brings about a new social awareness for humanity. One of the central principles of the Bahá'í Faith is the promotion of unity on all levels—individually, nationally, and globally (Abbás, 1982). The family is seen as the nucleus of society; therefore, family unity is the essential bedrock upon which unity of other kinds is built (Bahá'u'lláh, 1992). Because of this, the central figures of the Bahá'í Faith, whose writings constitute the holy scriptures for Bahá'ís (Effendi, 1971), have offered a great deal of guidance on the sacredness and importance of marriage—including guidance on the purpose of marriage, the spiritual significance of marriage, how to familiarize oneself with the character of a potential partner, and how to handle differences which will inevitably arise when two people are married. Later sections will further explore the concept of marriage and the Bahá'í Faith.

Marriage

While the social institution of marriage within the United States has changed greatly over the years, the importance people place on it in their lives remains as strong as ever (Campbell & Wright, 2010; Cherlin, 2004). People who are married are happier and healthier, live longer, and report less depression and fewer alcohol problems (Campbell & Wright, 2010; Horwitz, White, & Howell-White, 1996), though several studies indicate that these health benefits are stronger for men than for women (Macionis, 2012). Despite the fact that divorce, cohabitation, and childbearing out of wedlock occur at much higher rates today than they ever have (Teachman, 2003), marriage is still seen as a pivotal point in an individual's life and a marker of prestige. Furthermore, having a high-quality marriage is a primary life goal for most Americans (Campbell & Wright,

2010; Cherlin, 2004; Lloyd & South, 1996). Although the practical importance and emotional perspective on marriage have greatly changed, the symbolic importance placed on it is as high as it has ever been, if not higher (Cherlin, 2004). Regardless of the lifestyles chosen by some, most people greatly respect the institution of marriage and aspire to it. However, cohabitation and child rearing are no longer reserved to marriage, and divorce is much more commonplace.

The History of Marriage

Some surmise that the first *version* of marriage took place when early humans realized that intercourse causes conception, which in turn caused men to realize that in order to claim their children they needed to control their women (Squire, 2008). In time, simple procreation was influenced by the beginnings of Christianity, and the spiritual ideas of celibacy and chastity began to take over (Squire, 2008). Marriage was entered mainly for practical reasons, and individuals sought spouses who would be a *logical* fit. Marriage served many political, social, and economic functions, and the needs and desires of the individual were considered secondary. Love was considered a poor reason to get married and was not the primary factor people took into account when deciding when and whom to marry (Coontz, 2004). Individuals did not let their emotions dictate a decision as significant as marriage; rather, emotions were kept at bay and rationale took precedence, causing people to choose partners who would be the best providers, the best parents, and the best social fit.

In the 18th century, the idea of love as the driving force behind choosing a partner started to take over, both in North America and Western Europe (Coontz, 2004; Squire, 2008). People started putting emotion before logic, and love—rather than pure

practicality—became the main ingredient in choosing a partner. Cherlin (2004) identifies

two major ways in which marriage has changed, particularly in the last century: (a) the

wide spectrum of choice individuals now experience in their personal lives, and (b) the

nature of the rewards people seek through marriage and other close relationships.

Individuals in today's society aim for personal growth and deeper intimacy, while people

in the past focused more on the rewards to be found in fulfilling socially valued roles

(i.e., the good parent or the loyal/supportive spouse) (Cherlin, 2004).

In addition to the approach individuals took to choosing their partner, there was

also a modus operandi when it came to this phase of an individual's life: (a) the marital

ceremony should come first, (b) then, the couple should move in together at the same

time, (c) the two should start to have sex together, then (d) in about a year a child should

be born (Trost, 2010). This order of events was the course people were expected to take,

and any deviation was considered socially unacceptable and severely frowned upon. In

today's society these markers are still expected, but there is no longer a traditional

expectation of the order in which they take place. At one time marriage was considered

the foundation of adult life, but in today's society many consider it to be the capstone

(Cherlin, 2004).

Marriage Today

The institution of marriage in today's Western society is quite different than it

was 200 years ago. While one might hope that marriages based on love are happier and

longer-lasting, the facts point to quite the opposite: The painful truth is that marriages

based on love and personal choice are more fragile and unstable than marriages driven by

social, economic, or political reasons (Campbell & Wright, 2010). Cherlin (2004) refers

to this as the "deinstitutionalization of marriage" (p. 853). According to Cherlin, the social norms that define people's behavior have weakened and count for less than they did in the heyday of companionate marriage. There is a paradox in this: The very things that made marriage a unique and treasured personal relationship in the past two centuries have now paved the way for it to become optional and fragile (Coontz, 2004). However, practices like cohabitation and having children outside of wedlock are not actually replacing marriage; instead, they precede marriage or happen post-divorce (Campbell & Wright, 2010), thereby suggesting that people continue to give deference to the institution of marriage.

The divorce rate is higher than ever, the average age of marriage has gone from 23 to 27 for men and from 20 to 25 for women, more and more children are being born out of wedlock, and cohabitation is accepted as an institution in and of itself (Cherlin, 2004; Trost, 2010). Ironically, things such as cohabitation and multiple sexual partners prior to marriage are correlated with a higher likelihood of divorce (Teachman, 2003). This presents an intriguing question: If society still views marriage as important and one of life's capstones, why does our behavior contradict what we claim to believe? Why do individuals do things that will actually jeopardize the success of the marriage they aspire to have? Are we aware of the sabotaging effect of our actions?

Many North Americans find themselves in a difficult situation, because there is a disconnect between the way we *conceptualize* marriage, and the way we actually *behave* in a marriage (Campbell & Wright, 2010). The belief that marriage should last forever and should be sexually exclusive is an ideal that is both historical and contemporary; yet our ability to uphold this ideal appears to have become more and more difficult across

time. The main reason for this is that the focus is on personal fulfillment as a basis for

marriage (Campbell & Wright, 2010). Human beings are dynamic and ever changing, so

it seems that when our needs change and our feelings of satisfaction wane, the choices we

made in life that may have previously met our needs and desires could easily be found to

not meet our needs later in life. If something more substantial and selfless is not

anchoring this need, it suddenly becomes much more disposable. With personal reasons

as the basis of choosing a marital partner, individuals are more likely to commit infidelity

and/or divorce when satisfaction and love decline (Campbell & Wright, 2010).

Gottman's Principles for Marital Satisfaction

Given the confusing state of marriage in today's society, many people find

themselves unsure of what would actually ensure a happy and thriving marriage. John

Gottman, a renowned therapist and researcher, has done extensive research to identify

factors that contribute to the success of marriage. After conducting longitudinal research

following approximately 650 couples over the span of 14 years, he has identified seven

specific principles, which he contends will lead to a successful marriage (Gottman &

Silver, 1999). His findings are notable and will be briefly reviewed here.

1. Enhance love maps: According to Gottman (1999), couples who are keenly aware
   of their partner's hopes, dreams, and fears are the only ones who truly know their
   spouses.

2. Nurture fondness and admiration: These are considered by Gottman (1999) to be
   the "antidotes to contempt" (p. 65). According to Gottman, fondness and
   admiration are crucial to a couple's friendship, which is the foundation of the
   relationship.

3. Turn toward each other, instead of away: Gottman states that turning toward one's partner is the foundation of emotional connection, romance, passion, and a satisfying sex life, and he feels that turning toward each other in little ways every day is actually the true secret to happiness (Gottman, 1999).

4. Let your partner influence you: Gottman and his fellow researchers have found that while it is clearly necessary for both men and women to allow their partners to influence them, women typically do this on a regular basis and do not resist influence as much as men do (Gottman, 1999). The happiest and most stable marriages are the ones in which the husband does not resist decision making and power sharing with his wife (Gottman, 1999).

5. Solve your solvable problems: Gottman proposes a five-step approach to conflict resolution: (a) soften your startup, (b) learn to make and receive repair attempts, (c) soothe yourself and each other, (d) compromise, and (e) be tolerant of each other's faults (Gottman, 1999).

6. Overcome gridlock: According to Gottman (1999), the goal in ending gridlock is to move from gridlock to dialogue. Before two people can move past gridlock, they must understand the root of the problem.

7. Create shared meaning: When two people get married, a microculture is created; within this small entity, unique customs, rituals, and stories are created (Gottman, 1999). The culture that is jointly developed by the couple incorporates each individual's dreams and creates a shared sense of meaning (Gottman, 1999).

While Gottman's (1999) research participants in this particular study were all married couples—from newlyweds to couples celebrating decades of marriage—his

findings could also be applied to people preparing for marriage. Couples who strive to strengthen their relationship as much as possible prior to marriage could not only have a head start utilizing useful tools for marriage enrichment, but they may also learn a great deal about one another as they prepare to share the rest of their lives together.

Premarital Preparation

So is it possible to marry for love, but to also have a fulfilling and lasting marriage? Can we prepare for married life before taking the plunge and increase our chances of having a happy marriage? Very little has been published on ways in which individuals successfully prepare for marriage, but two factors have been identified as being particularly helpful in predicting marital success: premarital preparation (Halford et al., 2003; Murray & Murray, 2004; Stanley, 2001; Yilmaz & Kalkan, 2010) and religiosity (Campbell & Wright, 2010; Clements, 2004; Lambert & Dollahite, 2006). Surprisingly, very few researchers have explored *how* premarital preparation amongst religious individuals influences the process of preparing for marriage. In the following section I will discuss some of the sparse work that has been done regarding the influence of religiosity and premarital therapy.

Premarital Therapy

Premarital therapy is a therapeutic couple intervention that takes place with couples who plan to marry or are exploring the possibility of marriage. It is a "skills training procedure which aims at providing couples with information on ways to improve their relationship once they're married" (Sendiak, 1990, p. 6). Premarital therapy has its roots in the clergy. It began with religious officials such as priests, rabbis, and ministers who wanted to help strengthen marriages (Halford et al., 2003; Hunt, Hof, & DeMaria,

1998). In the early 1950s, different religious organizations started to offer structured relationship education programs for couples who were planning to marry (Hunt et al., 1998), and by the late 1990s between one quarter and one third of marrying couples in the United States, Australia, and Britain were attending some type of relationship education (Halford, 1999; Simons, Harris, & Willis, 1994; Stanley, 2001; Sullivan & Bradbury, 1997). Today, premarital preparation has gained such popularity and respect that some state legislatures offer incentives to couples who participate in some form of premarital counseling (Larson, Newell, Topham, & Nichols, 2002).

The seeds of marital distress are often sown well before the couple ties the knot (Clements, 2004). Due to the fact that the risk of divorce is highest in the early years of marriage, early action—as early as before the marriage actually takes place—can be extremely beneficial (Murray & Murray, 2004). Jacobson and Addis (1993) point out that newlyweds or couples who are about to marry are likely to be much more open to change-oriented programs, partly because they tend to be younger, happier, and more emotionally engaged. It seems that prevention, rather than intervention, is the ideal objective.

Couples partake in premarital therapy for a variety of reasons, including identifying potential difficulties that may arise in the future and developing the tools needed to work through them, as well as identifying their strengths and enhancing them. The goals of premarital therapy typically include: (a) teaching the couple information about married life, (b) enhancing communication skills, (c) encouraging couples to develop conflict resolution skills, and (d) allowing the couple to speak about sensitive

topics, such as money and sex (Carroll & Doherty, 2003; Murray & Murray, 2004; Risch, Riley, & Lawler, 2003; Yilmaz & Kalkan, 2010).

While little longitudinal research has been conducted on the long-term effects of premarital therapy (Carroll & Doherty, 2003), studies do show that it can be very helpful, and that couples who participate in premarital therapy usually demonstrate overall positive psychological health and do not have serious relationship problems (Murray & Murray, 2004). However, it is unclear whether the low conflict is a *result* of premarital therapy, or if couples who are low-risk are more likely to participate in premarital therapy in the first place. One study concluded that there is little evidence that high-risk couples would participate in relationship education, and that low-risk couples are more likely to attend compared to high-risk couples (Halford et al., 2003).

Stanley (2001) presents four strong potential benefits to couples who engage in premarital therapy: (a) it can slow couples down to cultivate deliberation, (b) it can send a message that marriage matters, (c) it can help couples learn about options if and when they need help in the future, and (d) it can lower the risk of subsequent marital distress or termination in some couples. A potential pre-effect of marital therapy is that approximately 5-15% of couples who experience it decide not to get married (Risch et al., 2003). This indicates that if individuals take the time to thoroughly educate themselves about one another, bringing the logical and emotional aspects together, at times they may elect to not go through with the marriage, thereby bypassing potential future dissatisfaction, infidelity, or divorce.

Premarital Assessments

When conducting premarital therapy, some therapists choose to administer an assessment. Assessments allow the couple to participate in an educational activity, usually involving self-report questionnaires, which provide insight into various dimensions that are shown to be predictive of later marital satisfaction and stability (Busby et al., 2007; Larson et al., 1995). Gottman (1999) points out that assessment is not an intellectual process; rather, it is an emotional exercise, where core issues are evaluated. The goal of most assessments is to strengthen the relationship and provide feedback to the couple on ways they could improve their relationship (Busby et al., 2007). Participating in an assessment also offers the couple the opportunity to discuss previously unaddressed issues and explore improvements in communication. In addition, it provides the couple with the additional perspective of the therapist or facilitator administering the assessment (Busby et al., 2007).

While many studies indicate that assessments significantly improve relationship functioning (Busby et al., 2007; Halford et al., 2003; Larson, Vatter, Galbraith, Holman, & Stahmann, 2007), some argue that not enough research has been conducted to evaluate the quality and effectiveness of these programs in the long-term (Busby et al., 2007; Larson et al., 1995) and that the research that does exist may not be empirically valid (Jakubowski, Milne, Brunner, & Miller, 2004). One criticism of providing feedback to couples about their differences is that they may not have the skills necessary to manage the conflict that arises as a result, causing it to potentially have a counterproductive effect (Busby et al., 2007). However, one could argue that the lack of conflict management skills would eventually surface, and it would be best to address this prior to the marriage.

Additionally, some researchers feel that the self-focused aspect of the reports could skew the accuracy, since people may not be likely to respond completely honestly, with the therapist or with themselves, when reporting on difficult or unpleasant topics (Busby et al., 2007). While these criticisms are all valid, many feel that creating awareness and sparking consultation are useful and that being proactive about potential issues is a positive thing.

Widely Used Premarital Assessments

Although a wide variety of premarital assessments are available, only a particular few are well known and commonly used. Larson et al. (2002) outline five key criteria for evaluating the strength of a premarital assessment questionnaire (PAQ). According to these researchers, a strong PAQ should:

1. Be designed primarily or exclusively to evaluate the premarital relationship. Couples about to get married will have particular expectations that should be directly addressed.

2. Collect comprehensive data that are relevant to the premarital counseling process. Both the test administrator and the couple should be able to garner information from the PAQ that will be predictive of later marital satisfaction.

3. Be easy to administer and widely applicable

4. Be easy to interpret

5. Be reliable and valid

Three particularly well known PAQs that meet all of the aforementioned criteria are the Premarital Personal and Relationship Evaluation (PREPARE), Facilitating Open Couple Communication, Understanding Study (FOCCUS), and the Relationship

Evaluation (RELATE) (Busby et al., 2007; Larson et al., 1995; Larson et al., 2002; Russell & Lyster, 1992). These PAQs are commonly used by therapists as well as clergy; they have been shown to have predictive validity in determining the future success of couples (Larson et al., 2002; Williams & Jurich, 1995).

PREPARE. PREPARE is a 195-item inventory which is designed to address areas of strength within the couple, as well as areas that require attention (Larson et al., 2002; Williams & Jurich, 1995). The questions in PREPARE are based on an extensive review of literature which discusses significant issues in premarital relationship quality (Fowers, Montel, & Olson, 1996). Some of the strengths of PREPARE include its somewhat shorter length, comprehensiveness, and ease of administration and interpretation (Larson et al., 2002). Areas of concern include the fact that it does not measure three factors that influence marital satisfaction: parental mental illness,similarity of intelligence, and similarity of absolute status (i.e., similarities in age, income, education, etc.) (Larson et al., 2002). Despite the areas lacking in the design, various studies have shown that PREPARE has strong predictive validity (Larson et al., 2002; Larson et al., 1995; Williams & Jurich, 1995).

FOCCUS. FOCCUS is a 156-item PAQ that it is utilized by approximately two-thirds of the Roman Catholic dioceses and over 500 Protestant churches of different denominations across the United States (Larson et al., 1995; Larson et al., 2002; Williams & Jurich, 1995). One of the unique features of FOCCUS is that, while it was designed to reflect the values of the Roman Catholic church (i.e., fidelity, forgiveness, unconditional love), it is also designed to work with interfaith couples, non-denominational couples, and a variety of other couples (Williams & Jurich, 1995). Like PREPARE, FOCCUS was

also designed to reflect the latest research on the ingredients necessary for a successful marriage, and both FOCCUS and PREPARE have been found to have similar predictive validity (Larson, 2002; Williams & Jurich, 1995). However, Larson et al. (2002) argue that FOCCUS has the same weaknesses as PREPARE, in that it also does not account for parental mental illness, similarity of intelligence, and similarity of absolute status.

FOCCUS was developed to work with a wide variety of relationships, including interfaith marriages, teen marriages, older marriages, second marriages, and cohabitating couples (Williams & Jurich, 1995). However, this could potentially be seen as a weakness, since one could contend that couples who fall into the more unique categories would need assessments tailored much more specifically to their circumstances. Also, a qualified facilitator needs to administer the assessment, thereby making it less accessible than the RELATE.

RELATE. RELATE, a 271-item questionnaire, is arguably the most comprehensive of the PAQs (Larson et al., 1995; Larson et al., 2002), as it takes into account the principles of time, change, and continuity with the contexts that surround the couples (Busby et al., 2007). The authors of RELATE noted the importance of tailoring interventions to the specific qualities, challenges, and strengths of each individual couple (Busbey et al., 2007). RELATE is also unique because it was designed to be used in large groups and in teaching settings (Larson, 2002), and can also be used with non-romantically involved individuals (Larson et al., 1995). Of the three assessments, RELATE is the easiest to interpret, since the couple gets the results directly and does not need counselor's interpretation. Furthermore, as part of the RELATE results, the couple also receives guidelines on what to do when differences arise (Larson et al., 2002).

RELATE, like the other two PAQs, does not address similarity of absolute status, but it does take into account parental mental illness and similarity of intelligence (Larson et al., 2002). Additionally, RELATE was designed to work with individuals of various faiths.

Of the three featured assessments, RELATE seems to be the most aligned with the systemic perspective, due to its acknowledgment that the various elements that affect the marital system will change over time, and that these elements should be measured and evaluated repeatedly and systematically (Busby et al., 2007). There is little information on whether or not PAQs influence relationship outcomes; however, the scant data that does exist seems to show that only RELATE has the ability to positively influence relationship outcomes in the short-term (Busby et al., 2007). Given its comprehensiveness, accessibility, and tested usefulness, I chose RELATE as the PAQ to be analyzed by the participants in the current study.

In the present study, I gave a copy of RELATE to the participants and asked them to evaluate the questions and offer input on what other areas would be especially helpful to be addressed by members of the Bahá'í community who are preparing for marriage. Through extensive interviews, combined with the evaluation of an already established and respected assessment such as RELATE, a more intimate understanding of how a Bahá'í prepares him- or herself for marriage can be gained, and helpful information can be gathered on ways in which they feel premarital tools can best prepare them for one of the biggest milestones of their lives.

Religiosity and Marital Preparation

Religious people report higher levels of marital satisfaction and are more likely to stay together (Campbell & Wright, 2010; Lambert & Dollahite, 2006). Individuals who

ascribe to a religion typically feel they have made a moral commitment they are dedicated to because of promises to themselves, their spouses, or God. These individuals believe very much in the sanctity of marriage and view their commitment as a social and religious responsibility (Campbell & Wright, 2010). Because marriage is given such significance, it would be natural to assume that religious people take extra care and precaution when preparing for marriage. However, very little research discusses the connection between religious people and marital satisfaction (Lambert & Dollahite, 2006), and even less research has been conducted to study individuals of religious populations and their experience of *preparing* for marriage

Religion and Conflict Resolution

Couples who identify themselves as religious—particularly in situations in which both individuals identify with the same religion—report lower levels of marital conflict and higher levels of marital satisfaction (Lambert & Dollahite, 2006; Mahoney, Pargament, Tarakeshwar, & Swank, 2008). However, it is not just being affiliated with a religion that matters; it is the way the religiosity plays out in day-to-day life (Gottman, 1999). Couples assert that the influence of religion helps them cultivate a sacred vision and purpose as well as enhance their relational virtues, and that seeking spiritual guidance through scripture and finding the same answers together helps to reduce marital stress (Lambert & Dollahite, 2006). Higher levels of religiousness have also been consistently linked with a greater commitment to the marital relationship (Mahoney et al., 2008). In a study conducted by Lambert and Dollahite (2006), the researchers found that their participants believed they had learned and put into practice the virtues of selflessness, unconditional love, and forgiveness. Individuals seem to take to heart and then apply

virtues that they feel are commendable in the sight of a Higher Power. Couples in Lambert and Dollahite's (2006) study also reported that their religiosity helped them deal with conflict in their marriage during three phases of the conflict process: (a) problem prevention, (b) conflict resolution, and (c) relationship reconciliation. These phases will be briefly reviewed below.

Problem Prevention

The couples in Lambert and Dollahite's (2006) study felt that their religion helped them foster a sacred vision and purpose as well as enhance their relational virtues— particularly the virtue of selflessness (Lambert & Dollahite, 2006). Having a shared vision was found to facilitate unity between the couple, and was reported to decrease stress. Seeking answers through scriptures and finding answers collaboratively were both reported to be particularly helpful (Lambert & Dollahite, 2006).

