The meaning, experience and ecology of African Christian marriages and familial relationships: a phenomenological study at Makumira University College, Tanzania

Wayne L. Nieminen
Iowa State University

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The meaning, experience and ecology of African Christian marriages
and familial relationships –
A phenomenological study
at Makumira University College, Tanzania

by

Wayne L. Nieminen

A dissertation submitted to the graduate faculty
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Major: Human Development and Family Studies (Marriage and Family Therapy)

Program of Study Committee:
Ron Werner-Wilson, Co-major Professor
Harvey Joanning, Co-major Professor
Dianne Draper
Shu-Min Huang
Mary Littrell

Iowa State University
Ames, Iowa
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Graduate College
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Co-major Professor

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Co-major Professor

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For the Major Program
Dedicated to the Community of Makumira University College
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ABSTRACT

Research on African Christian marriage and family life has lacked a critical focus on the experience and meaning of marriage between husbands and wives as couples. The intention of this phenomenological investigation is to enrich the international family therapy fields' understanding of the complexity and wider ecology (economics, religious, historical, feminist, educational) of African marriage and family life, specifically in the Christian population. Research took place at Makumira University College in Tanzania, a seminary of the Tumaini University system of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania, interviewing students, faculty and their spouses in a variety of formats (couple, individual, and focus group interviews). Economic and educational changes and above all religious beliefs were detailed as powerful mechanisms for ordering and re-ordering of local ethnic traditions as well as respondents' self-understanding as wives and husbands in gender relations. Cultural practices such as parental choice of spouse, bridewealth customs, domestic abuse of women, and the legitimization of marriage through child-bearing are undergoing transformation and in some cases rejection. The meaning of marriage as a relationship or "union in one flesh" between husband and wife is taking priority over the expectations and obligations to the extended family, though the duties and responsibilities to the extended family are still considered very important. Finally, this study identifies the feasibility and cultural relevancy of carrying out a marriage enrichment program tailored for Makumira University couples, with the intention of piloting such a program for use by Lutheran church leaders in the wider Tanzanian church.
CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION

Prologue and Focus of Study

Formerly our parents used to choose your partner. Then they prepared the possibilities according to the traditional customs, regulations that needed to be followed, calling the relatives to sit together, trying to discuss about the marriage. But in the new era in the Christian life, the couple is free to make the choice as a modern way of life...sometimes conflicts with the traditional way of life, then there might be some problems that arise...like the couple would make the choice but the parents would like to make the choice for their child...But in my case, actually my parents they tried to follow the new way of life...they decided to leave all of the choice on myself. (Male Focus Group #1)

Before, they (husbands) saw women as tools...to do something...to be their housemaids...to wash or to cook and that is the work of the old...But now days we can find that women and men try to collaborate together...and to work together...For maybe to help with babies or to cook or do whatever...But now things are changing. But not much, but a little bit changing. (Female Focus Group #2)

First of all in Africa...women and not men are to be married...it’s quite impossible for a woman to ask a man to be married...and in case she did that....well this boy might say to himself that this girl might have some problems, because this is not normal. And if boys are the ones marrying, they [the wife] are the ones living who is living in his home – the girl...so even if the things produced during your marriage life – are those things that are regarded as your properties...and sometimes cattle in my tribe is regarded as properties belonging to that boy – not the woman...that is why we are suppose to pay [a brideprice] because now I have a girl...she’s helping me very much...cooking, fetching water, bringing firewood...now you are taking that girl from her parents...it’s necessary to pay at least something...it’s not a price....because money cannot be compared to it...It’s [the brideprice] rather a value...a value of another human being. (Male Focus Group #2)

Africa needs an inclusive culture, i.e., the culture which does not take advantage of another sex. My fears and doubts are associated with African traditional religion scholarship. The endeavor to contextualize is worthwhile, but they fail to acknowledge the cultural and religious oppression of women. I think in dealing with issues which are touchy like polygamy, bride price, circumcision, and others, this scholarship should wait for women to write their stories, before they give judgments that these practices favor women. The efforts are done in African scholarship mostly by men who tend to project the notion that Africa is free from sexism. (Malle, 1992, p.157)
The individuals at Makumira University, in the above quotations, conveyed contrasting and distinctive perspectives on the marital, familial and gender relationships they’ve experienced in their lifetime. Traditional African understandings of these relationships, in varying velocities, have been giving way to different notions of marriage and family as influenced by western culture, Christianity, a changing economy, and feminism. A rousing struggle is being waged between the old and new.

