The Impact of Self-Esteem and Religiosity on the Marital Readiness Criteria of College Students

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by

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Abstract

The focus of this exploratory study was to better understand the impact of self-esteem and religiosity on marital readiness criteria of college students. Data was collected from 18-25 year old students at a large, public university in Southern Mississippi. A total of 216 participants completed questionnaires that consisted of demographic information and self-esteem, religiosity, and marital readiness scales. Results indicated that self-esteem and religiosity combined have a statistically significant positive relationship with marital readiness criteria. In addition to the analysis among all of the variables, the independent relationship between each independent variable on marital readiness was examined. The relationship between self-esteem and marital readiness was not statistically significant while the relationship between marital readiness and religiosity was. Results also demonstrated a connection between gender and religiosity, with females having higher religiosity scores than males. There was a further connection between marital readiness criteria and gender, with males having higher criteria scores than females.

Key Terms: emerging adulthood, marital horizon theory, marital readiness, religiosity, self-esteem.
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College is a time of change, growth, and uncertainty. Most college students are in a phase of life that has been identified by researchers as ‘emerging adulthood’ (Fincham and Cui, 2011). Emerging adulthood is defined as a time of transition between adolescence and adulthood, marked by changes in responsibility and focus that include areas such as place of residence, employment, and romantic partners (Arnett, 2004).

There are a number of factors, both adaptive and maladaptive, that influence the transition to adulthood. One factor that is significant in the transition to adulthood is marriage. From 1970 to 2000, the average age of marriage in America had risen by four years (Arnett, 2004). The overall trend to delay marriage can be explained in a number of ways. Marital horizon theory is one such explanation (Carroll et al, 2007). This theory explains these delays as related to three separate factors: the perceived importance of marriage, the ideal age of marriage, and marriage readiness criteria. These factors combine to form an individual’s marital horizon, which relatively determines the timing of marriage. (Carroll et al, 2007). Two additional factors aside from marriage that impact emerging adulthood are self-esteem and religiosity. This study focuses on how these three aspects of emerging adulthood, religion, self-esteem, and marriage are related. More specifically the primary purpose is to better understand how an individual college student’s marital readiness criteria are impacted by their self-reported religiosity and self-esteem.

For the purpose of this study, it is understood that college students are viewed within the context of emerging adulthood. The concept of ‘emerging adulthood’ came about when the trend in western society changed so that individuals began starting adolescence earlier, and, on the other end, began entering adulthood much later than
previous generations (Fincham and Cui, 2011). It is the time between leaving parent’s homes, which generally happens around ages 18 to 19, and involves getting a steady job, getting married, and having kids. This phase usually ends at 25 years of age (Fincham and Cui, 2011).

Since emerging adulthood includes aspects of both adolescence and adulthood, it cannot be categorized as either ‘late adolescence’ or ‘young adulthood’. Arnett (2004) attributes the development of emerging adulthood to the recent rise in the age of marriage and parenthood and to lives less restricted by gender and economic constraints. He lists five main features of this stage: it is an age of identity exploration (searching for stability in areas such as love and work), instability (many changes in jobs, living situations, and relationships), self-focus (the age least governed by institutional control), of feeling in-between (feeling not completely adolescent but not completely adult), and of possibilities (more options than an adult or an adolescent) (Arnett, 2007).

Emerging adults do not view marriage as a requirement for adulthood (Carroll et al, 2007). The majority of emerging adults, however, consider it an important life goal and desire to marry someday. The priority level they give to marriage varies between individuals. The importance given to marriage affects decisions on career paths, friends, and education during emerging adulthood. Emerging adults who have a younger ideal age for getting married make increased preparations for marriage sooner. These individuals would have shorter marital horizons. As stated earlier, Marital Horizon Theory is a theory of marital readiness which is defined as “a person’s outlook or approach to marriage in relation to his or her current situation” (Carroll et al, 2007, p. 225). It is comprised of three distinct parts: the importance of marriage in an individual’s future plans, an
individual’s ideal marriage age or time, and what preparations the individual views as necessary to have before marriage. The interaction between these factors can be used to determine differences in how long the period of emerging adulthood will last.