Conflict Resolution

Lambert and Dollahite (2006) found that the couples in their study identified the following three specific practices that contributed to effective conflict resolution:

1. Scriptural teachings: Couples reported viewing their respective scriptures as sources of information. They believed that specific teachings helped them work through disharmony. Many couples also felt that their scriptures provided stories that served as examples for how they should handle various issues that arise within the marriage (Lambert & Dollahite, 2006).

2. Attendance at religious services: Going to religious services was reported to shift the focus from trivial arguments to something the couple perceived as more important. Couples interviewed in this study also felt that attending religious

services gave them the personal strength needed to resolve their problems (Lambert & Dollahite, 2006).

3. Prayer: Prayer was found to decrease negativity, contempt, hostility, and emotional reactivity towards one's partner, while facilitating forgiveness (Jankowski & Sandage, 2011; Lambert & Dollahite, 2006). Couples stated that they felt prayer promoted open communication and empathy, increased self-change focus, and encouraged couple responsibility.

Relationship Reconciliation

Lambert and Dollahite (2006) found that the participants in their study believed their religiosity helped them see their marriage as lasting, not just for the *here and now*. This sense of permanency seemed to make couples more committed to reconciling issues and healing problems within the relationship. Couples also reported that they were reminded of the importance of forgiveness through their scriptures; on an even more specific level, some participants felt they were more willing to forgive out of their gratitude for God forgiving them (Lambert & Dollahite, 2006).

This suggests that for every step of the process, beliefs play a major role in the realm of conflict resolution for the religious couple, and that the shared vision of religiosity is a powerful tool. It also suggests that the couple has what could almost be conceptualized as a third party in the life of the marriage: their belief in a Higher Power. Religious couples believe that this third figure is the point of commonality that they turn to together in order to find and maintain a common ground.

Marriage and the Bahá'í Faith

According to Abbás (1909):

The marriage of the Bahá'ís means that both man and woman must become

spiritually and physically united, so that they may have eternal unity throughout

all the divine worlds and improve the spiritual life of each other. This is Bahá'í

matrimony. (pp. 325-326)

The Bahá'í writings teach that marriage is a divinely ordained and holy institution, and

that it is something God desires for humanity (Abbás, 1909; Rabbani, 1981). Bahá'u'lláh

(1992) refers to marriage as a "fortress for well-being and salvation" (p. 205) and states

that when two people get married, it is not just a union between two bodies; more

importantly, it is a unification of two souls. Since the married couple's connection is a

spiritual one, it will endure forever (Abbás, 1976, 1982). The union of marriage brings

the two souls together, uniting them and making them as if they were one soul (Abbás,

1909, 1982).

According to Bahá'í teachings, the spiritual connection would not exist without

the presence of God and love for Him. 'Abdu'l-Bahá (1972), the son of Bahá'u'lláh,

stated:

The love which exists between the hearts of the believers is prompted by the ideal

of the unity of the spirits. . . . Each sees in the other the Beauty of God reflected in

the soul, and finding this point of similarity, they are attracted to one another in

love. (p. 180)

This illustrates the fact that for Bahá'ís, the awareness of the presence of God is a crucial

part of not only the union, but also the attraction itself. To recognize that God is present

for the entire journey between two people could be a source of guidance, comfort, and encouragement for the couple, helping them keep in mind that the process should transcend physical attraction and simple, superficial commonalities which do not ultimately make a relationship successful.

The spiritual tie between husband and wife is greatly emphasized, and the Bahá'í writings state that both should always strive to encourage spiritual growth and development in one another. This growth is not only necessary for us as individuals and for the well-being of our souls, but on a larger scale, it is also crucial to the overall peace, prosperity, and advancement of the world. The primary way of bringing this about is by having children and fostering a connection between them and God, and by adopting the mentality of contributing to the betterment of humanity (Abbás, 1982; Rabbani, 1991). One could understand this as a large-scale ripple effect. In other words, establishing unity between the couple is essential to having unity within the family. When children grow up with an awareness of the need for unity, and it is modeled for them in their home, they grow up with an outward-facing orientation, striving to bring about the unity of the world.

According to Abbás (1982):

. . . the importance of marriage lieth in the bringing up of a richly blessed family, so that with entire gladness they may, even as candles, illuminate the world. For the enlightenment of the world dependeth upon the existence of man. If man did not exist in this world, it would have been like a tree without fruit. My hope is that you both may become even as one tree, and may, through the outpourings of

the cloud of loving-kindness, acquire freshness and charm, and may blossom and

yield fruit, so that your line may eternally endure. (p. 120)

Preparation for Marriage in the Bahá'í Faith

In the only recorded study that examined marital preparation in the Bahá'í

community, Bahbahani and Diehl (2008) surveyed hundreds of young adult Bahá'ís in

North America regarding their attitudes toward marriage and the issues they felt they

faced as single Bahá'ís. They found that their respondents had a strong urge to marry and

believed in marriage as a divine institution, yet they felt a lack of guidance from the

larger community (Bahbahani & Diehl, 2008). Additionally, because the Bahá'í

community is relatively small, they felt that their relationships were constantly under

scrutiny, and that this scrutiny placed pressure on the relationship and affected the natural

course of getting to know the other person (Bahbahani & Diehl, 2008).

The expectation of chastity before marriage, combined with the great importance

placed on marriage, as well as the curiosity—and sometimes unintentional judgment—of

the greater Bahá'í community, creates a difficult situation for many. Respondents in this

study felt that there was so much pressure placed on the hoped outcome of marriage that

the process was not given the time, attention, and diligence it deserved (Bahbahani &

Diehl, 2008). As the researchers explained, "The results are a confusing mixture of

pressure without guidance, an obsession with the end goal without any attention to

process, and a lack of space for honest dialogue and learning" (Bahbahani & Diehl, 2008,

p. 8). In an attempt to fill a major gap in understanding, this process was explored in the

present study.

Although there is a great deal of guidance in the Bahá'í writings on the approach one should take when preparing for marriage, Bahbahani and Diehl's (2008) study is the only one of its kind to examine members of the Bahá'í community and their attitudes toward marriage. The following paragraphs will address the specific guidance given in the Bahá'ís writings, which inform a Bahá'ís approach towards marriage.

Because marriage is such a sacred institution, the Bahá'í writings exhort Bahá'ís to exercise a great deal of care and consideration when acquainting themselves with the characters of potential spouses (Abbás, 1909, 1976, 1982). Bahá'ís believe that today's society is extremely lax regarding the sacred nature of marriage, and that Bahá'ís must consciously combat this trend (Winters, 2013). Bahá'ís are encouraged to take great care, study each other's characters, and spend time thoroughly getting to know one another before making the decision to get married; once that decision is made, it should be with the intention of establishing an eternal bond (Abbás, 1982; Universal House of Justice, 1982). It should be pointed out that this approach is the duty of all Bahá'í, regardless of whether or not their partners are of the same faith or a different one.

The Bahá'í writings greatly emphasize focusing on the character of the individual and the spiritual nature of the relationship and not being swayed or distracted by the over-emphasis placed on physical attraction in today's society (Rabbani, 1941). Bahá'ís obey the law of chastity and avoid sexual relations before marriage (Bahá'u'lláh, 1992; Rabbani, 1938, 1981). The sex impulse is acknowledged and given importance, but Bahá'u'lláh teaches that it is within the confines of marriage that it is truly beneficial to the couple (Rabbani, 1981). When two people become caught up in the physical

chemistry that exists between them, their judgment in the other aspects of the dynamic often becomes clouded, and they are unable to be objective when choosing a spouse.

Premarital Assessments and Bahá'ís

Premarital assessments could be especially effective when used with the Bahá'í population, because it would spark a major Bahá'í principle: consultation. The practice of consultation is given a great deal of importance in the Bahá'í writings; Bahá'ís are encouraged to utilize consultation in all matters, and it is viewed as the primary means of facilitating understanding between people (Bahá'u'lláh, 1988). Through the administration of a premarital assessment, the couple would be given an opportunity to consult with each other about the issues that are brought to light, and through their consultation, they would ideally reach a point of awareness and understanding (Bahá'u'lláh, 1988). The Bahá'í writings assert that people in consultation will discover their best path through the discussion of their different and often clashing viewpoints and perspectives (Abbás, 1982).

There is a particular art to the Bahá'í style of consultation, and if this were to be employed when utilizing a premarital assessment, the outcome could be quite helpful for couples. Some of the requisites necessary for effective consultation include purity of motive, humility, patience, love, harmony, and sincerity (Abbás, 1982,1991). Additionally, individuals are exhorted to not allow their feelings to be hurt until the matter is fully and frankly discussed. They are taught that with this approach, consultation can often be a panacea for conflict (Universal House of Justice, 1978). A comprehensive elaboration on the Bahá'í concept of consultation would take a great deal of explanation and is too involved to be thoroughly explained here.

Spirituality, Religion, and Therapy

Religion Versus Spirituality

Although the terms *religion* and *spirituality* are related, Kelly (1995) offers

distinctive definitions for each: Spirituality refers to a personal belief in a transcendent

connectedness to the universe, and religion is an institutional, creedal, and ritual

expression of spirituality associated with the world's religions and denominations. Put in

simpler terms, religion is the organized expression of spirituality. For the purposes of this

paper, religion and spirituality will often be used interchangeably, with the understanding

that reference to a client's spirituality is implied as being under the umbrella of his or her

religious beliefs.

Perspectives on Spirituality and Psychotherapy

For decades, clinicians viewed religion as either a form of pathology or as

something best left outside the therapy room (Wendel, 2003). According to Elder (1995),

Sigmund Freud argued that man projected his idealized image into God, thereby causing

him to become estranged from himself, and that the only way to overcome this alienation

was for man to make himself the proper object of his care, devotion, and worship. Freud

fundamentally felt that religion was the outcome of a childhood longing for the father

(Elder, 1995). However, over the years, the clinical perspective on religion as greatly

shifted. For example, the description of religion in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual

has evolved from one of pathology to a cultural consideration (Allmon, 2013). While it

may no longer be considered pathological, some argue that even in today's society, the

realm of spirituality may still be considered more taboo than even sex or death (Prest &

Keller, 1993), and that too often therapists focus on the sexual, emotional, and

interpersonal needs, but avoid addressing religious needs (Crossley & Salter, 2005; Stander et al., 1994).

In recent years, it has become more common and accepted to for therapists to incorporate religion and spirituality in their work; however, many clinicians still hesitate to make it a part of the therapeutic process. Wolf and Stevens (2001) point out that the primary emphasis in therapy has typically been the empirical and observable; since spirituality and religion cannot be physically observed or objectively measured, these aspects of life have been given less credence and validity. Many believe that science is fundamentally superior to religion as a means of addressing human problems (Stander et al., 1994). Additionally, some therapists are uncomfortable incorporating religion into therapy because they see it as authoritative and repressive (Stander et al., 1994). Along the same lines, some feel that clients can see the position of the therapist as one of power, and discussing religion could somehow turn into a form of proselytizing (Carlson, Kirkpatrick, Hecker, & Killmer, 2002)

Conversely, many therapists argue that bringing spirituality into the therapeutic process is not only helpful, but even essential. According to Berenson (1990), *"the most underutilized resource in family therapy is God"* (p. 50). Due to high levels of religiosity and spirituality reported in nationwide polls, it is likely that there will be a high level of religiosity among participants in any therapy session (Stander et al., 1994). To intentionally avoid exploring religion or spirituality could result in neglecting a potentially large part of the client's system.

Soul Healing

Soul healing, a concept coined by Dorothy Becvar after experiencing a great deal of difficulty and loss in her personal life, is a therapeutic approach in which spirituality is not just one piece of therapy, but essentially the entire crux of the healing process. This perspective welcomes consideration of the client's religious and spiritual dimensions, and maintains that incorporating these dimensions is vital to any healing (Becvar, 1998). Within the framework of soul healing, every aspect of the universe is considered an expression of the divine, infused with spirit, and thereby sacred (Becvar 1997, 1998). It is a perspective that a systemic therapist might view as a sort of universal, spiritual system. This universally spiritual outlook, on both the part of the therapist and the client, gives life a larger meaning and purpose. It focuses on the "growth and development not only of individual souls but also of the soul of the world" (Becvar, 1998, p. 5).

From a soul healing orientation, the therapist takes a not-knowing, non-expert stance (Becvar, 1998), and is seen not as the healer, but rather as the conduit to healing in a shared process with clients (Becvar, 1997). A great deal of importance is placed on the power of conversation and the co-construction of problems and solutions (Becvar, 1998). Clients are encouraged to understand the potential for opportunity within each crisis, and they are urged toward wholeness, a state in which the physical is aligned with the spiritual (Becvar, 1997). Raheem (as cited in Becvar, 1997) explains that "a condition of wholeness can be described as one in which a person operates from a unified consciousness of body, mind, emotions and soul" (p. 48). Moving toward this wholeness enables the individual to manifest his or her destiny and purpose (Becvar, 1998), which ultimately results in a sense of healing.

The soul healing approach could be an extremely powerful and effective tool for the spiritual therapist working with the spiritual client. However, it would be a more difficult fit for a therapist who does not identify him- or herself as particularly spiritual or who feels that a client's spirituality does not necessarily need to play as large a role in his or her life.

Marriage and Family Therapy and Spirituality

In a survey conducted by Bergin and Jenson (1990), the religiosity of various psychotherapy disciplines—psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers, and marriage and family therapists (MFTs)—was compared with that of the general public, and it was found that MFTs were the most religious of the four disciplines. One of the possible reasons for the higher level of spirituality among MFTs is that the historical roots of the MFT field lie in the early 1930s, when many members of the marriage counseling movement—who were also clergy members—focused on couple and marital distress decades before the development of systemic family therapy (Helmeke & Bischof, 2007). In a survey of clinical members of the American Association of Marriage and Family Therapists (AAMFT), 95% reported that they consider themselves spiritual, and 94% reported that their spirituality is an important aspect of their personal lives (Carlson, McGeorge & Anderson, 2011).

In the same survey conducted by Bergin and Jenson (1990), a large percentage of MFTs reported that their spirituality guided them toward their careers, and an even larger number of respondents stated that they viewed their careers as part of their spiritual development. Additionally, 95% of the respondents felt there was a relationship between spiritual and mental health. However, only 65% of the respondents felt that a spiritual

dimension should be considered in clinical practice, and an even smaller number felt that it was important to address clients' spirituality in order to help them (Bergin & Jenson, 1990). It seems that MFTs recognize the integral role that spirituality plays in many of their individual lives, yet they do not acknowledge that the same could be true in the lives of their clients.

Marriage and family therapists are the most religious and spiritual of all psychotherapy disciplines (Bergin & Jenson, 1990; Carlson et al., 2002; Prest & Keller, 1993), yet many still hesitate to incorporate spirituality into their clinical practice. Miller, Korinek, and Ivey (2004) suggest that because the field of MFT has struggled to assert itself as an authentic and credible area of study, scholars may have tended to distance themselves from anything that might threaten this process. Furthermore, very few graduate programs actually substantially incorporate religion and spirituality into their curriculum (Carlson et al., 2011; Harris, 1998; Post & Wade, 2009).

Despite a therapist's personal preference about whether or not to incorporate spirituality into the therapeutic process, the undeniable reality is that the therapist is likely to encounter clients who would benefit from the incorporation of spirituality in the therapeutic process It is also possible that the therapist will occasionally come across clients whose presenting concerns deal with distress directly related to their religious identity (Johnson & Hayes, 2003). In a survey conducted with clients of college and university counseling centers, it was found that 20% of the respondents reported a clinically significant level of difficulty related to religious/spiritual issues (Johnson & Hayes, 2003).

Incorporating Spirituality into Graduate Curricula

Several studies indicate that the majority of graduate counseling programs in the United States do not make religiosity and spirituality focal points in their curricula (Carlson et al., 2011; Hage, Hopson, Siegel, Payton, & DeFanti, 2006; Harris, 1998; Post & Wade, 2009). Although many programs emphasize diversity and multicultural training, it seems that spirituality is not considered as significant (Hage et al., 2006). The potential danger with the lack of formal training on spirituality and religiosity is that it could create the risk of therapists not properly incorporating spirituality if a therapeutic situation calls for it; they run the risk of either imposing their own beliefs and values, or simply applying religious and spiritual interventions inappropriately (Walker, Gorsuch, & Tan, 2004). Additionally, the unwillingness to address spirituality in graduate programs could turn into a problem that persists over several generations, in that supervisors might hesitate to talk about this aspect of clinical work, and supervisees will follow their lead (Miller et al., 2004).

Some researchers suggest that a strong first step in successfully incorporating spirituality into graduate curricula would be to invite faculty members and students to examine their individual beliefs, values, and prejudices regarding their own and others' spirituality, which might impact their practice (Grams, Carlson, & McGeorge, 2007; Hage et al., 2006). Furthermore, particular emphasis is placed on the importance of faculty members examining their own beliefs about the role of spirituality, since they are considered to be the gatekeepers of what is and is not included in curriculum (Grams et al., 2007). In order to sufficiently train therapists, instructors in family therapy graduate programs must be comfortable discussing subjects that require sensitivity and

introspection. Reflecting on one's beliefs and attitudes will foster a self-awareness that will also increase the therapist's comfort with bringing spirituality into the therapy room (Grams et al., 2007).

Counseling programs that do offer spirituality training may offer it in a stand-alone course; however, some researchers suggest that sprinkling spirituality training throughout all required courses would be more beneficial (Grams et al., 2007; Stander et al., 1994). Exposing graduate students to spirituality training throughout their education serves two purposes: (a) the training is constantly refreshed and brought to the forefront of the students' awareness, and (b) students are exposed to a variety of instructors and course content, thereby giving them a wider range of perspective and applicability.

The Need for Further Understanding

Strides still need to be made in order to increase understanding and effectively incorporate religion and spirituality into therapy. Unfortunately, therapists still occasionally view religiosity negatively. In a study conducted by O'Connor and Vandenberg (2005), it was found that when therapists are unfamiliar with the religious beliefs of a client, their clinical judgment can be altered. Clinicians in this study reported feeling that beliefs associated with more mainstream faiths like Catholicism were significantly less pathological than those associated with other, less mainstream religions, such as Islam (O'Connor & Vandenberg, 2005). In a nutshell, the further the religious belief was from mainstream beliefs, the higher the therapists rated it in terms of psychotic pathology. It is precisely this dynamic which merits the need for the current study.

The Bahá'í Faith, though quickly growing, is still seen by many as obscure and unfamiliar. The less clinicians understand about it, the more likely members of the Bahá'í

Faith are to encounter difficulty in the therapeutic process. The present study attempts to

not only fill the gap in the literature regarding the Bahá'í experience, but also to offer a

unique and authentic glimpse into the experiences of the members of this rapidly growing

faith, with hopes that it will be useful to therapists who work with religious individuals

that are Bahá'ís as well as members of other faiths.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Little research has been conducted with members of specific religious communities on the ways in which their beliefs and the doctrines of their respective religions influence their journeys of preparing for marriage. More specifically, while research has studied the effectiveness of premarital assessments in preparing couples for marriage, few studies have explored the applicability of well-established assessments from the participants' perspectives. The purpose of the present study is to connect the two concepts: to understand the experience of Bahá'ís preparing for marriage and capture their feedback about the usefulness of a well-established premarital assessment. The research question for this study is twofold: (a) What is the experience of Bahá'ís, both as individuals and as couples, who are either currently preparing for marriage or are reflecting on their marital preparation? (b) What types of questions in premarital questionnaires do they feel are particularly useful in the preparation process?

Qualitative Research

Patton (as cited in Rossman & Rallis, 2003) encourages researchers to "experience qualitative research inquiry as drama. . . . It involves capturing people's stories and weaving them together to reveal and give insight into real-world dramas" (p. xiii). For this reason, I chose qualitative research as the most appropriate approach for getting the most information thorough an in-depth understanding of the participants' stories of what it is like to be a Bahá'í preparing for marriage—and there are many out there who would actually consider this time in their lives as a real-life drama.

Rossman and Rallis (2003) point out that qualitative research has two clear features: (a) the researcher is the means through which the study is conducted, and (b) the

purpose is to learn about some component of the social world. The researcher is involved in a dynamic learning process, and he or she constructs the knowledge rather than simply receiving it. In the present study, this knowledge was collected through extensive interviews, with the goal of offering a glance into the experience of Bahá'ís during this unique time.

Grounded Theory

This study was informed by a grounded theory research approach. While in most research approaches, theory is derived through logical deduction from previous studies and knowledge (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), in the grounded theory approach, the theory is cultivated after close analysis and review of the data. Trochim (2001) explains that grounded theory is rooted, or grounded, in observation; it is a theory that explains a phenomenon of interest. Glaser and Strauss (1967) contend that one of the major benefits of using a grounded theory approach is that basing a theory on the data itself makes the theory indisputable. With this method, the researcher can avoid *exampling*, the intentional or unintentional attempt to find examples to fit an already existing theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Rather than formulating a theory or hypothesis and searching for data to then support it, the theory is rooted in data and is generated from an unbiased standpoint.

The grounded theory approach places much emphasis on theory as a process; the theory is a continuously evolving entity, not a perfected product (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Since the theory is based on data, additional data would not actually refute the theory or replace it with a new theory. Glaser and Strauss (1967) contend that since the theory is so intimately linked to the data, it will last despite modification and

reformulation, and new data will simply add to the continuous shaping and understanding of the existing theory.

In the current study, in-depth interviews provided information that formed larger themes to explain the premarital experience for Bahá'ís. The grounded theory approach is an iterative process, and there are specific steps that lead to the overarching theory generated at the end of the study (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Trochim, 2001). These steps will be reviewed in the data analysis section.

Grounded theory does not have a delineated end point (Trochim, 2001); consequently, this process could continue indefinitely. Due to the fact that the data could be pored over endlessly, it is ultimately up to the researcher to decide when to stop (Trochim, 2001). Patton, who refers to qualitative research as drama, put it best: "…the curtain never actually falls and the story never really ends, for there is always more to study and learn" (as cited in Rossman & Rallis, 2003, p. xiv).