Many of the Africans I interviewed at Iowa State University (for the pilot study) and at Makumira University (for the dissertation research) were very interested and concerned about the state of their household affairs. They are in the midst of living this reality and forging an unclear future. Many of the older individuals would like to return to past eras when roles, expectations, and consequences of offenses were clearly defined and acted upon. Many of the young people see the traditions as old-fashioned (“not modern”) and prefer the freedom of this new era. Others see the essential role that Christian Scriptures and the church has to play, but are ambivalent about the contemptuous form of Christianity many of the first missionaries brought with them which tended to despise both African culture and African capacity. Memories still linger of the colonial dismantling of their culture. A female Tanzanian pastor studying at Wartburg Seminary in Iowa articulated the state of affairs well.

It is hard now [on] families because now the social structure which is imagined is now becoming different. There are intermarriages; we are going to the cities. We are meeting there and they get married there. We are kind of moving the tradition and creating a mix of the old tradition and a kind of Christianity. But this is my experience and I would prefer to revisit our traditions and we can say that now, according to modern technologies and education, these ones… they are not really fitting in our context, but we can just see how to change them to fit our context. But not leave the traditions completely because a person is a being in community. This is something which is hard to approach from the heart of an African. It is very hard. (Pilot Study)
In the last four centuries, particularly the 19th and 20th century, most of Africa has undergone massive, if not cataclysmic, transitions on many levels of society. This is particularly true of Tanzania, a central eastern sub-Saharan African country, composed of roughly 34 million people who belong to 130 tribal groups. On a macro-level, Tanzania, in the last two centuries has had to contend with many social upheavals: the conquests of the Arab/Moslem and European colonial powers, the abduction of many of its people through the slave trade, the assault of its local customs and traditions by both Christian and Moslem proselytizers, the placing of artificial boundaries on diverse ethnic groups, a total restructuring of the indigenous economy, the migration of many of its men in pursuit of labor, independence from England, the social engineering of Julius Nyerere’s “ujamaa” policy, structural adjustment policies of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF), hyperinflation, poverty, and AIDS. Colonialization and “modernization” has had a very short life in the grand scheme of things. Germany’s administration lasted roughly 35 years (1885-1920) and England’s 44 years (1920-1964) (Iliffe, 1979), but the impact and influence of each on many levels of society have been immense.

On a “micro-level” marriages, families and gender relationships have had to bear the burden of many of these macro transformations described above. The state of affairs which I observed, particularly within the Lutheran Christian community at Makumira, is intricate. On the one hand, many of the rites of passage and traditions which have helped shape individuals into responsible members of the clan and culture have been displaced, if not ousted. Men, in varying degrees, and usually women are looking for a new meaning of marriage. Sons and daughters are struggling to be respectful and obedient to their parents,
but fret or become annoyed at the constraints and expectations of elders’ authority, which at
the same time is waning. The situation is one of tension between genders and generations.

The macro-level changes, outlined above, are not to be totally disparaged. Although
colonialists and missionaries carried with them a haughtiness, convinced that they were
bringing the treasures of civilization to the uncivilized Africans, my Tanzanian respondents
affirmed that they also brought Western sciences, schools and education, and a theology
which in the best of circumstances lifted up all humans as equally loved children of God with
talents and gifts to be used. All in various ways have contributed to the softening of
patriarchal authority over women and children, the slow liberation of rigid gender roles, the
expansion of opportunities for economic self-sufficiency and a movement towards a more
cooperative notion of marriage – based on free choice of spouse, mutual love and respect
between husband and family, and family planning in order to achieve a better quality of life.