In addition to being recognized as a contributing factor to the delay of marriage, emerging adulthood is known as a time where religiosity often increases in importance and undergoes changes in the way it is practiced (Stoppa & Lefkowitz, 2010). Religiosity has also been linked with several factors of well-being including physical health, adjustment to college, and lower sexual risk-taking. Lower sexual risk taking is part of the norm compliance area of marital readiness included in this study. Religion and spirituality have been found to protect college students from depression in the face of stress (Berry & York, 2011). Another study found religious commitment in college students to be a predictor of life satisfaction (Fife, Adegoke, McCoy & Brewer, 2011). Although religiosity is linked to overall well-being, which would play a role in marital readiness, there is currently no research directly linking religiosity to marital readiness. This is a unique feature of this study.

Along with marital horizon and religiosity, self-esteem appears to be an important contributing factor related to relationship quality and therefore marital readiness (Sciangula & Morry, 2009). Self-esteem has been defined as, “a positive or negative orientation towards oneself; an overall evaluation of one’s overall worth” (University of Maryland, 2013, pg.1). Self-esteem has been shown to increase during emerging adulthood, after it reaches a typical low-point during adolescence (Galambos et al, 2006). The changing nature of self-esteem in emerging adulthood combined with the link
between self-esteem and relationships makes it worth studying in combination with marriage.

Research suggests that 90% of adults marry at some point in their lives (Fincham and Cui, 2011). This, combined with the high divorce rate in the U.S., makes it a relevant area of research (Rey, 2010). Looking at the marital readiness criteria of emerging adults will increase understanding about marriage, and also about emerging adulthood. This is an area that has not been studied yet. While some marital readiness criteria and marriage attitudes and behaviors seem to be correlated to religious beliefs, there has never been research directly linking marital readiness criteria and religiosity. Self-esteem has also never been researched in the context of marital readiness criteria. The focus of this study was to examine the degree to which the self-esteem and religiosity of college students impact their marital readiness criteria.

**Literature Review**

**Marriage in Emerging Adulthood**

Emerging adulthood is a relatively new concept that has recently gained research attention. Arnett, who introduced the concept in 2000, explained that eventually, emerging adults grow weary of moving from one romantic partner to another. They then desire long-term relationships for the stability and comfort they offer, which leads most of them to desire marriage. However, they still may plan on marrying after completing school or starting a career (Arnett, 2004).

Arnett (2004) says that one reason emerging adults are delaying marriage is because early marriage would deny them the flexibility and freedom that young adulthood now offers. However, there are more serious reasons as well. Emerging adults feel the need to “get their own lives in order” (p. 101) before marrying. Arnett references
Erikson’s theory of human development to explain this phenomenon (2004). His stage “Intimacy vs Isolation” is the part of life where young adults search for a partner to spend their lives with. Before this stage can be reached however, the individual must resolve the “Identity vs. Role Confusion” stage during adolescence. The delay of marriage could be due to the fact that emerging adults are trying to establish their own identities before beginning a long-term relationship.

Arnett (2004) notes that most emerging adults, especially women, still maintain age 30 as a relative deadline by which to marry. This can be attributed to societal pressure, parental pressure, and for women, their biological clocks. He also reports that emerging adults are searching for a partner who shares some of their interests, and who is similar in beliefs and values. There is a difference in the way men and women perceive commitment because men feel they have more time to marry while women feel they must find a mate as soon as possible. Finally, Arnett (2004) also lists cohabitation and the fear of divorce as potential contributing factors to the rise in marriage age.

**Marital Horizon Theory**

Emerging adulthood serves as the context for the most important part of this study, marital horizon theory. This is a theory of marital readiness which is defined as “a person’s outlook or approach to marriage in relation to his or her current situation” (Carroll et al, 2007, p. 225). It is comprised of three distinct parts: the importance of marriage in an individual’s future plans, an individual’s ideal marriage age or time, and what preparations the individual views as necessary to have before marriage. These factors can be used to determine differences in how long the period of emerging adulthood will last.
In the study that first introduced the concept of marital horizon theory (Carroll et al, 2007), researchers sought to determine how the marital importance and ideal marriage age of an individual impacted various aspects of their behavior in emerging adulthood. Data indicated that most emerging adults thought of marriage as a life goal and that the average ideal age of marriage was twenty-five years (Carroll et al, 2007). A higher desire to marry was associated with less sexual permissiveness and lower substance abuse, while it was negatively associated with cohabitation and having children outside of marriage.