Data Collection

Qualitative Interview

To collect data for this study, I conducted qualitative interviews rather than utilizing a survey method. Weiss (1994) defines a qualitative interview as an interview that "sacrifices uniformity of questioning to achieve fuller development of information" (p. 3). Through the process of qualitative interviewing, researchers gain understanding and insight that we otherwise could not if we were to solely analyze answers to survey items (Weiss, 1994). In the current study, more information was gleaned because the participants were free to offer whatever information they liked, without it needing to fit into a predetermined answer.

The specific type of approach I used in the interviews is referred to as the "fixed question-open response" method (Weiss, 1994, p. 12). With this technique, I asked participants carefully constructed questions, and they were free to answer in their own words rather than choosing from pre-made responses. Weiss points out that since all respondents are asked the same questions, the responses to each question can be categorized and worked with statistically. I interpreted, summarized, and integrated (Weiss, 1994) participants' responses and ultimately developed an overall theory about the experience of Bahá'ís preparing for marriage as well as a separate analysis of the premarital questionnaire.

Moving Beyond Neutrality

My therapeutic interviewing style, combined with my enthusiasm for this particular topic, greatly influenced the development of a unique set of questions and prompted me to strive to develop a genuine rapport with each of my participants, much like what I strive for in the therapy room. Not only did I understand that connecting with them was important in order to get useful data, but I was also keenly aware of the fact that they were giving me a glimpse into a very intimate and personal piece of their lives. It was important to me that I honor this invitation, and communicate to the participants my respect and appreciation throughout the interview process by endeavoring to maintain a sense of openness, curiosity, and lack of judgment. I felt that it was important for the participants to see me as more than a removed, purely analytical researcher. In order to have a fruitful interview, it was essential for me to establish a personal connection be with the participants; I fostered this connection by asking respectful yet probing questions as and commiserating with them at times when I felt I could relate to their experiences.

Sampling

For this study the participants were part of a maximum variation sample, representing a variety of cultural backgrounds, ages, and geographic locations. The strategy behind using this specific type of sample was that central themes can be captured while at the same time cutting across a great deal of variation (Patton, 1987). According to Patton (1987), any patterns or themes discovered through such a diverse sample are of particular interest to the researcher; they highlight central, core aspects of what is being studied.

Patton (1987) points out that the data collected from smaller samples with more diversity produces two specific findings: (a) in-depth descriptions of each case which highlight unique scenarios, and (b) patterns that are particularly significant because they cannot be attributed to heterogeneity. It is important to point out that the purpose of a maximum variation sample is not to generalize the findings to all people or groups; rather, it is intended to look for information that gleans significant, common patterns within the given variation. Within the context of the current study, a maximum variation sample provided insight to common, shared experiences among young adult Bahá'ís and their premarital experiences. Additionally, when I reviewed the premarital questionnaires, all common suggestions and observations that came out of the diverse sample were particularly noteworthy.

The focus of this research was to understand the experiences of young adult Bahá'ís preparing for marriage, as well as to get their perspectives on the effectiveness of an established premarital questionnaire. Since the concept of *marital preparation* can be somewhat vague or loosely defined, for this study, I decided to include only young adult

individuals who were engaged at the time of the interview. Due to the fact that the Bahá'í Faith recognizes marriage as being a union between a man and a woman, all couples in the sample were heterosexual.

Since the focus was on the Bahá'í community, all couples interviewed were members of the Bahá'í Faith. Participants were between the ages of 20 and 35 and represented diverse racial backgrounds. The sample consisted of an equal number of males and females, consisting of 14 participants in total. While some may argue that 14 interviews are not enough to develop a strong theory, Glaser and Strauss (1967) maintain that with a grounded theory approach, the number of cases is not essential; a single case is enough to indicate a general conceptual category, and a few more cases can validate that indication.

In an attempt to minimize researcher influence on participants' responses, I conducted all the interviews with people I did not personally know. I strove to strike a sensitive balance between creating an atmosphere of comfort and trust with the participants so they felt safe to express themselves openly and doing my best to not convey my personal bias, thereby unintentionally causing them to give responses they might have assumed I wanted to hear.

Patton (1987) refers to interviewing as ". . . an art and science requiring skill, sensitivity, concentration, interpersonal understanding, insight, mental acuity, and discipline" (p. 108). I found this to be especially applicable to the current study; the sensitivity with which I approached the delicate territory of love and marriage could have strongly influenced the candidness with which the participants shared their thoughts.

Data Collection in the Current Study

The length of the interviews ranged from 45 minutes to an hour and a half. Since the purpose of the study was to understand the participants' unique experiences, I conducted the interviews with one participant at a time, both in person and via Skype. I interviewed each of the participants one time and recorded all of the interviews on a digital recorder, which I stored in a private drawer. I then transcribed the recorded interviews and analyzed the transcribed data.. All interviews will be saved for three years in accordance with Institutional Review Board (IRB) regulations.

Throughout the transcription process, I made the decision to not transcribe small portions of certain interviews when a participant's feedback was either anecdotal or tangential and had no relevance to the main topic being discussed. Examples of this include when one participant spoke about how he or she got into a minor accident and broke a bone a few weeks before his or her wedding, or when another participant went into lengthy detail about the requirements behind acquiring a Visa to move to the United States.

Throughout the study, I took several precautions to address confidentiality concerns. Prior to beginning the interviews, I gave assurance to all participants that I would take all possible measures to protect their privacy. I also informed participants that all documents would be kept in locked storage for three years prior to shredding and disposing of them, in order to comply with IRB requirements. I assigned a pseudonym to each participant, which I used throughout the entire process, with the exception of the signed consent forms. All electronic data was saved on a flash drive, which I stored in a

locked drawer, and all hardcopy data is stored in the same locked drawer, located in my home office.

Comparative Analysis in Grounded Theory

Glaser and Strauss (1967) identify two primary ways in which qualitative data is typically analyzed: (a) the researcher codes and analyzes qualitative data, thereby turning it into quantitative data, which is then ultimately used to test a specific hypothesis, and (b) the researcher studies the data for new properties of his or her theoretical categories and writes memos on these categories. The categories are then shaped and polished as the material is researched. The authors introduce the idea of a third method of data analysis, comparative analysis, which blends the two approaches.. This method combines the analytic approach of coding in the first approach with the style of theory development of the second. According to Glaser and Strauss:

> The purpose of the constant comparative method of joint coding and analysis is to generate theory more systematically than allowed by the second approach, *by using explicit coding and analytic procedures*. While more systematic than the second approach, this method does not adhere completely to the first, which hinders the development of theory because it is designed for provisional testing, not discovering, of hypotheses. (p. 102)

There are four stages of the constant comparative method: (a) comparing incidents applicable to each category, (b) integrating categories and their properties, (c) delimiting the theory, and (d) writing the theory. In this section I will briefly revisit the four steps of the constant comparative method as outlined by Glaser and Strauss (1967), and relate them to the analytical process of the current study.

Comparing incidents. In this stage, the researcher codes each detail in the data into as many categories of analysis as possible, as the categories or data emerge that fit within the identified categories. While coding, the data should be compared to the other data coded in the same category. It is emphasized that at this point, as ideas begin to generate and different types of coding begin to emerge, the researcher should stop coding and memo his or her thoughts (Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Trochim, 2001).

At the outset of analyzing the data, I noticed a few trends in the responses, which I thought could potentially turn into solidified categories. I began to see particular themes in the feedback and began the coding process, grouping the data under different categories that stood out. The following are a few examples of categories that first emerged in the initial examination of the data: judgment from others, a high level of religiosity, the short engagement period, a desire for guidance on premarital preparation from their religious community, dissatisfaction with the length of the questionnaire, and a general indifference towards the questionnaire. I wrote down my streaming thought process throughout this phase on a running memo, in which I noted whatever thoughts and trends evolved in the analysis process. As the process continued, some of these initial topics and patterns evolved into more solidified themes.

Integrating categories. Different categories and their properties start to become integrated through constant comparisons, ultimately compelling the researcher to make related theoretical sense of each comparison. According to Corbin and Strauss (1990), "Categories are the 'cornerstones' of a developing theory. They provide the means by which a theory is integrated" (p. 420). At this juncture, connections between the different

categories are found, and the various puzzle pieces of the data—which at one point may have seemed unrelated and scattered—begin to come together and form larger pieces of the puzzle, thereby giving the researcher an idea of what the big picture might look like.

As I repeatedly examined and compared the trending pieces of data, I integrated the various categories into larger themes, in an attempt to capture the experiences of the engaged young adult Bahá'ís in the study. Some of the more solidified themes I established include topics regarding a sense of scrutiny from both the Bahá'í community and the outside community, a lack of fellow Bahá'ís to offer premarital guidance, and a concern with the applicability of the questionnaire. Examples of these themes, which emerged as a result of comparison and integration, are discussed in greater detail later in this chapter.

Delimiting the theory. Boundaries begin to be established surrounding the developing theory. Delimiting occurs on two levels. First, the main theory is modified less and less and begins to solidify. These modifications take place on a smaller scale and involve clarifying the logic, eliminating irrelevant properties, integrating details into the overall larger theory, and engaging in reduction. The second level of delimiting takes place when the researcher becomes committed to the theory and focuses more closely on comparative analysis of the smaller sets of categories. As I pored over the formed categories in the present study, the overarching theme became clearer and more defined. I began to realize that overall, members of this sample seemed to feel they were not fully accepted by either community, religious or secular, and that the available premarital tools, which are often found useful, seemed to be of no interest to this particular group.

Writing the theory. Once the researcher is convinced that he or she has formed a strong substantive theory, that it is a reasonably accurate statement of the topic studied, and that it is framed in a way in which others in the same field would find it useful, then the results can be published with confidence. This substantive theory will be stated and elaborated upon in the following chapter.

Researcher Bias

Researcher bias often results from the researcher selectively observing and recording information, as well as allowing his or her personal views and beliefs to influence the coding and interpretation of data (Johnson, 1997). Bias has the potential to permeate the research on multiple levels, from something as subtle as the body language of the researcher when interviewing participants, to more overt forms, such as guiding questions in interviews and questionnaires.

Mays and Pope (1995) offer an outside the box approach to minimizing researcher bias. They encourage the reader to be aware of the distinction between the results section and the discussion section of any research study, implying that the reader can and should draw his or her own conclusions. In this study, I made efforts to minimize my bias as much as possible from the outset of the research design and throughout the entire process.

Grounded Theory and Researcher Bias

Some argue that due to its open-ended and less structured nature, researcher bias tends to be a greater threat to qualitative research than it is to quantitative research (Johnson, 1997). However, within the grounded theory approach, the bias is minimized more than it is in some other types of qualitative research. A major advantage of having an evolving theory that is based solely on the data collected is that researcher bias is

automatically limited. No matter how much the researcher is attached to an idea, if it does not stand up to repeated scrutiny through constant, proven relevance to the topic of study, it must be discarded (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). For this study, the developed theory was supported by the hard data provided by the interviewed participants.

The use of constant comparison also forces the researcher to challenge thoughts and interpretations against the actual data (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). I developed categories through commonalities found in the responses of the research participants, from my personal expectations or assumptions. The patterns I gleaned from the raw data created the categories used in developing the theory.

Self in the Research

The subject of premarital preparation within the Bahá'í Faith is quite close to my heart. I have always had a keen interest in the realm of marriage and couple dynamics, and I currently find my peers and myself at a stage in our lives when the idea of marriage is prominent in our minds and our day-to-day conversations. Through these conversations, I have also realized that the idea of marriage is not something taken lightly by members of my peer group; rather, many of us give it a great deal of time, thought, and even prayer.

I began to notice that my peers fall into one of two categories when it comes to this phase of our lives: (a) those who are a bit more detached about the process and are happy to let life run its natural course, and (b) those who tend to be more anxious and eager to find their mate and live happily ever after. I found myself drawing assumptions that those who are more detached about the outcome are less invested in premarital preparation, and those who are more anxious must simply take marriage more seriously,

and would therefore take more care in preparing themselves for marriage. However, these loosely created delineations are not what I am interested in exploring. My curiosity lies in challenging my assumptions and further understanding what the experience is actually like for these individuals under the surface, not what it appears to be like.

On a personal level, I have found myself bouncing between the two dispositions—sometimes detached, sometimes anxious. However, regardless of my outlook, I have always placed a great deal of importance on the institution of marriage, I and took my own preparation process very seriously. I felt that taking care to prepare myself for marriage was vital to the overall success of my future union, and I had a hard time understanding why anybody would *not* take care to prepare themselves as much as possible—mentally, spiritually, and emotionally—prior to taking the plunge.

Reflexivity and Personal Endeavors

The fundamental strategy for combating researcher bias is reflexivity, a process in which "the researcher actively engages in critical self-reflection about his or her potential biases and predispositions" (Johnson, 1997, p. 284). Davies and Dodd (2002) point out that bias can be combated through conscientious attention to the research process, and by making this process a visible one. Although Glaser and Strauss (1967) did not refer to reflexivity as being integral to the grounded theory process, it has recently been given more credence by researchers (Cole & Johnson, 2007; Gilgun, 2001). In an attempt to minimize my influence on the study during the interviewing process and in the development of the theory, I took precautions on both a cognitive and practical level.

Mentality. I was hyper-aware of myself and my opinions while conducting the interviews. I was aware that just because I place a great deal of importance on premarital preparation, it does not mean that all of the participants take it equally seriously and place the same weight on it that I do. I also remained mindful of my personal history. Rossman and Rallis (2003) caution researchers to be aware of past experiences that could influence their approach in the interview. The authors advise researchers to be "vigilant about the baggage [they] carry into the inquiry" (Rossman & Rallis, 2003, p. 51).

I was also conscious of the fact that I could, on some level, communicate my bias to the participants while interviewing them—whether it was by asking questions phrased in a certain way, or responding particularly favorably to answers that supported my own beliefs (Weiss, 1994). This was a very delicate thing, in that if participants picked up on my bias, they could have unwittingly provided answers they thought I would want to hear. In an attempt to avoid this bias, I established a research partnership before beginning each interview, and communicated to the respondent that what was needed is a thorough and accurate report (Weiss, 1994).

Communication. There are a few significant ways I communicated the research partnership to the participants. Prior to conducting the interviews, I made sure that the phrasing of the questions was appropriate and did not lead the participants to answer in any particular way. At the outset of each interview, I explicitly told the participant that I was not trying to prove any particular theory or hypothesis, and that the more open and honest his or her answer was, the more it would inform my research. I also found it beneficial to occasionally openly address with participants the fact that I could unintentionally communicate a bias, and that whatever bias they may perceive on my part

should not deter them from being as candid as possible. Additionally, I was very conscientious that any follow-up questions I asked were worded carefully. I was also mindful of my nonverbal communication, which could have easily conveyed a bias, either while asking questions or in response to their answers.

Journaling. Keeping a self-reflexive journal, in which I recorded my experience as I conducted the research, was very useful for guarding against my biases. I felt it was particularly helpful to make entries in this journal after interviews and throughout the coding process. I frequently and carefully reviewed the journal in order to reflect upon my own thought process, thus helping me recognize and work against whatever biases I may not have previously known I had. I found that by journaling my experience, I was able to externalize various thoughts and expectations that I would occasionally stumble upon within myself. By having an outlet for these personal hurdles, I was able to be more centered and detached in my research endeavors.

Peer review. A useful tool in working against my biases was asking for the assistance of my fellow colleagues, peers, and mentors, and enlisting them to look over segments of the study that needed to be better adjusted to not reflect bias, whether in question formation or theory development. Corbin and Strauss (1967) point out that having one's worked reviewed by others helps guard against researcher bias and creates the potential for fresh insights and heightened theoretical sensitivity. Since peer review can be an invaluable resource, I solicited the assistance of fellow classmates to read over my findings and offer their input. As a result of asking my peers to review my research, I simultaneously welcomed perspectives that I had not previously considered; by enlisting others to help keep my biases in check, I invited a more balanced approach.

Weiss (1994) argues that the only way to avoid bias when analyzing the data is to "discipline ourselves to deal fully and fairly with all the evidence and to report everything we've learned about an issue, absolutely everything, including cases that don't fit our theories as well as cases that do" (p. 213). Although one of the advantages of using a grounded theory approach is that I did not go into the research with theories already formed, I still remained careful to keep an open mind, remain as impartial as possible, and incorporate all the data gathered into forming my theories at the end of the study.

Member checking. Member checking was also helpful in reducing researcher bias, in that the participants had the final say about whether or not I accurately understood and interpreted the data. Approximately five months after I conducted the interviews, I sent the participants the analyzed data and asked them for their input regarding the accurate representation of their experiences and perspectives. I also informed the participants that if I did not hear from them within two weeks, I would assume they were satisfied with the material. Six participants responded, all favorably, and one request was made that a pseudonym be changed. Through member checking, I was able—to the greatest extent possible—to address any personal biases that may have clouded my analysis. After I acquired the approval of the participants and obtained the peer reviews, I finalized the draft.

In the following chapter, I present and explain the data acquired through the interviews, pertaining both to the premarital experience of young adult Bahá'ís and to their analysis and feedback regarding a popular premarital questionnaire. The ultimate objective is to shed a scientific light on a subject that is close to the hearts of many people.

CHAPTER IV: DATA ANALYSIS AND PRESENTATION

My goal in the present study was twofold: To understand the experience of young adult Bahá'ís preparing for marriage, and to gain something of a Bahá'í perspective in analyzing the usefulness of RELATE, a widely respected premarital questionnaire. To gather data for this study, I asked participants to engage in one, in-depth, semi-structured interview, which I conducted either in person or via Skype. I conducted interviews with seven couples. One couple was eliminated due to the fact that I was unable to schedule an interview with them prior to their wedding, prompting me to find another engaged Bahá'í couple to replace them. This resulted in a total of 14 admissible interviews conducted with the seven couples.

I conducted 12 of the interviews via Skype from my private office, and completed the other two at coffee shops chosen by the participants. At the outset of each interview, I reminded the participants of the confidential nature of the interview, and also gave them a brief overview of what to expect. I assured them that I was not intending to prove any hypotheses, and that whatever information they provided would inform my research. Additionally, in an effort to make the participants feel comfortable to be as candid as possible, I made clear to each of them that I did not write the questionnaire they would be evaluating. The questions I asked throughout the course of the interview were from a pre-approved set of questions, ensuring that the data I collected from the different participants was comparable. Interviews ranged in length, from approximately 30 minutes to an hour and a half. I recorded all 14 interviews on a digital recorder and later transcribed the recording while wearing headphones to ensure confidentiality.

In the present chapter, I briefly review the profiles of the interviewed couples, and then outline the various themes that emerged as a result of the data I collected from the interviews. These themes will address both premarital preparation and the premarital questionnaire. I will then discuss how the different themes relate to the proposed research question.

Participants

The participants in the study were between the ages of 20 and 35. Six of the couples live in the United States, and one couple lives in Australia. Their professional backgrounds were extremely diverse, ranging from medical doctors to entrepreneurs and students. I found the participating couples through word of mouth and Facebook advertising. All seven couples self-identified as members of the Bahá'í Faith and, at the time of the interview, were engaged to be married. More information about the couples can be found in Table 1.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Residence of Couples	Ages	Cultural Backgrounds	Length of Engagement	Length of Time as a Bahá'í
United States: 6 couples Australia: 1 couple	Twenties: 11 Thirties: 3	Caucasian: 9 *Persian: 5* *Non-Persian: 4* African American: 1 Multicultural: 4	3 months or less: 2 couples 4-6 months: 3 couples 1 year or longer: 2 couples	Entire life: 6 1-5 years: 2 8-15 years: 6

Mona and Rick

Mona and Rick are a couple in their late 20s, who had been together for about one year at the time of their interview. They knew each other when they were younger and reconnected when they were adults. They started out as a long-distance couple, and some time into the relationship, one of them moved to live in the same area as the other. According to Mona and Rick, the Bahá'í Faith did not play a major role in their relationship until they got engaged, at which point they began to actively incorporate it into their lives.

Mia and Cory

Mia and Cory are a couple in their mid-20s, who had been together for about two years at the time of their interview. They met during a service project, at which point they began to start getting to know each other and dating. They explained that the Bahá'í Faith was a driving force that brought them together at the beginning of their courtship and has played a crucial role throughout the course of their relationship. They feel that deepening their understanding in the Bahá'í Faith is a constant journey for them as individuals and as a couple.

Lana and Joe

Lana and Joe are a couple in their mid-20s. They were introduced through a mutual friend and reported an immediate mutual interest. Both Lana and Joe explained that from the outset of their relationship, they got to know each other with the purpose of exploring marriage as a possibility, rather than dating just to date. They stated that their respective Bahá'í communities are very supportive of their relationship and that this has been a source of encouragement and support for them.

Emma and Zack

Emma and Zack have been together for about two years. Due to the fact that they met on Bahá'í pilgrimage in Haifa, Israel, they believe the Bahá'í Faith is what brought them together. They started out dating inter-continentally, and after dating for a while decided to try their relationship in the same city. They explained that they feel the Baha'i Faith plays an integral role in their lives, both individually and as a couple.

Nadia and Doug

Nadia and Doug are both in their late 20s and had been together for about two years at the time of their interview. They began dating while taking a Bahá'í study class together. According to Nadia and Doug, the Bahá'í Faith has played a major role in their relationship from the beginning, and it very much guides their lives in all aspects.

Bahar and Siavash

Bahar and Siavash are a couple in their mid-20s. They met through Bahá'í-related events and were friends for quite some time before they started dating, even though many of their mutual friends would often suggest that they get to know each other. They reported that service is a central aspect of their relationship; it is the glue that keeps them together.

Shayda and Ryan

Shayda and Ryan are a couple in their late 20s who had been dating for two years at the time of their interview. Their relationship started out long distance, and about one year into it, they were able to live in the same city. They stated that the Bahá'í Faith plays an important role in their lives, and has increased in importance since their engagement.