Marital relations are in flux. This shift is by no means all pervasive. As one female
respondent said in the introduction: “But now things are changing. But not much, but a little
bit changing.”

Various non-religious academic disciplines have studied and documented the changing
nature of sub-Saharan culture and various dimensions of African marriage and family from
their unique empirical lenses. Anthropological ethnographies and studies on kinship abound
of the 130 ethnic groups (Beidelman, 1971, Foster, 1995; Huber, 1973). Demographers have
studied women’s role in family planning (Chege, 1995; Gwako, 1997; Dodoo, 1998) in a high
fertility environment and only recently observed men’s prevailing power over women’s
reproductive decisions (Bankole, 1995; Dodoo, 1993; Dodoo and van Landewicjk, 1996;
Hollos & Larsen, 1997). Most sociological studies in the family realm have focused upon
making women’s invisible position visible, disclosing: women’s expanding economic role in
the informal economy (Rutashobya, 1995; Tripp, 1989, 1997) and their struggle for
economic independence (Obbo, 1980; Reiter, 1975; Rubin 1996; Swantz 1985); gender
disparities in education (Logan, 1996; Stambach, 2000); women’s health issues ranging from
heavy workloads (Bryceson, 1995; Howard & Millard, 1997; Mebrahtu, 2000), domestic
violence (Mwau, 2000), genital mutilation (Abusharaf and Halim, 2000) to HIV/AIDS
issues (Karim, 2000; Obbo, 1995; Setel, 1996, 1999) and mothers and children in crisis
(Kilbride, 1990; Omari, 1990). The marriage and family therapy movement in Africa has had
a varied history. South Africa family therapy has largely paralleled and followed the
developments in the West (Italy, Australia, United States), but has also focused on the
healing of wounds caused by racist and oppressive Apartheid policies that disrupted the
African family (Gerhardt, 2003; Steyn, 1996). Other family therapists (Adekson, 2003) in
Nigeria have studied ways to incorporate the customary healing techniques (divining,
sacrificing, herbal therapy, prayer, therapeutic dance, invoking God, the gods, and ancestors,
dream interpretation, using proverbs and folktales) of traditional Yoruba healers to better
help Yoruba families.

Upon my arrival to Tanzania and receiving permission to use the Makumira library, I
discovered the church’s contributions to the general body of knowledge concerning Christian
marriage and family life. Large ecumenical studies beginning in the early 1970’s (Hastings,
1973) and continuing with CROMIA’s (Churches’ Research on Marriage in Africa) epic
study (Kisembo, 1977) – involving eight countries, surveying 2,500 leaders documented a
host of pastoral concerns including: declining marriage rates, polygamy, inter-ethnic
marriages, intricacies of customary marriages in relation to Christian weddings. I also
discovered African feminist theologians who were not only providing a voice for the many unheard women of urban and rural areas, but also pointing toward a new and redeemed relationship between men and women (Oduyoe, 1995, 2001; Oduyoye & Kanyaro, 1997; Malle, 1992; Mungurue, 2000). Local masters' theses of Lutheran students who have graduated from Makumira, opened doors to marriage and family life at the village level on such topics as: the impact of Christian mission upon traditional marriage, separation and divorce, the use of alcohol, premarital pregnancy, treatment of widows etc.

All are contributing to our general understanding of the African family from their unique vantage point. No research, to my knowledge, has attempted a detailed analysis of African Christian marriage and family life experience using interview data with men and women from a specific African religious community – in this case that of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Tanzania (ELCT). This area of research into distinct religious communities remains largely undeveloped.