A study by Willoughby and Dworkin (2009) examined the connections between risk-taking behavior emerging adults participate in and their desire to marry. They found those who had not used marijuana in the last year and females that had ever had sex had a stronger desire to marry now. Desire to marry was negatively correlated with binge drinking, birth control, and condom use. Overall Willoughby and Dworkin (2009) found that both males and females decrease risk-taking behavior in preparation for marriage. This study demonstrates that an individual’s desire to marry, and therefore marital horizon, will impact his or her behavior.

Another study was done that applied marital horizon theory to dating violence perpetration (Johnson, 2009). Only one component of marital horizon theory had an impact on dating violence: marital importance. Women who listed marriage to be less important to them were more likely to perpetrate psychological aggression in a dating relationship. This adds to the list of ways that an individual’s marital horizon impacts their behavior during emerging adulthood.

**Marital Readiness**
Marital readiness is a phrase used to indicate what preparations an individual sees as necessary to have in place before they are ready to marry. It is the third component of an individual’s marital horizon, and is the primary focus of this study. Previous studies have sought to assess whether or not the individuals perceive themselves as ready for marriage. However, in marital horizon theory, marital readiness means not only that, but also what the individual believes will make them ready for marriage (Olson, 2008). One study (Badger, 2005) sought to assess, among other things, the criteria emerging adults see as important for marriage. Most criteria that the participants listed as important seemed to be about making a marriage high-quality and preventing divorce. Top-ranked criteria included family capacities (for example, a man needs to be able to financially support a family and a woman needs to be able to care for children), interpersonal competencies (for example, being able to discuss feelings), norm compliance (things like having only one sexual partner), and personal responsibility (such as being financially independent) made up the top-ranked criteria. Badger’s study notes a caution in emerging adults about marriage, which causes them to make preparations so they can survive in case of divorce (2005). Overall, emerging adults felt that they needed to be self-reliant to be married, that they needed to be at least 18, that career and education skills should come before marriage, and that interpersonal skills were important.

Another study (Nelson, 2009) explained how financial behaviors and attitudes of emerging adults and their parents influenced the participant’s marital horizon. They assessed financial criteria by scaling emerging adults based on how financially independent they thought they needed to be before they got married. Emerging adults with the closest marital horizons had a moderate set of financial criteria and were not
dependent on their parents, while those who had high financial criteria and were financially dependent on their parents were likely to have distant marital horizons. The emerging adults who reported the closest marital horizons were those who received the least amount of financial assistance from their parents, but whose parents were willing to continue providing support after they were married. Overall, this study noted a change in the view of marriage. In the past, marriage had been viewed as a source of financial security. Now however, financial independence is increasingly seen as a requirement for marital readiness (Nelson, 2009).

Religiosity

In *Emerging Adulthood* (2004), Arnett emphasizes the fact that emerging adults have extremely individualized belief systems. They often questions religious beliefs because they believe that it is important to create your own beliefs instead of accepting an institution’s dogma without questioning it. Arnett explains that most emerging adults view different religions as a “buffet” where they can pick and choose what they want on their personal “plate”. He also notes that there is usually not a link between the religious upbringing of emerging adults and their current beliefs and practices.

One study examined college student’s religious beliefs and practices over the course of three semesters (Stoppa and Lefkowitz, 2010). The results were, overall, that participation in religious activities declined over time, but religious beliefs did not change significantly (Stoppa and Lefkowitz, 2010). This could indicate behavior and lifestyle differences in students who remain active in religious activities than those who do not.

Willoughby and Carroll (2010) studied how sexual experience, dating status, and religiosity affect attitudes about marriage. Most adults said marriage was important to
them, but only 17% said they currently had a desire to be married (Willoughby and Carroll, 2010). Religiosity in emerging adults was positively correlated with the belief that marriage is a lifetime relationship and the desire to marry now, and negatively correlated with the statement that there are more advantages to being single and with endorsement of cohabitation (Willoughby and Carroll, 2010). This study demonstrated a link between religiosity and attitudes about marriage.