While conducting the interviews with participants and transcribing the recording, I noticed various themes. I frequently identified common experiences and perspectives among many of the participants, with respect to both their premarital experiences and their opinions of the premarital assessment. The next section, which focuses on the most significant themes I identified among the interviews with the participating couples, is divided into two sub-sections: (1) trends regarding the premarital experience, and (2) trends regarding individual critiques of RELATE, the designated premarital questionnaire.

Themes Regarding Premarital Preparation

"This Forbidden Thing": The Dating Taboo

The Bahá'í writings place a strong emphasis on chastity before marriage. As a result, many participants felt that this principle made the concept of dating a difficult one to explore and understand within the Bahá'í community. A common understanding is that mainstream society associates dating with premarital sex and a casual approach to getting to know someone, rather than viewing it as an intention to ultimately find one's spouse. This societal assumption often makes Bahá'ís shy away from admitting that they might be getting to know, or dating, another person out of fearing of being judged or misunderstood. Additionally, this assumption can make other Bahá'ís within the community uncomfortable discussing the world of Bahá'í dating, thereby making it a taboo and somewhat confusing topic for many Bahá'ís who are entering this phase of their lives. Mona explained:

> I feel like being in a relationship is frowned upon by the community unless you're
>
> engaged. I felt like it was this forbidden thing. . . . I really felt like the community

frowned upon me if I were to say I have a boyfriend. But once we're engaged, you know, it's okay. It's great. I mean, how do you become engaged then?

Shayda echoed almost exactly the same challenge: "We're always taught about getting married, but we never talk about dating, and so how do you get married if you don't date?"

Treating issues surrounding dating and sexuality as taboo can make for a more difficult experience in marriage. If, from a young age, Bahá'ís are taught that the concepts of dating, sex, and sexual expression are wrong—or if these things are simply not discussed—they can hae difficulty addressing these issues in adulthood. Bahar offered her perspective:

> Marriage, relationships, romantic yearnings are all very natural parts of life. And instead of us being aware of it as Bahá'ís, a lot of times we kind of just shun it away or avoid it altogether and I think that's very dangerous. Because once we do get into serious relationships, or even in our marriages, we then—I think—have a tendency to go into it thinking, "Wow, sex is wrong." Or, "I'm uncomfortable with this idea." It becomes harder for us in the long run because for so long when we were younger we tried to avoid the topic, or it was awkward to talk about.

The dating taboo also causes couples to keep their relationships private until they progress to the next level, engagement. Four out of the seven couples I interviewed stated that they kept their relationships a secret from other Bahá'ís until they were either engaged or confident that they would become engaged in the near future. At the same time, participants said that once the general Bahá'í community found out about their

relationships, their support was a source of encouragement and strength. Lana recalls her experience:

> Once we got engaged we got an overwhelming really positive response, and it's been really nice having that support. [Joe's] Local Spiritual Assembly actually arranged a brunch for us with a few married Bahá'í couples, and so we had brunch with them. We shared prayers and they gave advice. It was really awesome. So it's been really positive, it's been great.

It seems that the opinions of fellow Bahá'ís, good or bad, are important and can be a source of either support or stress. Navigating around the taboo of dating is an experience filled with confusion and frustration, but it seems that once the couples make it official, they greatly value the community's support.

"A Bit of a Disconnect": Lack of Guidance from the Greater Community

An unintended outcome of the dating taboo likely led to the next predominant theme: the feeling among many of the participants that there was not enough guidance within their respective Bahá'í communities for how to go about getting to know someone they were interested in romantically. Many respondents reported that they felt somewhat left to their own devices to figure it out, and wished there were more resources within the community such as classes, or even adult figures who were comfortable and willing to discuss the topic. Bahar expressed her frustration with the situation:

> When I did turn to the Bahá'í community or elders in the Bahá'í community, or other married couples, I just feel like there was a bit of a disconnect, or inconsistencies, because it just seemed like everyone made it work for themselves somehow. There was no formula I could follow, there was no how-to guide, there

was no universal learning that I got from each couple or mentor that I tried to go

to for premarital preparation purposes. . . . It kind of disillusioned me from the

idea of learning more about preparing for marriage as a Bahá'í, and instead led

me more towards going on my intuition of what I thought was right or wrong.

Based on the feedback from the participants, guidance was lacking not only on an

individual level, but also on an organized level. A few participants mentioned that they

wished more formal classes were available for Bahá'ís to take in order to help prepare

them for marriage. Mona spoke about her experience:

I looked several times to see if there are couple's workshops at the Bahá'í

schools, sometimes they have preparation for marriage workshops. I had looked

all year round for us to go, and I couldn't find anything. So it would've been nice

if they offered it sometime during the year.

While some participants looked for guidance when they were already in

relationships, others also mentioned that they wished they could have learned about

dating and the Bahá'í Faith before they even entered the dating world. Joe stated:

Even before I dated, just more classes on . . . how to prepare, what to look for,

even though [Lana] and I learned that together, but I feel like I've been in

previous relationships and I didn't really know about some of this really awesome

guidance and it didn't work out. So I guess I wish I had more workshops or

deepenings, or any kind of things that would've told me about what people

usually do to prepare for marriage.

Bahar also expressed her desire to have had guidance before she entered the dating world:

Even if it wasn't the community members or the [Local Spiritual Assembly] saying, "Hey, here's guidance or some support" or anything like that, even just a booklet of some sort . . . so many booklets out there address what you talk about when you're already dating. But what happens even before that? I believe that the process of preparing for marriage is absolutely the same as just being ready for a boyfriend or girlfriend, or any sort of relationship. . . . I feel like if someone's even gonna think about being in a boyfriend-girlfriend type of relationship, they need to know who they are, what they want, and how they're ready for it.

Bahar and Joe's perspectives are particularly interesting and thought-provoking, as they reflect that preparation for marriage can—and ideally should—begin to take place before individuals actually get into a relationship.

Unfortunately, it seems that once a couple is openly in a relationship, it is often automatically assumed that they are not maintaining standards of chastity within the Bahá'í Faith. Perhaps it is for this reason that people hesitate to give guidance within the community; they simply do not know how to combat that assumption. At the same time, if the assumption is not challenged, it will persist, and the stigma of dating in the Bahá'í community will remain. Siavash, in describing this challenge reflected, ". . . it's a very interesting dynamic, you know. How does the social environment affect us in our dating and engagement process, and how does us dating and being engaged affect our social environment?" This is a complicated cycle worthy of deeper exploration.

"We Could Be a Little Less Careful": Openness with the Outside Community

Another strong theme I identified in the data may be understood as a reaction to the dating taboo. Many participants stated that they felt more comfortable being open

about their relationships with people outside the Bahá'í community and were less worried

about being judged by people who were not Bahá'ís. It seems that interacting with the

larger secular community made the participants feel like they were not under as much of

a microscope as they might be within the Bahá'í community. Siavash stated:

> We definitely felt like we could be a little less careful with the words we used,
>
> with what we'd say, with the way we'd behave with one another when we were in
>
> the larger secular society and community, whereas we have to be much more
>
> meticulous and much more thoughtful when it comes to our actions, our thoughts
>
> and our behaviors in the smaller Bahá'í community.

Many of the couples in this study felt they were more allowed to be themselves when

they were in non-Bahá'í settings. Perhaps the lack of particular moral expectations,

mixed with a certain sense of anonymity, enabled individuals to breathe a bit easier and

be more open about their feelings for their significant others.

Some of the participants expressed feeling that if their Bahá'í community found

out about their relationship, there would be an immediate and intense pressure placed on

them, with an expectation that they were going to get married. The participants expressed

that they did not feel this pressure from the larger, non-Bahá'í community—in fact, it was

quite the opposite. This dynamic will be explored in the following section. Zack

explained his perspective:

> It was much harder being in the Bahá'í community when [Emma] and I were
>
> getting to know each other, than it was in the bigger, outside societal community.
>
> . . . [In the Bahá'í community] whether good or bad, there's the pressure of, "Oh!
>
> He's so great/she's so great!" And there's a pressure that if it fails, then everyone

else [will talk]. So there's that, which can be good or bad, but it's a pressure and too much pressure is never good.

Siavash explained the difference between dating in the Bahá'í community and the greater community, and offered a reason for why this distinction exists:

Individuals who see the Bahá'í community as separate from the secular community can turn small things into big things, and vice versa. Whereas when you're talking about the secular society, because there are so many people, the decisions you make become less significant and have a smaller impact on that society.

Siavash's point is a crucial one; it suggests that perhaps members of the Bahá'í community feel a stronger sense of connection to the relationship, therefore causing them to be over-involved based on good intentions. Conversely, members of the non-Bahá'í community do not necessarily feel a bond with, or investment in, the relationship. It is interesting to note that, based on the general feedback from the participants, there seems to be quite a bit of pressure from the Bahá'í community, yet simultaneously little guidance.

"Crazy Virgin!": Expectations of the Outside Community

While many participants shared that they felt it was more permissible to have a boyfriend or girlfriend in the non-Bahá'í community, they reported experiencing a different sort of pressure from members of that community. Almost all participants reported feeling that the non-Bahá'í community simply did not understand why they chose to uphold certain Bahá'í laws, such as being engaged for a short time, choosing not to live together, and abstaining from sexual relations before marriage. Eleven of the 14

respondents reported encountering a range of negative reactions from members of the non-Bahá'í community—from surprise to judgment, or even pressure—regarding their perceived lack of conformity to the dating standards of mainstream society. Ryan recalled:

What became kind of a challenge was people sometimes, they just wouldn't understand, and they would sometimes make an argument or have strong feelings of disagreement with our decision to not be having sex, or our decision to not be living together. They would kind of feel that it's wrong and somehow we're not using wise decisions. Some people maybe even felt like we were being a bit fanatic.

Shayda explained a bit about how people would react to her decisions. She said, "People are surprised, and they'll say things like 'Oh, you guys are old school!' or, 'Oh, crazy virgin!' . . . They think it's weird, or they're shocked when we don't live together and we're getting married."

A few respondents reported that the reactions of their friends outside the Bahá'í community made them feel as if they were somehow on opposing sides. This may create a feeling of pressure which many Baha'is are able to relate to. Doug explained:

Even now, when I say we're not living together until we're married, they still don't get it. They're like, oh it's part of [Nadia's] religion, or her upbringing. Most of them are non-Bahá'ís anyway, so it's kind of me versus them type of mentality, which I find really strange, because I don't know what it is. . . . But then when I explain it's part of the teachings and Writings and why, they kind of

start to understand. But it's really strange. I don't know why it is, but a lot of people still see it as kind of strange.

As some of the participants explained, the outside pressure from non- Bahá'ís outside pressure could actually have a harmful impact on Bahá'ís who may feel uncomfortable sticking out; it could potentially lead them to conform to society's expectations, rather than upholding their own religious beliefs. Bahar stated:

Some people did understand and respect my decisions, or the lifestyle that I chose to live, whereas others truly thought I was naïve in that sense. And so it became a challenge to fight those influences, or to fight the temptation to want to fit in. I was lucky that I have a pretty strong personality, I'm pretty confident in myself, but I know many, many other Bahá'ís that [were] really challenged with that, because they were not confident in themselves. And they really, really easily gave into the pressures of some of their peers or what they saw outside of the Bahá'í community.

In a moment of candidness, one participant in this study confirmed this phenomenon:

The American norm is that as a male, you're supposed to be having sex. That's the cool thing to do, a rite of passage. And so I definitely fell into that at one point, and that's all that people really talked about. It was like, if you're not doing that with a person, [they ask] "What's wrong with you? Why aren't you doing that?" It was a pressure and an expectation that I succumbed to.

On a more positive note, some of the participants felt that encountering this opposition to their standards actually created an opportunity for them to teach people who

aren't Bahá'ís about the Bahá'í Faith. Emma had a more positive perspective of this dynamic. She stated:

> There is definitely this perception in the community of, "Aren't you guys going to live together? No? Why?" People are very confused by the whole thing. . . . But I'm quite happy to talk about it, because it leads to other conversations about the Faith.

The previously mentioned theme of the dating taboo, coupled with the current theme of expectations from the outside community, presents an unfortunate dilemma: Bahá'í couples are constantly dealing with differing and opposing expectations. Members of the Bahá'í community can unwittingly make them feel they are *wrong* for having a boyfriend or girlfriend, while the outside community makes them feel they are not dating the *right* way if they do not conform to mainstream expectations. This is essentially a dating Catch 22.

"Quite a Blessing": The Ninety-Five Day Engagement

According to Bahá'í law, once two people are engaged, their engagement period should not exceed 95 days. However, this law is currently binding only for individuals of Persian descent; the Universal House of Justice will determine when the law will be binding for all Bahá'ís (Bahá'u'lláh, 1992). As a result of this, all of the couples in this study in which both individuals were not of Persian descent had the option of a longer engagement period. Ryan summed up many of the participants' perspectives on the benefits and difficulties of having a 95-day engagement:

> It both helps and hurts. In some ways it's a challenge because we're limited, we can't do the things we'd like to do if we had more time. But on the other hand, it

helps because in some ways it will help with the chastity. If we knew we were getting married but we had to wait a year, I can see how individuals could get confused, or just like be, "We're essentially married, so why can't we be more intimate?" Whereas at least we know that's gonna wrap up. . . . It also helps in the sense of making decisions. Weddings in many ways are a commercial industry. It's helped us cut through some of that stuff so we can decide what we really want.

Many non-Persian Bahá'ís take advantage of this temporary loophole, recognizing that having more than three months to plan a wedding can alleviate some time-crunch stress as well as allow room for more options when it comes to choosing a dress or wedding venue. Interestingly, at some point during the course of their interviews, half of the participants mentioned their appreciation for this law, even though none of the interview questions actually addressed it. Those who got married within 95 days were grateful that they were not engaged longer, and those who took longer than 95 days to plan their weddings actually wished, in retrospect, that they had stayed within the 95-day bracket. The reasons participants gave for this ranged from wanting to simply get the stress of the planning process over with faster, to admitting that it was harder to abide by the chastity laws once they made the decision to get married. Reflecting on what she would have done differently in the preparation process, Nadia stated: "I probably would've shortened the engagement time. I think that would have been conducive to the emotional and spiritual well-being of us." Many other participants echoed this feeling.

Another reason some participants gave for appreciating the 95-day rule was that they felt it kept the focus more on the marriage, rather than the wedding itself. The idea

of the commercialization of weddings came up often, and participants explained that the

95-day rule helped them focus on the marriage itself. Siavash stated:

>Our social environment teaches women that the event of your wedding is the most
>
>important event of your life, when really, the decision to get married is one of the
>
>most important decisions you'll ever make, but that's not necessarily what's
>
>celebrated in secular society. It's the event of the wedding, independent of who
>
>you're marrying and independent of the decisions you've made, independent of
>
>why you've made those decisions, it's simply the event. And it's become like a
>
>business now.

Bahar spoke about her experience:

>The 95 days, I think, is actually quite a blessing. And I think it's a blessing
>
>because I call it the Band-Aid effect – you really just rip it off and get it over
>
>with. You don't have time to dwell on these intricacies that people can really get
>
>caught up in when planning a wedding. It takes over a lot of your emotions, a lot
>
>of your thoughts, and it's difficult to balance that, you know, because you're not
>
>engaged for eternity, like other couples that start losing their minds and their sole
>
>focus in life is planning a wedding for a year, if not for years. So then they have
>
>no idea what to do with themselves when their wedding is finally over. So the 95
>
>days is awesome because you avoid that syndrome.

Logistically, planning a wedding in three months can be quite difficult, as many

venues are booked a year or more in advance, and dresses typically take between six

months to a year to be delivered to the bride. One bride said, "It's hard to plan a wedding

. . . in 95 days, when you go into a bridal shop and they laugh in your face and some of

them actually told me to get out." These smaller details aside, it seems, ultimately, that those who did plan their weddings within 95 days were grateful for having done so.

Themes Regarding the Premarital Questionnaire

Participants analyzed RELATE (RELATionship Evaluation), a widely-used and well-respected questionnaire developed at Brigham Young University (www.relate-institute.org). RELATE is an online questionnaire that is divided into eight sections. It addresses topics ranging from family life to perceptions about one's partner. For purposes of this study, the items from the online questionnaire were copied and pasted onto a Word document, in order to facilitate review by the participants; once it was translated into Word, the document was 27 pages long. The following section focuses on themes regarding the feedback given by the participants after they reviewed RELATE.

"It's Too Detailed": Bigger is Not Necessarily Better

While I initially assumed that the participants would perceive the thorough nature of the questionnaire as a good thing, the most common feedback they gave was that it is simply too long. Many participants actually referred to the length of the assessment as a deterrent, and some said that as they went through the questionnaire, they went from analyzing it in detail to skimming through it. Interestingly, a few respondents reported that they felt themselves growing more and more impatient as they went through the questionnaire, and that this impatience influenced how favorably they looked upon it. Siavash stated:

> After looking through a couple pages, I just told myself it's too detailed. It doesn't
> need to be this detailed. And that probably would go against what a lot of
> researchers are trained to do, but I really feel like . . . it's a little too detailed. One

thing that definitely comes into role, at least for me when I'm taking some sort of

text or exam, is the longer it takes me to go through an exam, the more my

attitude and feelings begin to change. The more my feelings begin to change, the

more it affects the way that I'm answering the questions.

Cory shared Siavash's feelings:

It was a lot. Wow, they really were going after a lot of information which can be

good. But just as someone who [would be] taking the questionnaire, I didn't think

I could sit through all of this. I got into skim mode about halfway through.

A common occurrence throughout the interviews was that several of the

participants admitted to not having finished reviewing the questionnaires, even though

they had ample time to do so between receiving the paperwork and completing the

interview. Because so many of the participants reflected this pattern, my natural

conclusion is that the questionnaire simply has too much information for people to

process. While it could be assumed that the thoroughness of the questionnaire is a good

thing, the fact that it caused participants in this study to lose interest and even become

somewhat frustrated suggests that the length of the questionnaire is counter-productive.

"Reflect on What's Important": The Usefulness of Reflection Questions

Items on the questionnaire which did seem to resonate on a deeper level for the

participants were those that encouraged them to reflect on the emotional aspects of

themselves or their families, rather than those that focused on logistical areas like

education, income, or health. Questions that provoked introspection among the

participants regarding previous relationships, their views of their current relationships,

and their perceptions of their parents' relationship dynamics were all of particular interest to the participants in the present study. Cory stated:

A lot of people don't even take the time to reflect on what's important to them. And it's very difficult to figure out what you're looking for in another person if you don't know yourself very well. Self-reflection questions are very useful.

Some participants mentioned that reflection questions actually deepened their appreciation for their current partners; they explained that the contrast between past and present was a welcome reminder of how happy they were with their fiancés. Mona said, "When it asks questions about previous partners . . . it made me think, well, I had these issues with my ex, and I don't have them with [Rick] now. So it kind of put things into perspective." Emma also stated, "I think also thinking about your partner and the attributes they have and actually putting it in black and white on paper is really interesting. And actually, reading [that] made me appreciate [Zack] more."

When asked whether they felt any part of the questionnaire was not useful or applicable, nearly every participant mentioned that the questions addressing practical details about their parents—such as their income or how close they live to them—were insignificant and unnecessary. Responses ranged from "I don't know, and I don't care" to "I don't know why that makes a difference to me." Participants simply were not interested in logistical questions about their parents, and did not find them relevant.

However, when asked about parts of the questionnaire that they found especially useful, some respondents mentioned that the questions focused on the emotional dynamic between their parents were very useful and thought provoking. Doug explained his perspective:

The background to your parents is always interesting because you don't really

think about it, but then you think it could have an effect on the way you were

obviously brought up, and how you might end up turning out without even

knowing about it.

Lana expressed a similar perspective: "Anything talking about your parents' way of

dealing with conflict, it can bring insights to that person's own way. Or understanding

what went right or wrong in your parents' marriage can help with that a lot."

By and large, questions that prompted emotional reflections among the

participants—whether they pertained to their own relationships or the relationships

between their parents—resonated quite strongly. Alternatively, questions that were

unrelated to the actual emotional dynamics of the couple relationship—such as those

about video games and parental income—seemed irrelevant and superfluous to the

participants.

"This Wouldn't Give a Ton of Insights": Lack of Applicability

A surprising find was that nine of the 14 participants stated that they felt the

questionnaire was only partially, or not at all, applicable to them. Many expressed feeling

that a questionnaire more tailored to their religious beliefs would be a better fit, and that

this particular assessment did not focus enough on spirituality and/or religion. This is

particularly interesting, considering the fact that RELATE was designed at Brigham

Young University, a school known for being religiously oriented. Doug stated:

There is nothing like religion or spirituality or anything like that [in the

questionnaire]. It doesn't address any of that; there are a couple questions each,

like how religious is your father or how religious is your partner, but that's as far

as it goes. To me that would be one of the most important things, how strong

someone is with their faith. Because to me, what everyone does with their life

should be based off that. So it just doesn't address that.

Rick also felt that this particular questionnaire fell short in addressing spirituality:

I don't think that this [questionnaire] would have given you a ton of insights. . . . I

think in terms of particular faiths, there could have been some revealing questions

asked . . . [Questions about] the Bahá'í approaches to stuff, like consultation. How

are you gonna handle arguments? . . . Do you address conflict the same way your

religion suggests that you do?

Four of the seven couples in the study mentioned that they had previously used

other questionnaires, which they did find useful and personally applicable; one of the

most commonly mentioned questionnaires was one that was designed particularly for

Bahá'ís. It appears that an assessment with a stronger incorporation of Bahá'í principles

would be a better fit for many of the participants.

Miscellaneous Themes

Throughout the course of the interviews, some smaller themes surfaced. While the

majority of participants did not necessarily mention these themes, enough people

discussed them to warrant their being highlighted here.