This dissertation seeks to make a contribution to the international marriage and family therapy field by enriching our understanding of the complexity of African Christian marriages and family life. Specifically, the purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore / make a foray into Tanzanian Christian marriages and familial relationships at Makumira University College Tanzania, by obtaining verbal descriptions from informants – seminary students, faculty, pastors and spouses (10 couples; and 13 men and 13 women interviewed in focus groups or individually) – concerning the experience of their own marriages and perceptions of their surrounding cultural milieu. My aim was to go beyond the simple gathering of the usual social facts collected in surveys and to evoke the multiple and varied nature (perhaps even the heights and depths) of their personal experience. In effect,
my hope was that respondents' observations and interpretations would serve to produce a
clearer picture and rich description of: 1) people's married familial lives; 2) the meaning of
their marriages; 3) their hopes and dreams; 4) the issues they face personally in their
marriage and those they have witnessed in their ministry; 5) the role of the Lutheran church
and other sources in assisting families.

The wider focus of this study was interventive in nature and interested in the question:
What marital dynamics and other pertinent variables (beliefs, values, feelings, attitudes and
behaviors) from an Tanzanian Christian’s perspective should be considered in the
development of an experimental “marital enrichment” program at Makumira University?
The intention of such a program would be to strengthen the marriages of leaders within the
church, using or reflecting their own voices, so that they might serve as a guide and model
through an era of major cultural transition.

This dissertation stage of this study represents a second-stage of a three-fold project begun
in 1999 continuing through 2005. The outline is as follows:

1. **Pilot Study** – (completed in April and May 1999) – a qualitative
   phenomenological study – location: Iowa State University involving African
   Christian student couples from East Africa.

2. **Dissertation Research** – (September – November 2000) a phenomenological
   qualitative study – location: Makumira University College – a Lutheran seminary
   in the northeast corner of Tanzania. Involving the community of Makumira

3. **Marriage Enrichment Seminar** – (May- June 2005) – at the same location
   involving my wife (who was the Director of the Women’s Program, a seminary
   teacher in Central Africa Republic) and I who would facilitate an elective marriage
   enrichment “program” which we envision as a collaborative process at its core.
   Themes and issues from the dissertation research would be used and discussed.

The empirical core of this phenomenological research project is the interviews and the
analysis of their discourses. Every attempt possible was made to gain a better understanding
of this "core" by plunging into local culture....by making trips into the surrounding town and cities (Pare Mountains, Arusha, Moshe, Dar es Salaam), through informal conversations with church leaders, towns people, seminary students and faculty (including those not taking part in the study), and the reading of local students' bachelors and masters theses. I believe that to gain any minimal understanding in cultural studies, the notion of "phenomena" must be broadened and deepened outside the confines of an interview to include the sociocultural context. As Clifford Geertz (1973) says: "Cultural analysis is (or should be) guessing at meanings, assessing the guesses, and drawing explanatory conclusions from the better guesses, not discovering the Continent of Meaning and mapping out its bodiless landscape."
(p. 20)

**Roots of the Project**

Interest in doing research on marriage and family issues in Tanzania grew out of a four-year missionary experience with the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America and the Central African Republic Evangelical Lutheran Church. From 1991 to 1995, my wife and I taught at the Baboua Lutheran School of Theology in the Central African Republic as pastor-teachers. During that time, among the variety of courses that I taught, was one on pastoral counseling. I was humbled and perplexed by the great variety of situations that many of the students had already dealt with and would face later as leaders in the church. Difficulties in marital familial relationships, separations and divorces – intensified by illness, high mortality rates, high birth rates, loss of values and cultural traditions, political instability, civil disorder, lagging economic growth, spiritual and ancestral quagmires, the practice and accusations of
sorcery – placed great pressures upon the family. Students, evangelists, pastors often came to our home to discuss a range of situations and the "goings-on" with their family:

A seminary student confessed: "My wife only went to school for a short time, making it through some primary grades. When I return home from class, I want to discuss these things with her. She listens but she says that she doesn’t understand what I’m saying. I want to talk with her, but the differences in our education make communication really difficult. It’s becoming so frustrating and I worry about our future as a couple. What should I do?"

One evangelist said: "My wife has married the spirit of a spring and now has birthed a spirit child. The congregation of my village is upset. I don’t know if I can continue as an evangelist here...because this goes against our Christian beliefs. And I don’t know if I can still remain married to her. What should I do?"