Self-Esteem

Although self-esteem is a concept that has been frequently researched as applied to adolescents, it has not been widely studied within the context of emerging adulthood. A five-year trajectory study found that depression and anger decrease during emerging adulthood, while self-esteem increases (Galambos et al, 2006). The authors summarized that emerging adulthood is a time where psychological well-being generally increases.

One study found that self-esteem was a necessary component in starting and maintaining romantic relationships (Eryilmaz and Atak, 2011). The study found a positive relationship between starting romantic intimacy and the level of self-esteem in an individual (Eryilmaz and Atak, 2011). This indicates that self-esteem is a factor in romantic relationships, including marriage. The relationship between marital readiness and self-esteem is something that this study will explore.

Another study set out to evaluate two competing theories of dating behavior (Spreadbury et al, 1979). One theory said that physical attractiveness was more important to men when choosing a date, and the other said that personality was more important. The study was conducted by asking women to evaluate themselves based on attractiveness and personality, and then to record their dating frequency. It was found that physical
attractiveness was more important to men when choosing their dates (Spreadbury et al., 1979). Because the study required the women to rate themselves on attractiveness, it could be that their attractiveness to men was not based on physical features, but was based on how attractive they perceived themselves to be. This would provide a link to self-esteem because it is partly influenced by physical appearance.

Methods

Procedures

Data for this study was gathered through surveys from college students at a large public university located in Southern Mississippi. Surveys were distributed in person at the beginning of large general education classes. These classes were selected to obtain the most diverse sample possible. After permission was obtained from professors to seek participants, the researcher entered the class, explained the project briefly, and distributed the surveys. The participant goal was to include 200 unmarried college students without children.

Since this study involved human participants, permission for the study was gained from the Institutional Review Board. To ensure participants understood their choices, rights, and the actual study, they were required to sign a consent form that states they know what the study is about and what it will involve and that they give their permission for their answers to be included in the data analysis.

Demographic information was included in the study in order to understand the study participants. These variables included: gender, age, marital status, honors/non-honors student status, year in college, parent’s educational history, racial/ethnic identification, and full-time/part-time student. Of the 246 total surveys collected, 216
were considered eligible for this study. Of those disqualified, 28 fell outside of the 18-25 age range and 2 did not completely fill out the survey. Of the total, 141 (65%) were female and 75 (35%) were male. The students that participated included 43 freshmen (20%), 55 sophomores (26%), 50 juniors (23%), 65 seniors (30%), 2 that identified their academic year as ‘other’ (1%), and one that did not respond to the question. There were 122 students who identified as White/Caucasian (57%), 87 who chose African American (40%), 2 who chose Asian (1%), 4 that chose ‘other’ (2%), and one student who did not respond to this question. Of the respondents, 91 students (42%) had parents who earned a high-school equivalent or lower education and 125 students (58%) had parents who earned a bachelor’s degree, master’s degree, or other advanced degree.

The marital readiness criteria of college students was the dependent variable of this study. There were two independent variables: religiosity and self-esteem. Religiosity is a term that encompasses not just religious beliefs but also the level of involvement in religious activities and religious affiliation. The other independent variable in this study is self-esteem. Self-esteem is known as how valuable an individual feels as a person. Since self-esteem is an important part of emerging adulthood, it could have an impact on someone’s marital readiness criteria. In this study the impact between marital readiness and religiosity and self-esteem was explored.

**Measures**

**Marital Readiness:** Marital Readiness was assessed using a Likert-Type scale designed specifically for this study. The items were taken directly from criteria identified by emerging adults as being important to marriage in an earlier study (Badger, 2005). Badger (2005) grouped the identified criteria into the overall categories of family
capacities, norm compliance, interpersonal capacities, and personal responsibility. For the Marital Readiness Scale created for this study, participants were asked to rate how strongly they agreed or disagreed that certain criteria (e.g., owning a home) were necessary to have in place before marrying [see appendix]. Of the six most endorsed criteria from this study, interpersonal competencies accounted for three: the ability to express feelings in close relationships, commitment to a long-term love relationship, and the ability to successfully resolve conflict. The other three were in the category of personal responsibility: completing an education, taking responsibility for one’s own actions, and the ability to make decisions independently. This seems to reflect Badger’s (2005) assertion that emerging adults feel the need to be self-reliant before marriage. This could also reflect Arnett’s (2004) theory that emerging adults want to establish their own identities, in this case by developing interpersonal skills, before trying to find a partner.