"You Can't Really Say All That Much": Reputational Concerns

The dating taboo mentioned previously not only makes it difficult to balance

maintaining Bahá'í standards and wanting to get to know someone on a deeper level, but

it also makes some individuals—in this study, often the female participants—fearful of

the reputation they would get within the community if the relationship were to end. The

awareness of the taboo puts a particular pressure on the relationship, causing the couples to feel they are under close scrutiny; they sense that if the relationship does not work out, one or both of them will get a bad name. Emma explained her perspective:

> The one thing about it you can't really say all that much [about the fact that you're dating]. That's just not going to go down well, especially if something goes the other way and doesn't work out, then there is, unfortunately, a bad name for yourself and the other person. So unfortunately you can't say anything. . . . I definitely didn't feel comfortable about it.

Zack mentioned that he believes reputational concerns are more prevalent for women than they are for men. He explained, "Then there's the stigma of Bahá'í women who date Bahá'í men, and then the relationship falters, then there's some kind of stigma against the woman because she dated the [men]." This distinction would be a fascinating subject to explore in a separate study.

"I Just Wasn't Able to be Myself": Family Involvement

A few of the participants in the study stated that being in frequent contact with family proved to be a source of stress on the relationship. In some circumstances, individuals were even living with their future in-laws, and some explained that at times it was a bit too close for comfort. One participant explained:

> We've spent a lot of time at my house. Obviously my whole family lives here, and when we're all in the same house I find that we do have differences. Other people become involved. It always becomes way more complicated than it should be. . . . Because we can't really [sort out issues] between ourselves, my family will jump in and say that I shouldn't be talking to [him] like that, and I'll get

angry. I think my parents really want [him] to feel at home, so even if he's wrong

they'll say I'm wrong. Then I'll get angry because everyone is siding with him.

Regardless of what's happening the problem never gets solved.

Another participant spoke about her fiancé's experience living at her parents' house for a

period of time:

I didn't feel like I was free to have a comfortable relationship with [him]. . . . And

I just felt like I had to put on a façade in front of my parents. And I just wasn't

able to be myself. And also, I didn't even feel comfortable kissing [him], even on

the cheek or something, at my parents' house. It was really weird.

The feeling of constantly being under the scrutiny of family caused some participants in

this study to feel inhibited from being themselves. They reported feeling self-conscious in

a variety of situations, whether working out a difficulty or simply expressing affection for

their partners.

"A Very Weird Rating System": Limited Options for Answers

A frustration expressed by some of the participants was that the options given for

answering the questionnaire items were too restricting and did not accurately represent

their perspectives. Many of them felt that the questionnaire asks fairly weighty and

significant questions that prompt responses more complex than the simple range of

strongly agree, *agree*, *neutral*, *disagree*, and *strongly disagree*. Ryan explained:

There are items that I feel like, although they could be applicable, the way that

they're worded or the opportunities to answer are where they feel like they're not

applicable. Sometimes I felt like I couldn't answer a question correctly. For

example in a question it might have both a time and a condition, but then the way

of answering it might only be either a time (like rarely) or a condition (like

disagree). So I felt like one of them contradicted the other.

Emma made it a point to emphasize her frustration with the answering system in this

questionnaire:

There is definitely one thing I need to say: To say "satisfied, dissatisfied, neutral,

strongly dissatisfied"—some of these don't really apply to those questions. It's a

very weird rating system. I didn't even know how to answer that, it's just weird.

Mia also drew attention to the fact that if the options for responding are too limiting, the

responses will not accurately reflect the couple's compatibility. She stated, "There seems

to be a lot of options, but for some of them it's [too simplified or limited]. So how

accurate really is this? So I'm kind of turned off by doing these assessments."

The opinion shared among many of the participants that the premarital

questionnaire is too limiting suggests that going through a questionnaire in the presence

of a therapist may be more appealing; this way, individuals are afforded the opportunity

to elaborate on their answers, and they can feel that their responses truly reflect their

perspectives. Mia spoke about the usefulness of having a therapist present when

reviewing the results of the premarital questionnaire:

If the feedback is useful, [that's what matters]. [Someone who] gives you

feedback, then helps you understand what your next step could be to address it.

Having someone help you translate the results, that's what's more important to

me. It's useful if there's follow-through.

Reflections on Struggles in Reflexivity

Throughout the course of the interviews, I occasionally found myself either surprised or frustrated by something the participants said. While I remained mindful of maintaining a poker face and being as neutral as possible, I did find that certain responses triggered a stronger internal reaction for me than I expected. Three particular triggers in the interview process stood out for me: (1) participants who had little to contribute, (2) participants who had a strikingly different understanding of the Bahá'í writings than I do, and (3) participants who voiced complaints that struck a bit too close to home for me on a personal level. I will briefly elaborate on these challenges in this section.

The Boring Interview

As a qualitative researcher, it is natural and reasonable to expect that participants in a study will contribute content that will add to the wealth of knowledge being collected; any responses offered in the interviews are useful and inform the process. However, I found that when a participant's responses did not appear especially insightful, thoughtful, or even interesting, I felt frustrated. This made me realize that I went into this study expecting participants to have stories about their experiences, rather than just a simple sense of contentment or even neutrality regarding their experiences. My expectation for "stuff" in the interviews was made blatantly apparent to me when participants simply did not have much stuff to offer. I realized that not all participants had some sort of dramatic saga to reflect upon, and that sometimes their experiences were simple and fairly uneventful.

Differences in Opinion

In one specific interview, the participant elaborated on his understanding of the Bahá'í laws and their applicability to premarital preparation. He spoke honestly about his struggle with the chastity laws, and mentioned throughout the interview that he felt other laws in the Bahá'í Faith were more important to adhere to, such as fostering unity and being kind to others. During his interview he stated:

> . . . there's so much emphasis on building unity, showing love, trust, compassion, trustworthiness, and then there are some rules that are there somewhere and have been mentioned one time, and building unity is mentioned hundreds of times. So I put my effort towards that, and hopefully as I try to live my life I am able to meet all the laws as best I can.

From my perspective, I felt the participant was minimizing or loosely interpreting parts of the Bahá'í writings, which I believe are clear and unmistakable. This happened on more than one occasion throughout the interview process, and I found that I had to hold myself back from interjecting and saying things like, "You know, it does say in black and white that such-and-such really is not okay. There's no other way to slice it." In these moments I reminded myself that my understanding is just that: *my* understanding. To offer my personal beliefs would only disrupt the trust that was being built in the interviews, and would also alter whatever authentic, organic information the participants were offering me.

A Little Too Close to Home

In another interview, the participant candidly spoke about the difficulties he had experienced with Bahá'í women in his past—one of whom was actually a marriage and

family therapist! He was open about sharing that he had an extremely negative experience with this woman, as well as with other women, and that for a long time he had just sworn off Bahá'í women altogether. He recounted his experience:

> The Bahá'í women before I met [my fiancée] that I tried to get to know, they were just scary situations. Situations that I was almost scarred from, and [I] almost didn't want to deal with Bahá'í women for a long time. . . . I had some really extreme experiences, and I literally got scarred from that. . . . After these experiences I was just . . . really angry. And I had this anger towards Bahá'í women for a while. I got really disgruntled with the whole Bahá'í dating scene.

The more he elaborated on his experience—which, in retrospect, really was quite unpleasant—the more I found myself feeling defensive and wanting to advocate for the sane Bahá'í women out there. Again, this would have interrupted the trust we were building in the interview process, and it could have caused this participant to no longer speak as openly once he realized that I was identifying with the very women he had once sworn off.

Although these instances that triggered an unexpected internal response from me were frustrating to deal with in the moment, I also recognized that they were opportunities to learn more about myself. Fine (2012) contends that it is precisely in these moments of clashing that we learn more about ourselves. As I acknowledged my frustration in hearing things that resonated on a more personal level, I realized that full objectivity on the part of the researcher is impossible, especially in situations where the researcher deeply identifies with the subject being studied. However, at the same time, I believe this identification actually served to enrich the present study. My interest and

identification fueled my drive to further understand what the participants were communicating, and those irritable moments pushed me to recognize my sensitivities and strive to make sense of the respondents' perspectives in an attempt to understand their experiences as a whole.

Summary

The Bahá'í Faith—both its writings and its community members—plays a major role in the premarital preparation process of the participants in one form or another. Based on the gathered data, it appears to influence multiple aspects of the participants' lives, including their experiences within their respective religious communities, their experiences with the greater society, and even their wedding-planning processes. The Bahá'í Faith also plays a large role in determining whether or not the participants found RELATE to be helpful in analyzing the dynamics of their relationships with their partners. Furthermore, it influences what questionnaires participants do find to be helpful.

The common theme unifying both aspects of this study is that the Bahá'í Faith is the lens through which the participants view both their premarital experience and the effectiveness of the RELATE assessment. Although the first focus of the study directly explored the relationship between the participants' Bahá'í Faith and their premarital preparation, the second focus on analyzing RELATE did not expressly have anything to do with participants' Bahá'í identity. The fact that the questionnaire does not address specific religious distinctions was a recurring criticism among the participants. At the same time, many of the participants stated that other premarital assessments they had utilized, which were tailored for Bahá'í beliefs, felt more applicable to them. The participants' religious identity seems to be the springboard from which they

conceptualized everything explored in the interviews. The following and final chapter will explore the findings of this study in relationship to the larger body of existing research, and will also discuss the limitations of the present study as well as implications for future practice.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the present study was to take an in-depth look at two aspects of the lives of 14 young adult Bahá'ís: (1) their premarital preparation process while engaged, and (2) their views of what an effective premarital questionnaire would entail. To explore these topics, I conducted detailed interviews with the participants, all of whom were engaged to be married. Throughout the course of the interviews, I identified a total of eight major themes and three miscellaneous, smaller themes, which are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Major and Miscellaneous Themes in the Study

	PREMARITAL PREPARATION	PREMARITAL QUESTIONNAIRE
MAJOR THEMES	• The dating taboo • Lack of guidance from the greater community • Openness with the outside community • The outside community's expectations • The 95-day engagement	• Bigger is not necessarily better • The Usefulness of Reflection Questions • Lack of applicability
MISCELLANEOUS THEMES	• Reputational concerns • Family involvement	• Limited options for answers

Based on the feedback I collected throughout the course of the interviews, I discovered that premarital preparation is a conscious process for the majority of the participants. Their responses indicate that, for most of them, the Bahá'í belief system is integral to the marriage preparation process. This finding brings to light that, for the

participants of this study, the Bahá'í Faith is closely intertwined with their mindset toward marriage.

In this chapter, I discuss the findings of the current study in relationship to the larger body of literature regarding religion, marriage, and premarital assessments. I also explore the relationship between the two seemingly separate focuses of the current study, illustrating the connection between the premarital experience and premarital questionnaires. I then elaborate on the limitations of this study, discuss implications for practice and future research, and offer concluding remarks on my personal experience conducting this study.

Findings of the Study

Findings Within the Larger Context of Literature

The existing literature has established a strong relationship between religiosity and marital satisfaction (Campbell & Wright, 2010; Lambert & Dollahite, 2006). Couples who report a higher level of religiosity are more likely to report lower levels of marital discord and higher levels of happiness (Lambert & Dollahite, 2006; Mahoney, Pargament, Tarakeshwar, & Swank, 2008). Previous research has also established the usefulness of premarital assessments, with many studies indicating that couples who utilize premarital assessments have a higher level of functioning (Busby et al., 2007; Halford et al., 2003; Larson, Vatter, Galbraith, Holman, & Stahmann, 2007). However, I could not find any literature that addressed religious individuals and their process *before* getting married.

The purpose of this study was to fill this gap in the literature, which is also the link between the two focuses of the study: How does religion influence premarital

preparation, both experientially and practically? How do one's religious beliefs affect their experiences as they prepare for marriage, and how do these religious beliefs influence what items they find applicable within an assessment? Literature has established the connection between marriage and religion, and the connection between marriage and premarital assessments, but research has yet to connect the all three. The present study attempted to do just this, within the population of members of the Bahá'í Faith.

Transformation of the Research into Grounded Theory

This study utilized a grounded theory approach, which essentially takes the stance that understanding is created through a bottom-up approach, rather than from the top-down. In grounded theory studies, the researcher approaches the topic of study without a preconceived idea of what will be found; instead, he or she generates theories and understanding based solely on the feedback given by the participants (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The danger of going into a study with an existing theory is that it can blind the researcher to the richness of the incoming data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). For this reason, I made every effort in the present study to set aside my expectations and assumptions, as I endeavored to truly see the wealth of insight offered by the participants. However, as some degree of researcher bias is inevitable, these biases are addressed and elaborated upon later in this chapter.

Glaser and Strauss (1967) suggest that the researcher should go into the study actually ignoring the existing literature on the subject. While that may be difficult—if not impossible—in most studies, it was a particular advantage in the present study, since there simply was no existing literature on the specific subject being explored. This

enabled me to remain uninfluenced by any literature, which could have potentially altered my objectivity.

From the outset of the study, I made a conscious effort to design the interview questions so that they garnered the most honest and forthright answers possible. It was essential for me to ask questions that did not nudge the participants in any particular direction, leaving them free to answer authentically. I carried this mindset into the actual interview process; since I conducted all the interviews face-to-face—either via Skype or in person—I was extremely aware of the fact that I could easily communicate some sort of expectation, satisfaction, or dissatisfaction with the participants' input. In everything I communicated, whether through my body language or my intonation when asking questions, I did my best to simultaneously demonstrate neutrality and receptivity to all responses.

The further I got into the interview process, the more I started to notice trends developing. As I began to see patterns, I took note of my observations via memoing so that I could refer back to them if and when these themes began to further gel throughout the conversations. It was important to me that the themes generated from this study were an accurate representation of what the participants offered during the interview process, and I did my best to set aside my own filters so as to not taint the final product.

Gradually, I began to identify more solidified themes. On occasion, I would realize that while I thought a particular theme might be developing, I was not necessarily analyzing the data closely enough; I was, to some degree, becoming attached to a particular theme that was not substantially supported by the data. When this occurred, I recognized the need to abandon that particular line of thinking. This process of analysis

and re-analysis continued until I felt I had exhausted the examination of the data from every possible angle.

Once the themes were established and supported by exemplars given by the participants, member checking was the next step. I sent the findings to each of the participants via e-mail, requesting that they review everything to make sure I properly understood their input and incorporated their responses into the findings. In an effort to keep the findings as true to the participants' experiences as possible, I invited the participants to offer suggestions or revisions. I gave them a two-week time frame to review the data, and informed them that if they did not offer further critiques or input by the end of the two weeks, I would conclude that they were satisfied with the material. Through the rigorous process of striving for neutrality in all facets of the process, continuously revisiting the data to ensure its support of the emerging themes, and engaging in member checking to ensure that the participants felt they were accurately understood, the resulting themes held true to the grounded theory approach.

A Substantive Theory of the Experience of Young Adult Bahá'ís Preparing for Marriage

Glaser and Strauss (1967) distinguish between a *substantive theory*, which is developed for a very particular area of study, and a *formal theory*, which is developed for a conceptual area of study. Since the focus of this study was a very specific topic, a substantive theory was most fitting. Essentially, the developed theory can be considered a somewhat tentative theory, rather than a full-blown, robust theory.

Based on the themes I identified from the data, I constructed the following substantive theory regarding the experience of young adult Bahá'ís preparing for marriage:

> Young adult Bahá'ís who are preparing for marriage are fundamentally caught in a dating quandary. They feel they receive little to no guidance from individuals in the Bahá'í community, and the guidance that is offered from outside the Bahá'í community, despite being considered useful by many, is deemed by this particular population to have little applicability.

Ironically, the feedback from the participants in this study suggests that these young Bahá'ís are in dire need of premarital guidance yet are unable to relate to most of the established guidance that exists.

The entire scope of the participants' experience—including their relationships with their religious community, their relationships with the larger society, their relationships with their significant others, and even their views of what needs to be explored in premarital questionnaires—is filtered through the lens of their religious identity. Being a Bahá'í does not seem to simply be one of many facets that make up the participants' overall sense of identity; rather, it seems to be the *foundation* of their identity. This foundation gives individuals a particular perception of their experiences within their romantic relationships, which is both unique and powerful. Furthermore, it greatly contributes to the dilemma they find themselves in, wherein they have difficulty detaching from the potentially negative perceptions within their Bahá'í communities, but at the same time are acutely aware that their identity—and the beliefs that come with it— does not fit in with the expectations of mainstream society.

The participants' religious communities, which are intended to be a place of support and encouragement, can actually prove to be a source of stress and anxiety when they unintentionally cause the individuals to feel they are not being "proper Bahá'ís"; this essentially conveys to them that their very foundation is wrong or not good enough. The participants in this study were so aware of the expected standards of the Bahá'í community that they often opted to keep their relationships a secret until they were engaged, rather than risk tainting their fellow Bahá'ís' view of their character. Their Bahá'í identity was so important to them that they took whatever precautions they could to not to risk it being misconstrued.

At the same time, individuals in this study often found themselves not fitting in to society's expectations and standards, thereby causing them to feel isolated or misunderstood. Their adherence to Bahá'í standards—such as abstaining from sex before marriage, or not cohabitating until they were married—often made them feel as if they were seen by others as strange or crazy. Again, their Bahá'í identity *was* their fundamental identity, and being keenly aware of this frequently caused them to feel like they were outsiders in comparison to mainstream society.

One of the main comments that participants voiced regarding the premarital assessment was that its applicability and effectiveness would be greater if more questions actually addressed religion and spirituality. Many participants felt they simply could not relate to RELATE; they found it unnecessarily long, and believed it would be more useful if it took into account their personal religious beliefs and standards. According to the participants, incorporating the Bahá'í Faith into the questionnaire would have made it

much more appealing, as it would have more directly addressed fundamental facets of their individual characters and daily lives.

Not only did many of the participants feel that the questionnaire was not relevant, but a few of them also indicated feeling put off by some of the questionnaire items. Participants frequently mentioned that they saw questions addressing topics such as pornography and sexual abuse as odd and, in some cases, slightly offensive. In these instances I reminded the participants that the RELATE questionnaire is generic and not specifically designed for them or for other members of the Bahá'í Faith; once I pointed out that these topics could be crucial for some couples to address, many of the participants seemed to relax a bit and expressed understanding why these topics could be important for other couples to evaluate.

A More Applicable Approach

In many of the interviews, participants referred to a particular questionnaire that they did find useful. This questionnaire was designed by Susanne Alexander, a member of the Bahá'í Faith and a relationship and marriage coach who has written several books on incorporating Bahá'í principles into relationships. Her work is applicable to both couples who are dating and couples who are already married. One of Alexander's works, which she co-wrote with Craig A. Farnsworth, is a book entitled *Marriage Can Be Forever* (Alexander & Farnsworth, 2003). It is comprised of a collection of questionnaires designed as worksheets (see Appendix F), which individuals can complete either independently or with their significant others. One benefit of using Alexander's book is that it allows individuals to choose from nearly 50 different worksheets, each of which focuses on a different aspect of relationships, such as consultation, finances,

expectations of a spouse, and even analyzing trends within the relationship. This way, participants are able to explore in-depth facets of their relationship that are of interest to them.

The questionnaires in Alexander and Farnsworth's (2003) book are strong in areas that many of the participants found RELATE to be weak. They incorporate both the concept of spirituality and the religious beliefs of the Bahá'í Faith, and also ask participants open-ended questions, rather than forcing them to tailor their answers to fit a pre-determined scale of agreement. Additionally, the shorter length of these questionnaires may have been more appealing and manageable for the participants. Fusing Alexander's Bahá'í-inspired method with a systemic approach informed by research could create a questionnaire that is much better suited for this population, providing them with a tool that could truly be advantageous to them during this confusing phase of their lives.

Timing Matters

One concern about the RELATE questionnaire is that most couples, once they are engaged, are likely not in a state of mind to want to analyze their compatibility. At this stage in the courtship process, many couples are caught up in the excitement of wedding planning and looking forward to marriage; examining their compatibility is probably far from their minds. Asking couples who are well into the planning stages of their wedding to evaluate the RELATE questionnaire may have made the questionnaire seem even less applicable, since they likely perceived their compatibility as already well-established.

Self of the Researcher in Theory Development

One possible criticism of this study is that my personal identification with the researched subject matter is too close. It could be assumed that because the generated substantive theory is inevitably influenced by the self of the researcher, the theory is not objective enough. However, Fine (1998) argues that this closeness can add a particular richness to the research and theory development, which is actually valuable, rather than serving as an obstacle or hindrance. Fine also points out that by engaging with others, we learn more about ourselves, as well as who we are in relation to the contexts we study.

Striving to maintain a distance between the researcher and the participants is, in a way, denying reality. As researchers we work hard to establish a connection with our participants, yet we deny that connection in the name of objectivity when interpreting the data. Fine (1998) contends that in the pursuit of obtaining objective data, we "limit what we feel free to say, expand our minds and constrict our mouths, engage [ourselves] in intimacy and seduce [ourselves] into complicity, make us quick to interpret and hesitant to write" (p. 72). This insistence on separation and objectivity can create a sort of polarized dynamic; we feel we must separate our interpretation of data from the larger, more personal experience we are bound to have if we effectively connect with our research participants during the interview process.

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Limitations of the Research

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Regardless of how many precautions are taken to thoroughly address various issues that come up in different studies, all research has its limitations. The following section addresses the limitations of the present study, including sample limitations, researcher bias, and limits to generalizability.

Limitations of the Sample

While some may argue that a sample size of 14 individuals is too small, proponents of the grounded theory approach suggest that the crucial element is representing as much diversity within the sample as possible. According to Patton (1987), any themes that emerge from a diverse sample are particularly significant, because they cut across a great deal of variation; themes that emerge out of diversity are likely to reflect central, core trends.

To say with absolute certainty that a sample is diverse enough may be a bit overconfident in any scenario. Although the sample for this study was quite diverse, constraints of time and practicality made it difficult to fully maximize the diversity. Restricting the sample to couples who were engaged at the time of the interview greatly narrowed the possibilities; the sample was then further limited by the fact that I needed to select participants as quickly as possible in order to meet logistical deadlines. Due to the naturally diverse nature of the Bahá'í world, it was relatively easy to have a fairly diverse sample; yet there is no doubt that there could always be room for further, more widespread diversity.