The wife of a seminary student said: At night my grandmother (who is dead) comes to me in a dream saying that my husband is having an affair with another seminary student’s wife. During the day I see my husband talking to her. I’m suspicious. He says that he has been faithful. But my ancestor is saying he is lying. What should I do?

A number of seminary students related similar extended family and personal finance related difficulties: My family in my village knows that I receive a stipend as a student. My extended relatives continually come and stay at our home and ask to borrow money. It goes against our culture to refuse a request for help and I fear their putting a curse on my family. What should I do?

I was often at a loss as to what to say or how to help. Other questions, in addition to, "What should I do?" arose: How does my American understanding of "marriage" and "family" differ from the local African understanding? How extended are one’s responsibilities toward the extended family and clan? What responsibilities do family members have for each other? Why do the seminary students insist on calling so many people their mother and father back at their village? For heaven’s sake, who is their "real" mother and father?! Why do women and men seemingly lead separate lives? Why is ok for men to hold hands and women to hold hands, but not for married couples to hold hands?
Why do wives and husbands display no public affection for each other? How do I understand such spiritual forces as ancestors, spirits and witchcraft which are obviously considered phenomenologically real?

Many of the situations presented to me were new frontiers in the counseling realm. Often the cultural divide between myself and the Central Africans was enormous and crossing that expanse took a great deal of time, patience and curiosity. And to my chagrin, retrospectively, I sometimes yielded to a contemptuous view of the local culture and customs and made little effort to cross that cultural divide. Other times, however, my life and worldview were deepened and stretched by my friendships and the stories my neighbors, students and colleagues told of their amazing lives. I'll always remember the advice of one local elder to me: "If you are going to be of any service to us, you will have to learn to see Africans with African eyes."

Living in this particular region of the Central African Republic has helped to acquaint me with some of the incredible complexities of marriage and family life in Sub-Saharan Africa. Discussions with colleagues and visiting African Bishops from Nigeria, Namibia, Cameroon and Tanzania have continued to increase my curiosity of the powerful mysteries on the boundaries of different cultural worlds. I've gradually come to understand that in order to do intervene therapeutically in the family of another culture, one has to, as Clifford Geertz (1973, p.13) states, make an effort to become familiar with the "imaginative universe" in which human acts are "signs." Such an "imaginative universe" includes not only the symbolic forms and structures of meaning, but is fused to the signs or events of a culture's public world of common life (its political, economic, educational and daily realities). I've come to believe that one cannot make too many assumptions living in a different culture!
Lack of cultural knowledge, careless attributions of meaning can be a recipe for disaster not only in daily social intercourse but especially in the realm of counseling. Needless to say, I've personally tasted some of those unappetizing dishes! Thus, it is in this inquisitive, curious spirit that I decided to take on this research project with the goals of “learning to see African with African eyes,” to reconnoiter this imaginative universe, and to investigate if and how an enrichment of marriages could take place among leaders and spouses at Makumira University.

Personal Lens

There is scarcely one [African people]... which has not been affected to a greater or less extent, by the work of Christian missions, and among most of them organized communities of native Christians play an integral part in the social organization. No contemporary social study can afford to neglect this element, the form it takes, and its relations with other groups with which it coexists and interacts. (Beattie, 1953, p.178)

In this study, I have adopted a qualitative-postmodern approach to research which acknowledges that all research is driven by personal and theoretical assumptions and presuppositions (Creswell, 1998; Doherty, Boss, Larossa, Schumm & Steinmetz, 1993; Moustakas, 1994). Furthermore, such an approach demands that the investigator carefully interrogate these presuppositions, identify and disclose how they might influence the research project.(Colaizzi, 1978; Moustakas, 1994). It is the task of this section to briefly articulate my basic epistemological assumptions and convictions on which this project rests.