**Religiosity**: Religiosity was assessed using the Revised Religious Life Inventory (Hills, Francis, and Robbins, 2004). It is a Likert-Type scale comprised of 24 items that includes three separate subscales. The R-RLI was scored by summing all responses. The scores can range from 144 to 160. The higher a participant’s score was, the less religious they were. The first subscale included seven items that assess extrinsic religiosity (alpha=.76), which is where people use religion for their own purposes. The second subscale had nine items and it evaluates intrinsic religiosity (alpha=.93), which means the person seeks to live out what he or she believes. The third subscale had 8 items and it assesses the quest of religion (alpha=.83), which means the person is seeking spiritual answers that are not necessarily lined up with any formal religious institution (Schultz, 2009).
Self-Esteem: Participant self-esteem was assessed using the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1989). It was scored as a Likert-Type assessment made up of ten statements which are scored on a four point scale ranging from 4 (strongly agree) to 1 (strongly disagree). The reported Cronbach’s alpha for this scale ranged between .77-.88 and test-retest correlations from .82-.88. (Rosenberg, 1989).

Data Analysis

The data collected was entered into SPSS and for analysis. Multivariate regression analysis was done to examine the degree to which self-esteem and religiosity were predictors of marital readiness criteria. Independent t-tests were done to examine the relationships between gender and each of the three variables.

Results

The first type of analysis performed was a multivariate regression analysis. This analysis revealed how well the overall relationships among the variables combined, including the effect of self-esteem and religiosity on marital readiness criteria, fit. Furthermore this analysis indicated which correlations existed between each independent variable and marital readiness criteria. The r-squared value was .151 which means that roughly 15% of marital readiness criteria can be explained by self-esteem and religiosity combined. Therefore, self-esteem and religiosity have a statistically significant positive relationship with marital readiness.

Beta standardized coefficients were evaluated to explore the influence of the independent variables individually. The beta value for self-esteem was -.035. This means that self-esteem alone did not make a statistically significant contribution to predicting
marital readiness criteria. The Beta value for religiosity was -0.387. This means that religiosity was a statistically significant, although small, contributing variable to predicting marital readiness criteria.

The data was checked for multicollinearity. There was no correlation between religiosity and self-esteem as variables (0.019). Tolerance and VIF for the data both had a value of one, which is acceptable. Tolerance should be greater than 0.10 and VIF should be less than 10.

Independent t-tests were done between gender and each of the three variables. These tests did not reveal any significant differences between genders in regards to self-esteem.

T-tests showed a significant difference between genders in religiosity. Females in the sample (M=128.6, SD=25) seemed to have slightly higher religiosity than males (M=115.8, SD=34.2). The mean difference was -12.84. The magnitude of this difference was small (eta squared=.03).

The independent t-test between gender and marital readiness displayed significant differences between the two groups. Males (M=25.8, SD=7.59) seemed to demonstrate higher marital readiness criteria than females (M=22.9, SD=4.25). The mean difference was 2.96. The magnitude of this difference was small to moderate (eta squared=.04).

The Self-esteem scores reported by the participants had a mean of 16.29 and a standard deviation of 2.2. A score of less than 15 indicates low self-esteem. This would make the overall self-esteem of students surveyed slightly above average. The areas where student’s answers reflected the lowest self-esteem were items eight, nine, and ten. Fifty-eight students (27%) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement “I wish I could
have more respect for myself.” Forty-six students (21%) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement “I certainly feel useless at times.” Finally, thirty students (14%) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement “At times I think I am no good at all.”

The mean religiosity score for the population survey was 124.19 with a standard deviation of 29. This score is lower than all of the possible sub-scores listed on the scoring information of the Revised Religious Life Inventory. This could be due to the averaging of scores between people who were highly religious and people who were not religious at all. There were some items on the scale that students responded to more universally than others. This means that a higher percentage than usual chose the same 1-9 value in response to the statements. In response to the statement “I am constantly questioning my religious beliefs” 102 students (47%) chose 9, which means they strongly disagreed. One hundred and four students (48%) chose 1, or strongly agree, in response to the statement “The prayers I say when I am alone carry as much meaning and personal emotion as those said by me during services.” Ninety one students (42%) chose 1, strongly agree, in response to the statement, “Quite often I have been keenly aware of the presence of God or the Divine Being.”