Consequence of Time

Due to the extensive length of the questionnaire, participants in this study were given ample time to review RELATE prior to their interviews. However, this proved to be a double-edged sword, as that period of time often caused them to forget much of what they had reviewed. In the majority of the interviews, participants mentioned that they simply did not remember very much about the questionnaire itself, and one or two participants even asked for more time to review the questionnaire again before continuing

the interview. The length of the questionnaire, combined with the passage of time prior to discussing it, proved to be a difficult combination to work with throughout the interviews.

Interviewing Couples

Although I interviewed each of the participants separately, the fact that each participant was engaged to another individual who was also participating in the study could be a limitation. Concerns regarding personal opinions, confidentiality, advance knowledge of the questions, and a preconceived idea of the researcher could all influence the answers given in the interviews. The following are a few potential limitations that may have resulted from interviewing couples, which may or may not have actually come into play during this study:

1. The individuals who were interviewed first could have communicated their opinions about the content of the interview to their partners, who had yet to be interviewed, thereby potentially influencing the organic authenticity of their answers.

2. The individuals who were interviewed first could have informed their partners, who had yet to be interviewed, about what questions to expect during the dialogue; answers offered after having an extended period of time to contemplate the questions may differ from answers that would otherwise have been given more spontaneously.

3. Although confidentiality was continuously assured throughout the entire process, participants could still have been concerned that their partners might find out

about particularly sensitive information, thus prompting them to hold back from full disclosure.

4. Participants could have potentially developed particular perceptions of the researcher and subsequently communicated those perceptions to their partners, resulting in a unique sort of participant bias.

Working with couples is an enjoyable yet complex process that is not without its limitations and considerations.

Limits to Generalizability

Three major factors contribute to the limitation of generalizability in this study: diversity, age, and religiosity. As mentioned previously in this chapter, I attempted to make the sample as diverse as possible; however, given the fact that the Bahá'í Faith is such a globally widespread religion, a larger sample with an even more diverse representation would have been ideal. Although they reported a variety of cultural backgrounds, participants in the study were still ultimately raised in, and currently residing in, a Western country. This fact alone could greatly influence the experiences they reported, thus limiting how much the themes gleaned from this study could be applied to individuals from non-Western cultures.

The age bracket of the participants also contributes to the lack of generalizability. Since 13 of the 14 participants were in their 20s, there is a limit to how much the feedback they gave in their interviews can be applied to individuals outside that age range. It can be argued that life experience in the 20s is unique, and that in order to make the results of this study more widely applicable, perspectives of more individuals in their 30s would be helpful.

Religiosity also influences how much the findings of this study can be applied to the larger Bahá'í community. Because the participants in this study mostly identified themselves as highly religious, the generalizability of the grounded theory to the general Bahá'í world is limited. Religiosity is a fairly abstract and fluid concept, and it is impossible to categorize individuals into compartments of religious devotion. People who view themselves as either less religious or more religious may find that their experiences are quite different from what has been described in the current study.

Implications for Practice

While some therapists may be skeptical that members of this population will ever walk through their office doors, the reality is that the Bahá'í Faith is one of the most geographically widespread religions in the world, and is rapidly growing. Not only would the information garnered from this research be useful for any therapist working with a Bahá'í individual, couple, or family, but it would also be useful for therapists working with many clients who identify themselves as religious. The recognition that clients' religion can serve as the primary lens through which they view their world is an essential acknowledgement, both in the therapeutic relationship and the therapeutic process.

Therapists working with young adult Bahá'ís in the courtship and engagement phases of their relationships would do well to keep in mind that there could be opposing forces in their lives, waging a tug-of-war on their emotions. Therapists need to understand that their clients' religious communities have particular assumptions and expectations for them to uphold Bahá'í standards; at the same time, the outside community often judges or even criticizes them for striving to uphold these very

standards. Developing the skills to work with clients as they navigate through this societal pressure cooker could prove to be an invaluable asset in the therapy room.

Knowledge regarding perspectives toward premarital questionnaires would also be useful for therapists working with Bahá'ís going through premarital therapy. While RELATE was not found to be especially applicable to the participants of this study, many of the participants did report utilizing other tools to aid them in the preparation process. It may be ideal to go through premarital preparation with a therapist who is either versed in, or willing to learn about, the Bahá'í Faith and its teachings related to marriage and family life. The personal touch of a therapist can be a useful bridge between a somewhat generic, impersonal assessment and two people trying to make sense of their compatibilities. Additionally, the presence of a therapist would help clients work through incompatibilities, difficulties, or confusion that may arise as a result of taking a premarital assessment.

Implications for the Bahá'í Community

The participants of this study gave quite a bit of feedback regarding ways in which they wished their respective Bahá'í communities would address courtship and premarital preparation. The information garnered from the present study not only identifies areas in which the participants hoped for improvement, it also offers specific suggestions for ways to foster the desired improvement. One of the major findings of the study is that individuals are hungry for some sort of guidance to assist them in this phase of their lives; this guidance could come from parents, happily married couples, or the larger Bahá'í community.

The dating taboo that exists within the Bahá'í community seems to make many Bahá'ís feel as if they simply cannot or should not discuss the realities of the dating world with one another. At the same time, many individuals in this study indicated that they would have liked to speak to others about it, in hopes of getting perspective, advice, or the wisdom of experience. While it would clearly be unrealistic to expect the participants' wariness about discussing this topic to just vanish overnight, a viable option might be for the governing bodies of each city—known as the Local Spiritual Assemblies—to establish committees comprised of people who are capable and comfortable discussing topics related to dating and marriage. Doing this would accomplish two major things: (a) resources would be created for individuals to utilize, and (b) the stigma of discussing this topic could be removed, simple because of the Local Spiritual Assembly making it acceptable to address these issues.

Many individuals stated that they felt it would be useful if more classes were made available to the Bahá'í community to address the marital preparation phase of life. These classes could be implemented in a variety of arenas—on a more local, grass-roots level, or on a larger and more formalized level, such as at the different established Bahá'í schools around the country. Classes could focus on deepening participants' understanding of the Bahá'í writings that discuss marriage and relate these writing to real-life experience. These classes could be made available to couples who are interested in getting married, as well as to individuals who simply want to prepare even before they have met "the One". A forum that is simultaneously academic and a safe space to discuss sensitive issues could prove to be an invaluable resource for the young adult Bahá'í community.

Other couples within the Bahá'í community could benefit from the findings of this study, in that they may find they are not alone in their journey. A sense of comfort and reassurance may be felt by other couples, by virtue of the fact that they can relate to the perspectives and experiences of the individuals in this study. Furthermore, whatever changes are implemented by communities in an attempt to address certain needs would be beneficial to future couples, who would then have access to resources which could prove to be helpful to them in their premarital preparation process.

Implications for Future Research

Future studies focused on further exploring the experiences of young adult Bahá'ís in the premarital phase of their lives could expand on the current research in few different ways. One angle that could be particularly interesting would be to follow up with the participants of the current study a few years into their marriage. A study conducted at the five-year mark, for example, could explore the ways in which each couple prepared for marriage, whether or not they felt their preparation process was adequate and helpful, and whether they would have done anything differently.

Having participants review questionnaires that were specifically designed for Bahá'ís would be another direction worthy of exploration. Since participants in the present study expressed a preference for questionnaires that are more tailored to their religious beliefs and principles, it would be interesting to further narrow down what a truly effective questionnaire *does* look like for this population. Similarly, it would be interesting for participants in a future study to review this questionnaire with the researcher, since personal touch could influence how much a questionnaire resonates with the participants.

A new questionnaire, which encompasses content and is rooted in Bahá'ís ideals and principles, could potentially include different sections that delve into areas of importance that are either focused on in the Bahá'í writings or relate to the experience of living a Bahá'í life while engaged. Some possible questions to explore include:

1. How well do you feel you and your partner are able to incorporate consultation into your lives?

2. Do you feel you and your partner effectively incorporate the principle of unity in your relationship?

3. Do you feel that spirituality is a significant part of your relationship?

4. How do Bahá'í principles factor in to conflict resolution between you and your partner?

5. How would Bahá'í principles factor in to raising children with your partner?

6. How, if at all, do you feel the Bahá'í community's expectations affect you/your relationship?

7. How, if at all, do you feel mainstream society's expectations affect you/your relationship?

8. Do you feel that other people's expectations influence your decisions within the relationship?

9. Do you feel pressured by other people's expectations?

10. Are you comfortable being open about your relationship with your significant other? If not, how does this discomfort affect your happiness within the relationship?

It would be fascinating to explore participants' reactions to questionnaires that truly take into account their deeper identity, rather than taking a more general, one-size-fits-all approach. It would also be interesting to test the usefulness of a more tailored questionnaire, to determine how much more useful it is in comparison to RELATE or other assessments.

Concluding Reflections

When I initially set out on this mission to explore the experience of engaged young adult Bahá'ís, I had no idea what a journey lay ahead. What started out as a straightforward—albeit seemingly large—project turned into something that stretched, frustrated, exhausted, motivated, and ultimately inspired me. As I prepare to conclude the study, I find myself simultaneously relieved, sentimental, and thirsty for more knowledge to broaden my understanding of this subject.

Conducting this study has shown me just how much religion and spirituality can be woven into the fabric of one's identity. Although it may be natural for therapists to see their clients as separate from their religions, the results of this study strongly point to the contrary: One cannot actually see the entire person without acknowledging the role of Faith in his or her life. While some clients may identify themselves as spiritual but not religious, or feel their religion does not play a significant role in their lives, the decisive factor is that it is their call, and not the therapist's, as to whether or not religion and spirituality should be brought into the therapeutic journey.

As systemic thinkers, we are urged to intertwine the various aspects of an individual's life in order to better understand the presenting picture. Exploring clients' religious foundations provides information on their respective beliefs and self-identity,

strengthens the therapist-client relationship, and could even bring to light potential solutions to presenting concerns that may have otherwise gone unrecognized. By incorporating the religious beliefs and practices of our clients, we are acknowledging a valuable aspect of their lives that could facilitate the therapeutic process; unlocking these gems could prove to be a priceless gift.

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Appendix A

Invitation to Participate in a Research Study Entitled

Understanding the Experience of Engaged Young Adult Bahá'ís

Dear friend,

My name is Nura Mowzoon, and I am currently a doctoral student pursuing a degree in Marriage & Family Therapy at Nova Southeastern University. For my dissertation, I am conducting a study in which I am exploring the experience of young adult Bahá'í couples as they prepare for marriage. My interest lies in understanding the ways in which the Bahá'í Faith may or may not impact the preparation process for marriage, as well as what role, if any, the larger Bahá'í community has played in that preparation process. Additionally, I am interested in exploring what questions are most useful in developing a premarital questionnaire.

Couples who wish to be considered as candidates for this study must fit the following criteria:
- Both individuals identify themselves as members of the Bahá'í Faith
- They must be between the ages of 20-35
- They must be currently engaged to be married

Participants in this study will be interviewed by me, either face-to-face or via phone or Skype. Prior to the interview, you will be asked to complete a demographic form, then review a premarital questionnaire to later be discussed during your interview; this entire process could take you 1 – 1.5 hours. Interviews are expected to take approximately 1.5 hours, and will be done individually. Every effort will be made to protect participant privacy, and actual names will not be used in the data or the published results. While you are free to share whatever you like with your fiancé(e) regarding the interviews, I will not disclose anything about our interviews to your fiancé(e) or anyone else. However, my dissertation chair Dr. Cole, as well as IRB personnel, may review research records.

If you or anyone you know may be interested in participating in this study, or would like more information, please contact me at your earliest convenience. Please feel free to share this invitation with any Bahá'ís you know, and encourage all interested parties to contact me directly. I would very much appreciate your assistance, either as a participant or as a recruiter!

Warmly,

Nura Mowzoon, M.S.

Doctoral Candidate

Nova Southeastern University
Graduate School of Humanities & Social Sciences
Cell: 954.465.5696
E-mail: nmowzoon@yahoo.com

Appendix B

Interview Questions

Regarding Premarital Preparation:

1. What role, if any, does the Bahá'í Faith play in your everyday life?
2. What role, if any, does the Bahá'í Faith play in your preparation for marriage?
3. Please elaborate on your experience as a Bahá'í and applying your beliefs to your premarital preparation.
4. In your opinion, what relationship, if any, is there between the Bahá'í teachings and premarital preparation?
5. What was your experience being a young adult Bahá'í preparing for marriage in relationship to the larger Bahá'í community?
6. What was your experience being a young adult Bahá'í preparing for marriage in relationship to the larger secular community?
7. If there was one thing that could make the process of readying yourself for marriage easier, what would it be?
8. Do you feel that your experience is similar to the experience of your peers? Is there anything you experience that you feel is unique to you?
9. What role, if any, do you feel the writings of the Bahá'í Faith played in you choosing your fiancé(e)?
10. What role, if any, do you feel the larger Bahá'í community played in you choosing your fiancé(e)?

Regarding the Premarital Assessment:

1. Would you say that this assessment is applicable to you and your needs and/or interests?
2. Are there items you feel are not useful or applicable at all?
3. Are there items you feel are particularly useful and applicable?
4. Is there any specific area of interest to you that is not covered in the assessment?
5. How useful, if at all, do you feel a premarital assessment is?
6. How likely, if at all, are you to use a premarital assessment in real life?
7. Has reviewing the assessment caused you to think about things you would not have otherwise considered?

Appendix C

Consent Form for Participation in the Research Study Entitled

Understanding the Experience of Engaged Young Adult Bahá'ís

Funding Source: None

IRB protocol #08291217Exp.

Principal Investigator:	Co-investigator:
Nura Mowzoon, M.S.	Patricia M. Cole, Ph. D.
5081 w. Laredo St.	3301 College Ave.
Chandler, AZ 85226	Ft. Lauderdale, FL 33314
(954)465-5696	(954) 262-3022

For questions/concerns about your research rights, contact:
Human Research Oversight Board (Institutional Review Board or IRB)
Nova Southeastern University
(954) 262-5369/Toll-free: (866) 499-0790
IRB@nova.edu

What is the study about?
You are invited to participate in a research study. The goal of this study is to explore the premarital experience of young adult Bahá'ís who are engaged to be married, as well as to acquire input regarding the usefulness of a premarital questionnaire.

Why are you asking me?
We are inviting you to participate because you are a Bahá'í between the ages of 20-35 that is engaged to be married. There will be a total of 14 participants.

What will I be doing if I agree to be in the study?
You will be asked to do the following:
1. Complete a demographic sheet (this should take approximately 5 minutes)
2. Review a premarital questionnaire (this should take approximately 1-1.5 hours)
3. Participate in an interview with Ms. Mowzoon, either in person, over the phone, or via Skype (this would take approximately 1.5 hours)
4. Review the results collected from the interview, to ensure your input has been accurately understood (this would take approximately 1 hour). If you do not

provide feedback within 2 weeks of receiving the data, I will assume that all the
data is accurate.

The interview is comprised of 17 total questions, broken into two sections: One section is
exploring your personal experiences as a Bahá'í preparing for marriage, and the second
section will be asking for your input and opinion regarding the usefulness of the
premarital questionnaire you will have reviewed prior to the interview (you will not be
asked to actually take the questionnaire). Regarding your experience preparing for
marriage, you will be asked questions about your relationship with the Bahá'í Faith, if
and how the Bahá'í Faith has influenced your premarital preparation, and what role, if
any, the larger Bahá'í community has played in your premarital preparation. The time
and setting for the interview will be determined by you and the principal investigator.

Is there any audio or video recording?
This research project will include an audio recording of the interview. This audio
recording will be available to be heard by the researcher, Ms. Mowzoon, personnel from
the IRB, and the dissertation chair, Dr. Cole. The recording will be transcribed by Ms.
Mowzoon. Ms. Mowzoon will use headphones when transcribing your interview in her
home office to protect your privacy and confidentiality. Interviews will be transcribed
into a password protected computer and also saved on a flash drive. The audio recorder
and the flash drive would both be kept in a private, locked drawer in the Ms. Mowzoon's
home office. The transcriptions would subsequently be saved in the same locked drawer.
To comply with IRB requirements, all recordings and transcripts will be kept for 3 years
(36 months); after 3 years from the end of the study, all recordings will be deleted and
transcripts will be shredded by the Ms. Mowzoon. Because your voice will be potentially
identifiable by anyone who hears the recording, your confidentiality for things you say on
the recording cannot be guaranteed although the researcher will try to limit access to the
recording as described in this paragraph.

What are the dangers to me?
Risks to you are minimal; this means that they are not considered to be any greater than
risks you would face on a daily basis. By agreeing to participate in this study, you will
lose a total of approximately 3.5 – 5 hours of your time, depending on the length of the
interview and the time you take to review materials. Additionally, protecting your privacy
and confidentiality is extremely important to the investigators; the loss of confidentiality
is possible, but not likely. All participants will be assigned pseudonyms, to be used in the
interview and the transcription process, to protect their identity.

Discussing your personal relationship with the Bahá'í Faith, as well as discussing your personal experience preparing for marriage, could bring back unhappy memories or trigger some emotional reactions, such as sadness or anxiety for you. We ask that you disclose only what you feel comfortable sharing; there is no "expected" level of disclosure. In the event that you experience discomfort, Ms. Mowzoon will make every attempt to assist you. If you continue to feel negatively, you will be encouraged to seek counseling at your own expense.

If you elect to use Skype for the interview, Skype may collect information about you including (but not limited to) your name, address, phone number, email address, age, gender, IP address, etc. You can visit the Skype privacy policy website (http://www.skype.com/intl/en/legal/privacy/general/) if you would like further information. While Skype may not know that you are participating in this study, they may be collecting identifiable information.

If you have any questions about the research, your research rights, or if you experience an injury because of the research please contact Ms. Mowzoon at (954) 465-5696. You may also contact the IRB at the numbers indicated above with questions about your research rights.

Are there any benefits to me for taking part in this research study?

No, there are no direct benefits to you for participating in this study.

Will I get paid for being in the study? Will it cost me anything?

There are no costs to you or payments made for participating in this study.

How will you keep my information private?

As mentioned above, you will be assigned a pseudonym for this study, and that pseudonym is what will be used to refer to you throughout all the collected data. Headphones will be utilized when transcribing the interviews. This consent form which contains your actual name, one list containing all assigned pseudonyms to actual names, and your demographic sheet are the only three documents containing your private information. These documents will be locked in a private drawer in the primary investigator's home office. In order to comply with IRB requirements, all documents will be kept in locked storage for three years; after three years, all documents will be shredded and disposed of. All information in this study is strictly confidential unless disclosure is required by law. The IRB, regulatory agencies, or Dr. Cole may review research records.

What if I do not want to participate or I want to leave the study?
You have the right to leave this study at any time or refuse to participate. If you do decide to leave or you decide not to participate, you will not experience any penalties. If you choose to withdraw, any information collected about you before the date you leave the study will be kept in the research records for 36 months from the conclusion of the study but will not be used as a part of the research.

Other considerations:
If the researchers learn anything which might change your mind about being involved, you will be informed of this as soon as possible.

Voluntary Consent by Participant:
By signing below, you indicate that
- This study has been explained to you
- You have read this document or it has been read to you
- Your questions about this research study have been answered
- You have been told that you may researchers any study-related questions in the future, or contact them in the event of a research-related inquiry
- You have been told that you may ask the Institutional Review Board (IRB) personnel questions about your study rights
- You are entitled to a copy of this form after you have read and signed it
- You voluntarily agree to participate in the study entitled **Understanding the Experience of Engaged Young Adult Bahá'ís**

Participant's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Participant's Name: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent _____ Date: _____

Appendix D

Demographic Information

The information provided on this page will be kept confidential and locked in a private drawer.
We ask for this information in order to verify data with you, as well as to contact you for any
other necessary purposes of the study.

Name: _____

Address: _____

_____

_____

Phone: _____

E-mail:_____

Code number (to be assigned by researcher): _____

This code number will be used on the following page to further protect your anonymity.

The information provided on this page may be used in the reported data of the study, but all references will be kept as anonymous as possible, and will use your given pseudonym.

Age: _____

Gender: _____

Ethnicity: _____

Country of Origin: _____

Length of time as a member of the Bahá'í Faith: _____

Length of time dating: _____

Length of time engaged up until currently: _____

Total engagement time: _____

Is this your first time being engaged? _____

Code number: _____ (filled out by researcher)

Appendix E

RELATE Questionnaire

SECTION A

QUESTIONS IN THIS SECTION ASK ABOUT YOUR PERSONALITY AND ATTITUDES

How did you hear about RELATE? (Please choose one)

- Instructor
- Therapist
- Clergy
- Friend
- Family Member
- Web search (please specify)
- Magazine/Newspaper ad (please specify)
- Online Ad or Link (please specify)
- Other (please specify)

How much do these words or phrases describe you? Choose "never", "rarely", "sometimes", "often" or "very often":

- Considerate
- Friendly
- Kind
- Open minded
- Easy going
- Feel hopeless
- Talkative
- Worrier
- Shy
- Tense
- Organized
- Fight with others/lose temper
- Easily irritated or mad
- Loving
- Flexible
- Sad and blue
- Adaptable
- Depressed
- Quiet
- Fearful
- Outgoing
- Nervous
- Messy
- Act immature

How do you feel about yourself? Choose "never", "rarely", "sometimes", "often" or "very often":

- I take a positive attitude toward myself.
- I feel I am a person of worth.
- I think I am no good at all.
- I am inclined to think I am a failure.

How frequently do you use: Choose "never", "rarely", "sometimes", "often" or "very often":

- Alcohol?
- Illegal drugs?

About your spiritual orientation: Choose "never", "rarely", "sometimes", "often" or "very often":

- How often do you pray (commune with a higher power)?
- Some doctrines or practices of my church (or religious body) are hard for me to accept.
- Spirituality is an important part of my life.

How often do you attend religious services? Choose one:

- Weekly
- At least monthly
- Several times a year
- Once or twice a year or less
- Never

SECTION B

THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS ARE ABOUT YOUR VALUES, ATTITUDES, AND BELIEFS AS THEY APPLY TO YOURSELF OR TO YOUR CURRENT OR FUTURE MARRIAGE.