Of the 18 items on the Marital Readiness scale, there were some items that were more widely endorsed as important or highly important by students than others. Only five or less respondents marked the following statements “Unimportant” or “Highly Unimportant” in regards to their importance to marital readiness: “Completing your education”, “Commitment to a long-term love relationship”, “Ability to express feelings in close relationships”, “Ability to successfully resolve conflict”, “Taking responsibility for one’s own actions”, and “Ability to make decisions independently.” This means that
these are the most important marital readiness criteria amongst the college students that were surveyed. The two least endorsed criteria were “Owning a home” and “Not using illegal substances”. In response to every statement, the majority of students responded “Highly important” and “Important” in response to all statements. This indicates that the marital readiness criteria of college students could be generally regarded as high.

Discussion

The framework behind this study was marital horizon theory. This theory attempts to interpret how close or distant marriage is for an individual by looking at how important they think marriage is overall, what their ideal age for marriage is, and the level of their marital readiness criteria (high vs. low) (Carroll et al, 2007). The purpose of this study was to further examine marital readiness criteria and to measure if this was impacted by the self-esteem and religiosity of college students.

Study results indicated that the relationship among self-esteem, religiosity, and marital readiness is statistically significant. Specifically, the findings suggest that increased levels of religiosity and self-esteem combined have a statistically significant positive relationship with marital readiness. While the results were statistically significant, they were not as strong as expected. However, this model does not represent a complete explanation of marital readiness and it is acknowledged that there are other factors that could further explain these relationships.

In addition to the combined statistically significant effect of self-esteem and religiosity on marital readiness, the strongest influence among the variables examined was between religiosity and marital readiness. Specifically, results indicated a positive correlation between religiosity and marital readiness criteria. This means that as
religiosity increases, marital readiness also appears to increase. This finding seems to echo similar findings within the larger field of study regarding the links between religion and marriage in general. Results from one qualitative study that examined the correlations between religion and the quality and duration of marriage indicated that although involvement in a faith community can result in couples spending time apart, religiosity also correlates positively with marital stability and satisfaction (Marks, 2005). Another study indicated that marriage is correlated with higher religious participation (Uecker, Regnerus & Vaaler, 2007). There could be more research done on whether or not higher marital readiness criteria is related to better marital quality similarly to religion.

Religion is a subject that has been studied with regard to emerging adulthood and has been known to change during this time (Arnett, 2004). While this time of life has traditionally associated with the lessening of religious ties, some researchers argue that rather than becoming less religious, emerging adults usually challenge the status quo of their previous beliefs (Milevsky & Leh, 2008). One study found that the marital status of one’s parents, support from one’s family, and overall life satisfaction are factors that increase religious participation (Milevsky & Leh, 2008). From previous research we know that religion is something impacts the choices emerging adults make as they live their lives. From this study we know that there is a positive relationship between marital readiness criteria and religiosity. This means that having higher religiosity makes someone more likely to have higher marital readiness criteria.

While the relationship between religiosity and marital readiness was statistically significant when examined independently from self-esteem, the relationship between self-
esteem and marital readiness was not statistically significant when examined independent of religiosity. This could be a due to a number of factors. The self-esteem scale that we used measured self-worth from one’s own perspective (Rosenberg, 1989). While it makes sense that self-esteem would be an important factor in a marriage relationship, and therefore marital readiness, this study did not measure self-esteem within a relational context. However, another study did examine these relationships more closely and found that higher self-esteem did lead to better relationship satisfaction (Sciangula & Morry, 2009). They measured self-esteem using the Rosenberg Scale, relational satisfaction in dating couples, and how individuals saw themselves in low and moderately relationally relevant traits. They also measured how each individual thought their partner perceived their abilities in low and moderately relevant traits. The people who were the most satisfied in their relationships had the highest self-esteem and answered that they thought their partner idealized them when it came to moderately relevant relationship traits (Sciangula & Morry, 2009). This study demonstrated a link between self-esteem and relationships that our study did not.