Please choose "strongly disagree", "disagree", "it depends", "agree" or "strongly agree" for the following statements:

- Marriage involves a covenant with God, not just a legal contract recognized by the law.
- A husband should help out with some housework, but a wife should organize what needs to be done and when.
- If a husband and wife disagree about something important, the wife should give in to her husband because he is the main leader of the family.
- It creates problems for spouses if they go for a few days without spending much time together as a couple.
- Being married is among the one or two most important things in life.
- Sexual intercourse is the most bonding experience you can have in a marriage.
- As long as we're in a committed relationship, sexual intercourse is acceptable before marriage.
- Living together is an acceptable alternative to marriage.
- It would be an acceptable arrangement for the husband to stay home to care for young children while the wife earns the paycheck.
- Having nice things today is more important to me than saving for the future.
- Even if I was unhappily married, I would not have a love affair with someone else.
- Husbands and wives should both carefully look for bargains before buying something they want.
- In marriage, having time alone is more important than togetherness.
- If I had an unhappy marriage and neither counseling nor other actions helped, my spouse and I would be better off if we divorced.

Are you currently employed?

- No
- Yes

How many hours per week do you typically work for pay (Make an average per week estimate covering the last 6 months)?

————

Please choose "strongly disagree", "disagree", "undecided", "agree" or "strongly agree" for the following statement:

- The total income of my household is sufficient to meet the needs of those who live in my home.

Please choose "very easy", "easy", "neither easy nor difficult", "very difficult" or "not applicable" for the following statements:

- How easy or difficult is it for you to manage the demands of your work and family life?
- How easy or difficult is it for your partner to manage the demands of his/her work and his/her family life?

Here is a list of things (in alphabetical order) that many people look for or want out of life. Please study the list carefully, then choose the ONE that is MOST important to YOU.

What is the ONE thing listed that is MOST important to YOU?

- Being well-respected
- Fun-enjoyment-excitement
- Security
- Self-fulfillment
- Self-respect
- Sense of accomplishment
- Sense of belonging
- Warm relations with others

Your sexual preference is (choose one):

- Heterosexual (opposite sex)
- Bisexual (either sex)
- Homosexual (same sex)

How much education have you completed? Choose one:

- Less than high school
- High school equivalency (GED)
- High school diploma
- Some college, not currently enrolled
- Some college, currently enrolled
- Associate's degree
- Bachelor's degree
- Graduate or professional degree, not completed
- Graduate or professional degree, completed

Your current personal yearly gross income before taxes & deductions (choose one):

- None
- Under $20,000
- $20,000 – $39,999
- $40,000 – $59,999
- $60,000 – $79,999
- $80,000 – $99,999
- $100,000 – $119,999

- $120,000 – $139,999
- $140,000 – $159,999
- $160,000 – $199,000
- $200,000 – $299,999
- $300,000 and above

Your race or ethnic group is (choose one):

- African (Black)
- Asian
- Caucasian (White)
- Native American
- Latino (Mexican American, Puerto Rican, Cuban, etc.)
- Mixed/Biracial
- Other (please specify)

Your religious affiliation is (choose one):

- Catholic
- Eastern Orthodox Catholic
- Protestant (Methodist, Lutheran, Episcopalian, Baptist, etc.)
- Jewish
- Islamic
- Latter-day Saint (Mormon)
- Buddhist
- Jehovah's Witnesses
- Unitarian Universalist
- Hindu
- Sikh
- Other (please specify)
- None

How many children do you have?

_____

During the last year, how many of your children lived with you for at least 50 days or more?

_____

Please indicate how you typically feel toward romantic partners in general. Keep in mind that there are no right or wrong answers. Please choose "strongly disagree", "disagree", "somewhat disagree", "undecided", "somewhat agree", "agree", or "strongly agree":

- I'm comfortable having others depend on me.
- I find it relatively easy to get close to others.
- I'm somewhat uncomfortable being too close to others.
- I'm nervous whenever anyone gets too close to me.

- I rarely worry about being abandoned by others.
- I often worry that my partner(s) don't really love me.
- I often want to merge completely with others, and this desire sometimes scares them away.
- I usually want more closeness and intimacy than others do.
- I'm confident that my partner(s) love me just as much as I love them.
- I'm not very comfortable having to depend on other people.
- I don't like people getting too close to me.
- I find it difficult to trust others completely.
- Others often want me to be more intimate than I feel comfortable being.
- Others often are reluctant to get as close as I would like.
- I rarely worry about my partner(s) leaving me.
- I'm confident others would never hurt me by suddenly ending our relationship.
- The thought of being left by others rarely enters my mind.

Please answer the following questions about yourself. Answer with "never true", "rarely true", "sometimes true", "usually true" or "always true":

- If the way I'm approaching change doesn't work, I can usually think of something different to try.
- I tend to fall back on what is comfortable for me in relationships, rather than trying new ways of relating.
- Even when I know what I could do differently to improve things in the relationships, I cannot seem to change my behavior.
- I try to apply ideas about effective relationships to improving our relationship
- I give my partner helpful feedback on the ways she/he can help me achieve my goals.
- If things go wrong in the relationship I tend to feel powerless.
- If my partner doesn't appreciate the change efforts I am making, I tend to give up.
- I actually put my intentions or plans for personal change into practice.

How many serious romantic relationships have you had with different people (including your current partner, if appropriate):

_____

How many dates have you been on during the last six months?

_____

How much do you agree with the following statements about relationships, based on your experiences? Please answer with "strongly disagree", "disagree", "it depends", "agree", or "strongly agree":

- From what I have experienced in my romantic relationships, I think relationships are safe, secure, rewarding, worth being in, and a source of comfort.

- From what I have experienced in my relationships, I think close relationships are confusing, unfair, anxiety-provoking, inconsistent, and unpredictable.
- There are matters from my relationships that I am still having trouble dealing with or coming to terms with.
- I feel at peace about anything negative that has happened to me in my romantic relationships.

SECTION C

For how many years while you were growing up (to age 18) did you live in the following type of family? Choose one:

- 0 years
- 1 to 3 years
- 4 to 6 years
- 7 to 9 years
- 10 to 12 years
- 13 to 15 years
- 16 to 17 years
- 18 years

How many times between your birth and your 18th birthday was there a change in the parental system of the home you lived in? (Examples of this could include a parent leaving the home because of divorce, a new person becoming a step parent, the death of a parent, a new romantic partner of your parent who lived in your home, foster care, etc.)

_____

Sometimes family conflicts can lead to physical acts that are violent. These acts may include slapping, pushing, kicking, hitting with a fist, hitting with objects or other types of violence.
Considering all of your experiences while growing up in your family, how would you rate the general level of violence in your home? Choose one:

- There was VERY OFTEN violence in the home.
- There was OFTEN violence in the home.
- There was SOMETIMES violence in the home.
- There was RARELY violence in the home.
- There was NEVER violence in the home.

Sometimes in families sexual activities occur that are inappropriate. These acts include a parent or sibling fondling a child, a parent or sibling engaging in sexual intercourse with a child, or some other type of inappropriate sexual activity.
From the following list of family members, select the one person who was most sexually abusive toward you.

- Brother
- Sister
- Father
- Mother
- Step or foster father
- Step or foster mother
- Another relative
- No family member was sexually abusive to me

Please answer the following with "never", "rarely", "sometimes", "often", or "very often":

- How often was someone outside your family (not your partner) sexually abusive toward you?
- How often were you sexually inappropriate to a family member?
- How often did inappropriate sexual activities occur between other family members, but not directly involving you?

Please tell us whom you have in mind as you answer questions about your family.

- A family of a biological and step-parent.
- My adoptive family.
- A family made up of only one biological parent.

Did your parents ever live together without being married? Choose one:

- No
- Yes

In my immediate family, while I grew up…
Please choose "never", "rarely", "sometimes", "often" or "very often":

- There were family members who experienced emotional problems such as severe depression, anxiety attacks, eating disorders, or other mental/emotional problems.
- There were physical strains such as a member(s) being physically handicapped, hospitalized for a serious physical illness or injury, or becoming premaritally pregnant.
- There were financial strains such as loss of jobs, bankruptcy, large debts, or going on welfare.
- There were one or more family members who struggled with addictions to alcohol or other drugs.

Did your biological parents ever divorce?

- Yes
- No

Did your biological parents ever marry?

- Yes
- No

SECTION D

Please tell us whom you will have in mind as you answer questions about your mother.

- Adoptive mother
- Biological mother
- Foster-mother
- Grandmother
- Step-mother
- Another female mother-figure
- I really didn't have anyone I considered a mother

Please tell us whom you will have in mind as you answer questions about your father.

- Adoptive father
- Biological father
- Foster-father
- Grandfather
- Step-father
- Another male father-figure
- I really didn't have anyone I considered a father

How much education has your father completed?

- Less than high school
- High school equivalency (GED)
- High school diploma
- Some college, not currently enrolled
- Some college, currently enrolled
- Associate's degree
- Bachelor's degree
- Graduate or professional degree, not completed
- Graduate or professional degree, completed

How much education has your mother completed?

- Less than high school
- High school equivalency (GED)
- High school diploma
- Some college, not currently enrolled
- Some college, currently enrolled
- Associate's degree
- Bachelor's degree
- Graduate or professional degree, not completed
- Graduate or professional degree, completed

What is your father's current yearly gross income before taxes and deductions?

- None
- Under $20,000
- $20,000 – $39,999
- $40,000 – $59,999
- $60,000 – $79,999
- $80,000 – $99,999
- $100,000 – $119,999
- $120,000 – $139,999
- $140,000 – $159,999
- $160,000 – $199,000
- $200,000 – $299,999
- $300,000 and above

What is your mother's current yearly gross income before taxes and deductions?

- None
- Under $20,000
- $20,000 – $39,999
- $40,000 – $59,999
- $60,000 – $79,999
- $80,000 – $99,999
- $100,000 – $119,999
- $120,000 – $139,999
- $140,000 – $159,999
- $160,000 – $199,000
- $200,000 – $299,999
- $300,000 and above

Please indicate the religion, if any, your father belonged to for the greatest amount of time between your birth and 18th birthday.

- Catholic
- Eastern Orthodox Catholic
- Protestant (Methodist, Lutheran, Episcopalian, Baptist, etc.)
- Jewish
- Islamic
- Latter-day Saint (Mormon)
- Buddhist
- Jehovah's Witnesses
- Unitarian Universalist
- Hindu
- Sikh
- Other (please specify)
- None

Please indicate the religion, if any, your mother belonged to for the greatest amount of time between your birth and 18th birthday.

- Catholic
- Eastern Orthodox Catholic
- Protestant (Methodist, Lutheran, Episcopalian, Baptist, etc.)
- Jewish
- Islamic
- Latter-day Saint (Mormon)
- Buddhist
- Jehovah's Witnesses
- Unitarian Universalist
- Hindu
- Sikh
- Other (please specify)
- None

During your growing up years, how religious did you consider your mother to be?

- Very religious
- Religious
- Somewhat religious
- Nonreligious
- Very nonreligious

During your growing up years, how religious did you consider your father to be?

- Very religious
- Religious
- Somewhat religious
- Nonreligious
- Very nonreligious

How much do you agree with the following statements about your family, based on your years growing up? Please choose "strongly disagree", "disagree", "it depends", "agree", "strongly agree", or "doesn't apply":

- My father showed physical affection to me by appropriate hugging and/or kissing.
- My father and I were able to share our feelings on just about any topic without embarrassment or fear of hurt feelings.
- My father participated in enjoyable activities with me.
- My mother participated in enjoyable activities with me.
- My mother showed physical affection to me by appropriate hugging and/or kissing.
- My mother and I were able to share our feelings on just about any topic without embarrassment or fear of hurt feelings.

Below are four common ways of handling disagreements or conflict in relationships. Please choose the ONE that best represents how your father, or father figure, usually handled conflict:

- My father avoided conflict. He didn't think there was much to be gained from getting openly angry with others. In fact, to him a lot of talking about emotions and difficult issues seemed to make matters worse. He thought that if people would just relax, problems would have a way of working themselves out.
- My father discussed difficult issues, but it was important to him to display a lot of self-control and to remain calm. He preferred to let others know that their opinions and emotions were valued even if they were different than his. When arguing, he tried to spend a lot of time validating others as well as trying to find a compromise.
- My father debated and argued about issues until they were resolved. Arguing openly and strongly didn't bother him because this was how he felt differences were resolved. Although sometimes his arguing was intense, that was okay because he tried to balance this with kind and loving expressions. He thought that his passion and zest actually led to better relationships with lots of intensity, making up, laughing, and affection.
- My father could get pretty upset when he argued. When he was upset at times he insulted others by using something like sarcasm or put downs. During intense discussions he found it was difficult to listen to what others were saying because he was trying to make his point. Sometimes he had intensely negative feelings toward others when there was a conflict.

Below are four common ways of handling disagreements or conflict in relationships. Please choose the ONE that best represents how your mother, or mother figure, usually handled conflict:

- My mother avoided conflict. She didn't think there was much to be gained from getting openly angry with others. In fact, to her a lot of talking about emotions and difficult issues seemed to make matters worse. She thought that if people would just relax, problems would have a way of working themselves out.
- My mother discussed difficult issues, but it was important to her to display a lot of self-control and to remain calm. She preferred to let others know that their opinions and emotions were valued even if they were different than hers. When arguing, she tried to spend a lot of time validating others as well as trying to find a compromise.
- My mother debated and argued about issues until they were resolved. Arguing openly and strongly didn't bother her because this was how she felt differences were resolved. Although sometimes her arguing was intense, that was okay because she tried to balance this with kind and loving expressions. She thought that her passion and zest actually led to better relationships with lots of intensity, making up, laughing, and affection.
- My mother could get pretty upset when she argued. When she was upset at times she insulted others by using something like sarcasm or put downs. During intense discussions she found it was difficult to listen to what others were saying because she was trying to make her point. Sometimes she had intensely negative feelings toward others when there was a conflict.

How much do you agree with the following statements about your family, based on your years growing up? Please choose "strongly disagree", "disagree", "it depends", "agree", "strongly agree", or "doesn't apply":

- My mother was happy in her marriage.
- My father was happy in his marriage.
- I would like my marriage to be like my parents' marriage.

How many romantic partners did your mother have between your date of birth and your eighteenth birthday (counting your father)?

_____

How many romantic partners did your father have between your date of birth and your eighteenth birthday (counting your mother)?

_____

Please choose "strongly disagree", "disagree", "it depends", "agree", or "strongly agree" for the following statements:

- There are matters from my family experience that I'm still having trouble dealing with or coming to terms with.
- I feel at peace about anything negative that happened to me in the family in which I grew up.
- From what I experienced in my family, I think family relationships are safe, secure, rewarding, worth being in, and a source of comfort.
- We had a loving atmosphere in our family.
- There are matters from my family experience that negatively affect my ability to form close relationships.
- From what I experienced in my family, I think family relationships are confusing, unfair, anxiety-provoking, inconsistent, and unpredictable.
- All things considered, my childhood years were happy.

What effect has your partner's family, as a whole, had on your relationship with your spouse?

- A very positive effect
- A positive effect
- A somewhat positive effect
- A somewhat negative effect
- A negative effect
- A very negative effect
- Not applicable

How many miles away does your mother live?

- 0-10 miles
- 11-50 miles
- 51-100 miles
- 101-500 miles
- More than 500 miles
- Not applicable

How many miles away does your father live?

- 0-10 miles
- 11-50 miles
- 51-100 miles
- 101-500 miles
- More than 500 miles
- Not applicable

Please answer the following with "very good", "good", "fair", "poor", "very poor", or "not applicable":

- Overall, your relationship with your partner's father is?
- Overall, your relationship with your partner's mother is?

Please answer the following with "daily", "weekly", "monthly", "a few times a year", "yearly", "never", or "not applicable":

- How often do you and your partner have an argument related to your partner's parents?
- How often do you and your partner have an argument related to your parents?

Please answer the following with "entirely", "monthly", "somewhat", "not at all", "don't know", or "not applicable":

- To what extent does your partner's mother recognize you as a part of their family?
- To what extent does your partner's father recognize you as a part of their family?

Please answer the following with "daily", "weekly", "monthly", "a few times a year", "yearly", "never", or "not applicable":

- How often do you have significant contact with your mother such as seeing her in person or calling her on the phone?
- How often do you have significant contact with your father such as seeing him in person or calling him on the phone?

SECTION E

QUESTIONS IN THIS SECTION DEAL WITH YOUR RELATIONSHIP STATUS, AND YOUR PERCEPTIONS OF YOUR RELATIONSHIP AND YOUR PARTNER

Which best describes your current marital status?

- Single, never married
- Cohabiting, living with your partner in an intimate relation
- Married, first marriage
- Married but separated
- Divorced
- Remarried
- Widowed

Have you ever cohabited (lived with) a romantic partner prior to marriage?

- Yes
- No

How many times have you been divorced?

_____

In some relationships children are present premaritally. Which statement best describes your current situation?

- There is a pregnancy and the child will be born before the marriage.
- There is a pregnancy and the child will be born after the marriage.
- We currently have one or more children from previous relationships.
- We already have a child(ren) from our non-marital relationship.
- We are currently married, and one or more of the above situations applied to us before our marriage.
- We are currently married, and none of the above situations applied to us before our marriage.
- We are currently unmarried, and none of the above situations apply to us.
- We are currently unmarried, and none of the above situations apply to us.

How long have you and your partner been dating (If married, how long did you and your partner date before marrying)?

- 0 to3 months
- 4 to 6 months
- 7 to 12 months
- 1 to 2 years
- 3 to 5 years
- 6 to 10 years
- 11 to 15 years
- 16 to 20 years
- 21 to 30 years

- 31 to 40 years
- More than 40 years

How often do you desire to have sexual intercourse with your partner?

- Never
- Less than once a month
- 1 to 3 times a month
- About once a week
- 2 to 4 times a week
- 5 to 7 times a week
- More than once a day

How soon did you and your partner have sexual intercourse?

- We had sexual intercourse before we started dating
- We had sexual intercourse on our first date
- We had sexual intercourse a few weeks after we started dating
- We had sexual intercourse from 1 to 2 months after we started dating
- We had sexual intercourse from 3 to 5 months after we started dating
- We had sexual intercourse from 6-12 months after we started dating
- We had sexual intercourse from 1-2 years after we started dating
- We had sexual intercourse more than two years after we started dating
- We had sexual intercourse only after we were married
- We have never had sexual intercourse

With how many people have you had sexual intercourse (including your current partner if appropriate)?

_____

I often attempt to be physically intimate with my partner.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- It depends
- Agree
- Strongly agree

What is your relationship to the person about whom you will answer the "partner" questions below?

- I am casually/occasionally dating her/him
- I am in a serious or steady dating relationship with her/him
- I am engaged or committed to marry her/him
- I am married to her/him
- We are just friends and not dating
- We are just acquaintances but not dating

How much do these words or phrases describe your partner? Please choose "never", "rarely", "sometimes", "often", or "very often":

- Tense
- Loving
- Fights with others/loses temper
- Easily irritated or mad
- Shy
- Flexible
- Outgoing
- Adaptable
- Messy
- Sad and blue
- Depressed
- Fearful
- Nervous
- Friendly
- Considerate
- Acts immature
- Kind
- Talkative
- Open minded
- Quiet
- Easy going
- Organized
- Feels hopeless
- Worrier

How does your partner feel about herself or himself? Please choose "never", "rarely", "sometimes", "often", or "very often":

- My partner takes a positive attitude toward himself/herself.
- My partner feels he/she is a person of worth.
- My partner thinks he/she is no good at all.
- My partner is inclined to think he/she is a failure.

SECTION F

How often does your partner use the following? Please choose "never", "rarely", "sometimes", "often", or "very often":

- Alcohol
- Illegal drugs

Please answer the following with "strongly disagree", "disagree", "undecided", "agree", or "strongly agree":

- I want this relationship to stay strong no matter what rough times we may encounter.
- My relationship with my partner is more important to me than almost anything else in my life.
- I like to think of my partner and me more in terms of "us" and "we" rather than "me" and "him/her."
- I may not want to be with my partner a few years from now.

Please select which of the four relationship types described below best represents how you feel about your current relationship with your partner:

- It is easy for me to become emotionally close to my partner. I am comfortable depending on my partner and having my partner depend on me. I don't worry about being alone or having my partner not accept me.
- I am uncomfortable getting close to my partner. I want my relationship to be close, but I find it difficult to trust my partner completely, or to depend on my partner. I worry that I will be hurt if I allow myself to become too close to my partner.
- I want to be completely emotionally intimate with my partner, but I often find that my partner is reluctant to get as close as I would like. I am uncomfortable being without my partner, but sometimes worry that my partner doesn't value me as much as I value my partner.
- I am comfortable without a real close emotional relationship with my partner. It is very important to me to feel independent and self-sufficient, and I prefer not to depend fully on my partner or have my partner depend fully on me.

In your relationship, how satisfied are you with the following? Please choose "very dissatisfied", "dissatisfied", "neutral", "satisfied", or "very satisfied":

- The love you experience.
- The amount of relationship equality you experience.
- The quality of your communication.
- The physical intimacy you experience.
- How conflicts are resolved.
- The amount of time you have together.
- Your overall relationship with your partner.

How much do the following individuals approve of your current relationship? Please choose "not at all", "somewhat", "mostly", "entirely", "don't know", or "doesn't apply":

- Your partner's mother
- Your father
- Your partner's father
- Your partner's friends
- Your friends
- Your mother

Please answer the following questions about your relationship. Please choose "never", "rarely", "sometimes", "often", or "very often":

- How often have you and your partner discussed ending your relationship (or marriage)?
- How often have you thought your relationship (or marriage) might be in trouble?
- How often have you broken up or separated and then gotten back together?

How are YOU in your relationship? Please choose "never", "rarely", "sometimes", "often", or "very often":

- I find my partner to be intelligent.
- I find my partner's values to be appealing.
- I find my partner physically attractive.
- I show a lot of love toward my partner.
- My partner and I share many of the same interests and hobbies.
- I include my partner in my life.
- I admire my partner.

Please answer how much you agree or disagree with the following statements. Please choose "strongly disagree", "disagree", "it depends", "agree", "strongly agree", or "doesn't apply":

- There are many things about my partner I would like to change.

How are YOU in your relationship? Please choose "never", "rarely", "sometimes", "often", or "very often":

- In most matters, I understand what my partner is trying to say.
- I am able to listen to my partner in an understanding way.
- I struggle to find words to express myself to my partner.
- I talk over pleasant things that happen during the day when I am with my partner.
- I understand my partner's feelings.
- When I talk to my partner I can say what I want in a clean manner.
- I sit down with my partner and just talk things over.
- I discuss my personal problems with my partner.

- When I have been emotionally or verbally injured by something my partner has done I can still move forward and have a good relationship.
- I can forgive my partner pretty easily.
- I am able to give up the hurt and resentment toward my partner when he or she does not treat me as well as I deserve.

How are YOU when the two of you have a conflict? Please choose "never", "rarely", "sometimes", "often", or "very often":

- I have no respect for my partner when we are discussing an issue.
- When my partner complains, I feel that I have to "ward off" these attacks.
- I feel physically tired or drained after I have an argument with my partner.
- When I get upset I can see glaring faults in my partner's personality.
- I feel unfairly attacked when my partner is being negative.
- Whenever I have a conflict with m partner, I feel physically tense and anxious, and I don't think clearly.
- Whenever we have a conflict, the feelings I have are overwhelming.
- I am confident I reach out to my partner.
- I am rarely available to my partner.
- It is hard for my partner to get my attention.
- I struggle to feel close and engaged in our relationship.
- I listen when my partner shares his/her deepest feelings.
- Even when we are apart, I reach out to my partner.
- It is hard for me to confide in my partner.

How are YOU when the two of you have a conflict? Please choose "never", "rarely", "sometimes", "often", or "very often":

- While in an argument, I recognize my partner is overwhelmed and then make a deliberate effort to calm him/her down.
- I use a tactless choice of words when I complain.
- I have been withdrawing more and more from the relationship.
- I don't want to respond at all to my partner when we argue.
- When I am in an argument, I recognize when I am overwhelmed and then make a deliberate effort to calm myself down.
- I don't censor my complaints at all. I really let my partner have it full force.
- I've found that during an intense argument it is better to take a break, calm down, then return to discuss it later.
- There's no stopping me once I get started complaining.
- When we get in an argument I find I want to ignore my partner.
- I don't feel like I have the energy to keep fighting for this relationship.

Below are four common ways of handling disagreements or conflict in relationships. Please choose the ONE that best represents how YOU usually handle conflict.

- I avoid conflict. I don't think there is much to be gained from getting openly angry with others. In fact, a lot of talking about emotions and difficult issues seems to make matters worse. I think that if you just relax about problems, they will have a way of working themselves out.

- I discuss difficult issues but it is important to display a lot of self-control and to remain calm. I prefer to let others know that their opinions and emotions are valued even if they are different than mine. When arguing, I try to spend a lot of time validating others as well as trying to find a compromise.
- I debate and argue about issues until they are resolved. Arguing openly and strongly doesn't bother me because this is how differences are resolved. Although sometimes my arguing is intense that is okay because I try to balance this with kind and loving expressions. I think my passion and zest actually lead to a better relationship with lots of intensity, making up, laughing, and affection.
- I can get pretty upset when I argue. When I am upset at times I insult others by using something like sarcasm or put downs. During intense discussions I find it difficult to listen to what others are saying because I am trying to make my point. Sometimes I have intensely negative feelings toward others when we have a conflict.

SECTION G

How often have the following areas been a problem in your relationship? Please choose "never", "rarely", "sometimes", "often", or "very often":

- Financial matters
- Communication
- Having children
- Rearing children
- Intimacy/sexuality
- Your parents
- Your partner's parents
- Roles (who does what)
- My weight
- My partner's weight
- Who's in charge
- Time spent together
- Time spent using media such as video games, the internet, or television.
- Types of media used such as violent or sexually oriented media
- Substance/chemical use
- Religion/spirituality

Please answer the following about how YOUR PARTNER is in your relationship. Please choose "never", "rarely", "sometimes", "often", or "very often":

- My partner can say what he/she wants to say in a clear manner.
- My partner finds me physically attractive.
- My partner sits down with me just to talk things over.
- My partner shows a lot of love towards me.
- My partner discusses his/her personal problems with me.
- My partner finds me to be intelligent.
- In most matters, my partner understands what I am trying to say.
- My partner is able to listen to me in an understanding way.
- My partner includes me in his or her life.
- My partner struggles to find words to express him/herself to me.
- My partner admires me.
- My partner talks over pleasant things that happen during the day with me.
- My values are appealing to my partner.
- My partner understands my feelings.
- My partner can forgive me pretty easily.
- My partner is able to give up the hurt and resentment toward me when I do not treat him or her as well as I should.
- When my partner has been emotionally or verbally injured by something I have done my partner can still move forward and have a good relationship with me.

How is YOUR PARTNER when the two of you have a conflict? Please choose "never", "rarely", "sometimes", "often", or "very often":

- My partner feels physically tired or drained after he/she has an argument with me.
- While in an argument, my partner recognizes when she/he is overwhelmed and then makes a deliberate effort to calm down.
- During an intense argument my partner takes a break, calms down, then returns and discusses it later.
- My partner doesn't censor his or her complaints at all. She or he really lets me have it full force.
- There's no stopping my partner once he/she gets started complaining.
- My partner has been withdrawing more and more from the relationship.
- When my partner gets upset, my partner acts like there are glaring faults in my personality.
- My partner doesn't want to respond at all to me when we argue.
- My partner acts like he/she is being unfairly attacked when I am being negative.
- Whenever my partner has a conflict with me, she/he acts physically tense and anxious and can't seem to think clearly.
- Whenever we have a conflict, my partner seems overwhelmed.
- While in an argument, my partner recognizes when I am overwhelmed and then makes a deliberate effort to calm me down.
- My partner uses a tactless choice of words when she or he complains.
- When we get in an argument my partner wants to ignore me.
- My partner shows no respect for me when we are discussing an issue.
- My partner doesn't feel like he/she has the energy to keep fighting for this relationship.
- When I complain, my partner acts like he or she has to "ward off" my attacks.

Please answer how much you agree or disagree with the following statements.

Answer the following question with "strongly disagree", "disagree", "it depends", "agree", "strongly agree", or "doesn't apply":

- There are many things about me that my partner would like to change.

Answer the following questions with "never true", "rarely true", "sometimes true", "usually true", or "always true":

- My partner listens when I share my deepest feelings.
- Even when we are apart, my partner reaches out to me.
- It is hard for my partner to confide in me.
- My partner is rarely available to me.
- It is hard for me to get my partner's attention.
- I am confident my partner reaches out to me.
- My partner struggles to feel close and engaged in our relationship.

Please select which of the four relationship types described below best represents how you think your partner feels about your current relationship:

- It is easy for my partner to become emotionally close to me. My partner is comfortable depending on me and having me depend on her/him. My partner doesn't worry about being alone or having me not accept her/him.
- My partner is uncomfortable getting close to me. My partner wants our relationship to be close, but she/he finds it difficult to trust me completely, or to depend on me. My partner worries that she/he will be hurt if she/he becomes too close to me.
- My partner wants to be completely emotionally intimate with me but often finds that I am reluctant to get as close as she/he would like. My partner is uncomfortable being without me, but sometimes worries that I don't value her/him as much as she/he values me.
- My partner is comfortable without a real close emotional relationship with me. It is very important to my partner to feel independent and self-sufficient, and she/he prefers not to depend fully on me or have me depend fully on her/him.

Briefly describe the strengths you see in your current relationship with your partner:

Briefly describe the weaknesses you see in your current relationship with your partner:

SECTION H

Please answer the following questions about your partner. Please choose "never true", "rarely true", "sometimes true", "usually true", or "always true":

- My partner actually puts his/her intentions or plans for personal change into practice.
- If the way my partner is approaching change doesn't work, s/he can usually think of something different to try.
- My partner tends to fall back on what is comfortable for him/her in relationships, rather than trying new ways of relating.
- Even when my partner knows what s/he should do differently to improve things in the relationship, s/he cannot seem to change his/her behavior.
- My partner tries to apply ideas about effective relationships to improve our relationship.
- My partner gives me helpful feedback on the ways I can help him/her achieve his/her goals.
- If things go wrong in the relationship my partner tends to feel powerless.
- If I don't appreciate the change efforts my partner is making, s/he tends to give up.

Below are four common ways of handling disagreements or conflict in relationships. Please choose the ONE that best represents how your PARTNER usually handles conflict:

- My partner avoids conflict. She/he doesn't think there is much to be gained from getting openly angry with others. In fact, a lot of talking about emotions and difficult issues seems to make matters worse. She/he thinks that if you just relax about problems, they will have a way of working themselves out.
- My partner discusses difficult issues but it is important for him/her to display a lot of self-control and to remain calm. She/he prefers to let others know that their opinions and emotions are valued even if they are different than hers/his. When arguing, she/he tries to spend a lot of time validating others as well as trying to find a compromise.
- My partner debates and argues about issues until they are resolved. Arguing openly and strongly doesn't bother her/him because this is how differences are resolved. Although sometimes her/his arguing is intense that is okay because she/he tries to balance this with kind and loving expressions. She/he thinks passion and zest actually lead to a better relationship with lots of intensity, making up, laughing, and affection.
- My partner can get pretty upset when she/he argues. When she/he is upset at times she/he insults others by using something like sarcasm or put downs. During intense discussions she/he finds it difficult to listen to what others are saying because she/he is trying to make a point. Sometimes she/he has intensely negative feelings toward others when she/he has a conflict.

How often have you and your partner been engaged in the following behaviors in your relationship IN THE LAST YEAR? Please choose "never", "rarely", "sometimes", "often", or "very often":

- I have threatened to end my relationship with my romantic partner in order to get him/her to do what I wanted.
- My partner has given me the silent treatment or "cold shoulder" when I have hurt his/her feelings or made him/her angry in some way.
- I have gone "behind my partner's back" and shared private information about him/her with other people.
- When my partner has been mad at me, he/she has recruited other people to "take sides" with him/her and get them upset with me too.
- My partner has intentionally ignored me until I give in to his/her way about something.
- My partner has withheld physical affection from me when he/she was angry with me.
- My partner has spread rumors or negative information about me to be mean.
- I have given my partner the silent treatment or "cold shoulder" when he/she has hurt my feelings in some way.
- My partner has threatened to end our relationship in order to get me to do what he/she wanted.
- When I have been mad at my partner, I have recruited other people to "take sides" with me and get them upset with him/her too.
- My partner has gone "behind my back" and shared private information about me with other people.
- I have intentionally ignored my partner until he/she gives in to my way about something.
- I have withheld physical affection from my partner when I was angry with him/her.
- I have spread rumors or negative information about my partner to be mean.

No matter how well a couple gets along, there are times when they disagree, get annoyed with the other person, or just have spats or fights because they are in a bad mood, tired, or some other reasons. Couples have many different ways to try and settle their differences. The following are a few ways couples try to settle their differences. Please circle how many times you did each of these things in the past year.

	Once in the past year	Twice in the past year	3-5 times in the past year	6-10 times in the past year	11-20 times in the past year	More than 20 times in the past year	Not in the past year but it did happen before	This has never happened
My partner pushed or shoved me								
My partner punched or hit me with something that could hurt								
I pushed or shoved my partner								

I punched or hit my partner with something that could hurt							
My partner threw something at me that could hurt.							
I threw something at my partner that could hurt.							

Sometimes individuals feel pressured to participate in physically intimate behavior when they don't want to. Please answer the following questions about this issue. Please choose "never", "rarely", "sometimes", "often", or "very often":

- How often has your current partner been pressured against her/her will to participate in sexual behaviors (such as fondling, oral sex, or intercourse) by YOU?
- How often have you been pressured against your will to participate in intimate sexual activities (such as fondling, oral sex, or intercourse) by YOUR CURRENT PARTNER?

During the last twelve months on how many days did you view or read pornography (i.e., movies, magazines, internet sites, adult romance novels)?

- None
- Once a month or less
- 2 or 3 days a month
- 1 or 2 days a week
- 3 to 5 days a week
- Almost every day

During the last twelve months what is your best estimate of how many days your partner viewed or read pornography (i.e., movies, magazines, internet sites, adult romance novels)?

- None
- Once a month or less
- 2 or 3 days a month
- 1 or 2 days a week
- 3 to 5 days a week
- Almost every day

When you view or read pornography, what percent of the time do you view it with your spouse or partner versus viewing it alone?

- I never view or read pornography
- 100% alone, 0% with partner
- About 75% alone, 25% with partner
- About 50% alone, 50% with partner
- About 25% alone, 75% with partner
- 0% alone, 100% with partner

Please indicate to what extent you agree with the following statements? Please choose "strongly disagree", "disagree", "it depends", "agree", or "strongly agree":

- Viewing pornography is an acceptable way for teens to express their sexuality.
- Viewing pornography is an acceptable way for single adults to express their sexuality.
- Viewing pornography is an acceptable way for married adults to express their sexuality.
- In marriage, pornography is only acceptable when both spouses view it together.
- Pornography has been a source of conflict in our relationship.
- Pornography is an acceptable way for married couples to "spice up" their love life.
- Pornography objectifies and degrades women and men.
- Pornography is a form of marital infidelity.

How often do you use each of the following types of media to connect with your partner?

	More than once a day	Once a day	Once a week	2-3 times a month	Once a month	Less than once a month	Never
Text using a mobile phone							
Instant Messenger							
Call using a mobile phone							
E-mail							
Social Networking sites (e.g., Facebook, MySpace)							

How often do you use any of the media mentioned in the above question to…

	More than once a day	Once a day	Once a week	2-3 times a month	Once a month	Less than once a month	Never
Discuss serious issues with your partner?							
Hurt your partner (e.g. sending mean messages)?							
Broach a potentially confrontational subject?							
Apologize to your partner for something?							
Express affection to your partner?							
Connect with others while you and your partner are interacting (e.g., sending a text or checking email while having a conversation with your partner)?							

Do you ever play video games?

- Yes
- No

On average, over the last three years, how satisfied are you with your overall health?

- Very dissatisfied
- Dissatisfied
- Neutral
- Satisfied
- Very satisfied

On average how satisfied are you with your partner's overall health?

- Very dissatisfied
- Dissatisfied
- Neutral

- Satisfied
- Very satisfied

Please select from the following statements the one that best describes your daily physical activity level:

- I am not very active (I do not exercise regularly or participate in regular physical activity).
- I am somewhat active (I occasionally exercise and participate in a few physical activities).
- I am active (I exercise a couple of times a week and often participate in physical activities).
- I am very active (I exercise at least 3 times a week and participate frequently in physical activities).

Please select from the following statements the one that best describes your daily eating habits:

- I am not particularly careful about what I eat (i.e., my diet commonly includes high fat or sugar items, and/or irregular meals, and/or insufficient amounts of fruits and vegetables).
- I am somewhat careful about what I eat (i.e., my diet sometimes includes high fat or sugar items, and/or irregular meals, and/or insufficient amount of fruits and vegetables).
- I am careful about what I eat (i.e., my diet rarely includes high fat or sugar items, and/or irregular meals, and/or insufficient amount of fruits and vegetables).
- I am very careful about what I eat (i.e., my diet almost never includes high fat or sugar items, and/or irregular meals, and/or insufficient amount of fruits and vegetables).

How many days during the past 12 months have you smoked a cigarette?

- Never
- Less than once a month
- 1 to 3 times a month
- About once a week
- 2 to 4 times a week
- 5 to 7 times a week
- More than once a day

What is your current weight (in pounds)?

_____

What is your current height (in inches)?

_____

Appendix F

Bahá'í-Inspired Questionnaire

Worksheet 31A: Trends in Your Relationship and Current Status

Purpose: To assess the trends in your relationship and determine your conclusions about your level of compatibility as a couple and your readiness to marry. This worksheet cannot cover all aspects of relationship assessment, but you can use it as a starting point to consult about the trends that you observe. You will also assess your current relationship status and look forward to the possibility of marriage.

Note: Much of the work that you have done in this book addresses your skills, thoughts, or emotions at a given point in time. Relationships, however, are *dynamic and ever-changing*, with habits and behavior patterns developing and altering almost imperceptibly. These can range from how you interact on family issues to how you react to each other's emotional expressions. Developing the practice of assessing your relationship on an ongoing basis will serve you well in your courtship, engagement, and marriage, should you choose to move forward.

Instructions:

A) As a starting point, individually review the work you did in previous chapters—activities, worksheets, answers to questions, journal entries, and so on. *Take your time* and understand that there is a lot of information to review. You may not read or skim through all of it in one setting. *Simply completing this worksheet quickly will not give you all the insights that are vital* for examining the dynamic changes and status of your relationship.

B) After you have reviewed your previous responses and work, complete this worksheet individually, *referring back to the relevant chapters to refresh your memory*. Use the scale below to rate both your previous level of skill and understanding (early in your relationship) and your current level.

C) Then together compare and consult about your worksheet results and make notes in the final column.

Poor or Unhealthy Understanding, Skills, Behavior, or Interactions	1	2	3	4	5	Excellent and Healthy Understanding, Skills, Behavior, or Interactions

Refer to Ch.	Topic/ Focus Area	Prev. Level	Level Now	Notes Any Successes? Concerns?
2	Knowing one's own purpose(s) in life and actively fulfilling them (Ones in common?)			

3	Using consultative decision-making			
4	Understanding each other's expectations of marriage			
5	Understanding issues from the past and resolving them; Learning lessons from the past			
6	Knowing one's own and each other's character			
Refer to Ch.	**Topic/ Focus Area**	**Prev. Level**	**Level Now**	**Notes Any Successes? Concerns?**
8	Achieving an excellent friendship			
10	Understanding and fulfilling the purpose of courtship; engaging in courting activities; including family in activities			
11	Willingness to make and keep a commitment			
12	Acting in a chaste manner; not living together without being married			
13	Understanding marriage as a valuable goal			
14	Understanding the value of compatibility and unity			
15	Experiencing a deep and lasting love; understanding God as the Source of Love			
16	Understanding one another's faith and spiritual choices and having religion as a unifying force			
17	Building and maintaining family unity			
18	Understanding each other's culture and maintaining unity in diversity			
19	Demonstrating behavior and attitudes that reflect the equality of women and men			

20	Understanding and appreciating each other's personality			
21 22	Engaging in effective and harmonious communication			
23	Recognizing and expressing emotions effectively (and not harming others)			
24	Understanding the role of sex within marriage; sharing of sexual histories as appropriate			
25	Knowing the importance of having and rearing children; committing to actions that create and strengthen children's well-being and education			

Refer to Ch.	Topic/ Focus Area	Prev. Level	Level Now	Notes Any Successes? Concerns?
26	Understanding service and time options and making moderate choices			
27	Understanding how to manage work and money responsibly; agreeing on how to manage money in marriage			
28	Understanding and agreeing on how to set up a home together harmoniously			
29	Responding effectively to tests and difficulties			
30	Creating and maintaining a clear vision of mutual commitments within marriage and how to achieve them			

Individual Reflection and Couple Discussion:

1. In what ways do I understand myself and my partner differently now than I did early in our relationship?

    _____
    _____
    _____

2. What shifts in attitudes or behaviors have I seen in myself and in my partner? Are they positive shifts? If so, am I confident these w ill be long-lasting? Why or why not?

    _____
    _____
    _____

3. How well am I eliminating criticism and encouraging and supporting my partner?

    _____
    _____
    _____

4. What do I wish my partner would change about himself/herself that I am concerned may be a problem in marriage?

    _____
    _____
    _____

5. In what ways do I think I will change after marrying? How reasonable is this to expect? Does my partner agree?

    _____
    _____
    _____

6. In what ways do I think my partner will change after marrying? How reasonable is this to expect? Does my partner agree?

    _____
    _____
    _____

7. If my partner speaks and acts the same way in marriage that he/she does now, will that be positive or negative? Why?

    _____
    _____
    _____
    _____
    _____

8. How are my partner and I managing any issues or differences of opinion and outlook/lifestyle that we have discovered? Am I confident that these differences will not cause disunity after marriage? Why or why not?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

9. In what ways has our relationship advanced? Is this a trend that encourages me? Why or why not?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

10. In what ways has our relationship deteriorated? Is this a trend I am concerned about? Why or why not? This is how I think we should address my concerns:

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

11. What demonstrates to me that we would be unified and compatible marriage partners?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

12. What, if anything, is now stopping me from choosing to marry?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Biographical Sketch

Nura Crawford Mowzoon was born in Honolulu, HI, and moved to Chandler, AZ at the age of two. In 2000, she received her Bachelor's of Science in Family Studies and Child Development, with a minor in Psychology, from Arizona State University, Tempe, AZ. In 2003, she received her Master's of Science in Marriage and Family Therapy, with a specialization in Medical Family Therapy, from Nova Southeastern University, Fort Lauderdale, FL. After several years of working professionally, Nura is receiving her Ph.D. in Marriage and Family Therapy from Nova Southeastern University.

Presentations of Nura's research have taken place at various conferences around the country, including the Southwestern Social Science Association and the Association for Bahá'í Studies in North America. She enjoys researching and working with couples, and is currently an instructor at her alma mater, Arizona State University, where she teaches courses in the social sciences.

When she is not immersed in academia, Nura enjoys traveling, dancing, yoga, and spending quality time with family and friends. She is an active member of the Bahá'í Faith, and strives to dedicate as much of her free time to Faith-based service activities which focus on the betterment of humanity and promoting unity among people of all cultures, religions and backgrounds.