A concept that may be better than self-esteem at measuring relationship skills is that of self compassion. Self compassion is defined as being kind to oneself when faced with hard times or failure, seeing ones flaws in the scope of humanity, and not ignoring or dwelling on negative emotions (Neff & Beretvas, 2013). One study examined the relationship between self-compassion and healthy relationship behaviors. They found that those who had self compassion demonstrated more healthy relationship behaviors than those who did not have self compassion (Neff & Beretvas, 2013). They also found that self compassion predicted this healthy behavior better than trait self-esteem or attachment
style and that self compassion is an observable trait. Because it is related to healthy relationship behavior, self compassion may be a better predictor of marital readiness.

Although the above study is helpful, it looks at the self compassion of individuals in committed relationships, which could be different than the self compassion of singles in the general population. Another study compared self-compassion to self-esteem related to psychological functioning. The results indicated that self-esteem was related to narcissism while self compassion was not, and that self compassion created a more stable sense of self-worth that was not dependent on circumstances (Neff & Vonk, 2009). These results suggest that self compassion might be a better way to examine how someone views themselves than self-esteem.

The connections between marriage and emerging adulthood are important to understand since the timing and view of marriage is one of the most important factors that contributed to the existence of emerging adulthood. One study examined the relationship between the sexual attitudes and behaviors of emerging adults and their marital horizons (Willoughby, 2012). The author found that there was a positive association between sexual experience and marital importance of emerging adults but individuals who engaged in sexual behavior the most frequently were more likely to say there were more advantages to being single than being married. When examining participant’s marital readiness criteria, researchers found that norm compliance was seen as less important to those who engaged in sex the most frequently and that sexual experience and cohabitation were seen as an important marital readiness factor in those who were the most sexually experienced (Willoughby, 2012). These findings reflect
overall attitudes held by those in the emerging adult stage related to marriage and relationships.

Another study examined what marriage means to emerging adults. One-fifth of study participants were labeled as marriage naturalists who married early as their previous generation did and see marriage as the natural outcome of romantic relationships (Kefalas, Furstenberg, Carr, & Napolitano, 2011). The other four-fifths were marriage planners, which meant they view marriage as occurring over a long time, after a relationship has been proved secure, after professional and other life goals have been met, and after the individual feels ready to give up convenience for the obligations of marriage (Kefalas, Furstenberg, Carr, & Napolitano, 2011). This reflects themes from emerging adulthood, showing that marriage is still a goal but holds a different function in the lives of emerging adults than previous generations.

There are some limitations to this study. First of all, the participants were all in college courses. It is likely that participating in higher education might impact an individual’s perspectives on marriage by exposing them to new ideas. This study is not as comprehensive as a study with college and non-college participants would be. Another limitation was that all participants are currently residing in Mississippi, the deep south. Because people of similar beliefs and backgrounds tend to group together, this could also skew results. Finally, although the self-esteem and religion measures were well established, the martial readiness survey was created by the author and has no established validity or reliability.

An important factor that this study did not address is that of marital importance. It would be insightful to ask participants if marriage is an important goal for them and how
important it is. For future studies, it would be more worthwhile to measure for self
compassion rather than self-esteem because self compassion appears to be a better
indicator of healthy relationships. Finally, a different measure for religion that identified
religious affiliations as well as strength of religious involvement seems like it would give
more information about the relationship between religion and marriage.
**Appendix**

**Marital Readiness Criteria Scale**

Please respond to the following criteria based on how important you think each statement is in regards to preparation for marriage: Highly Important, Important, Unimportant, or Highly Unimportant.

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<td>Financial Independence from parents.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Living outside of your parent’s home.</td>
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<td>Completing your education.</td>
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<td>An established career.</td>
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<td>Owning a home.</td>
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<td>A full-time job.</td>
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<td>Ability to support a family financially.</td>
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<td>Ability to run a household.</td>
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<td>Ability to care for children.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Commitment to a long-term love relationship.</td>
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<td>Ability to express feelings in close relationships.</td>
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<td>Ability to discuss personal problems with others.</td>
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<td>Ability to successfully resolve conflict.</td>
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<td>Having only one sexual partner.</td>
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<td>Not committing crimes.</td>
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<td>Not using illegal substances.</td>
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<td>Taking responsibility for one’s own actions.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ability to make decisions independently.</td>
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