Personal Religious and Missionary Stance: First and foremost, I would like my readers to be aware that I have been a Lutheran pastor of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America for 19 years. I am a religious person whose religious orientation profoundly influences the
way I view the world. Such a religious orientation prompted my wife and me to be missionaries in the Central African Republic. Our church instructed us that, “The Christ who sends you, is the one who awaits you.” I understood my church to be advising us to look carefully for the presence of God in local customs and beliefs and to make careful, discerning judgments. I know that such “judgments” were made in the area we lived against the traditions of polygamy, genital mutilation (clitoridectomy), infanticide (killing of twins or girls upon birth), and sorcery (putting curses on people, throwing lightening). Other customs were encouraged (herbal remedies, local marriage customs, celebrations, seasonal festivals, sore gamo reconciliation etc.). In short, I believe that all cultures need to be redeemed including my own. Some scholars eschew any judgment or critique of the phenomena they study. This approach is rejected here in favor of a reflexive judicious critique reflected in the words of the ethicist, Reinhold Niebuhr (1974):

> Yet distinctions between good and evil, between justice and injustice, between the honest teacher and the propagandist, between the responsible states person and the irresponsible demagogue are very important, and must be made. Our precarious virtues and moral standards depend upon careful judgments and distinctions. But the multifarious dramas of history reveal the provisional nature of these distinctions. Ultimately considered, evil is done, not so much by evil people but by good people who do not know themselves. (p. 93)

**Academic Community and Missionary Quandary:** I find that the academic community, by and large, looks at the missionary enterprise with contempt - or at least a certain degree of ambivalence – for corrupting traditional society. The fundamentalistic, callously ethnocentric, mindlessly romantic, Baptist minister of *The Poisonwood Bible* (Kingsolver, 1999), Nathan Price, seems to be the popular prototype of such missionary behavior. I simply acknowledge and regret that such persons have indeed composed the ranks of missionaries. I, however, encourage the academic community to look more closely at its
own presuppositions against missionaries. There is no single homogenous missionary culture. And there were many missionaries who defended traditional African interests against colonialists and mercenary capitalist interests. I believed very much in an enlightened, humbled Christian mission enterprise that is a steward of the mystery of God’s love working for justice in the world.

**Theological Assumptions:** My theology forms the core hermeneutical lens with which I greet life. I find myself identifying with the post-liberal theological tradition coming out of Yale Divinity School. Such a framework is definitely not “fundamentalist” and neither is it “liberal.” George Lindbeck’s (1984) book, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age*, is one of its founding works. Post-liberalism is more of a “cultural linguistic” approach which denies the more liberal understanding that there is a universal experiential core to all religions (the belief that all religions in essence are the same). It recognizes that different religious traditions elicit different experiences and provide very different ways of understanding and orientation toward the world. The post-liberal tradition highlights the distinctive language of a particular community’s meta-narrative and how the particular community has been formed by this language of truth. I would see the post-liberal theology as a philosophical partner with symbolic interactionism, social constructionism and collaborative language therapies. However, I would argue that post-liberalism can be used as an academic theological approach which honors (and relativizes less) the truth-value of a particular community’s meta-narrative. It respects a particular community’s claim that being Christian helps one to re-examine one’s tradition and reshape one’s familial relationships accordingly. This, I think, is best illustrated in one pastor’s comments to me: “But if you are a Christian, but still you hold to your [tribal] tradition very strongly, consequently you will
mistreat your wife...But if you are really accepting Jesus Christ and your life is governed by the love of God than you will be able to be selective, to leave out cultural negative things which will harm your spouse.” (Couple #2)

**Epistemological Assumptions:** I have adopted a quasi-postmodern/social constructionist (Berger & Luckman, 1967; Gergen, 1985; Gergen & McNamee, 1992) and ecological (Bateson, 1972) epistemological stance for this research project. Such a stance accepts the following claims: 1) knowledge (meaning, understanding, theories) is the product of an active cooperative enterprise of people in relationship and is set within an immediate context in the world; 2) One comes to know tentatively in participation with others and knowledge emerges/is constructed and discovered in language; 3) Reality is multiverse/multiperspectived, and holds multi-meanings, but its home is framed by hierarchies, power relationships, and meta-narratives that should be disclosed and deconstructed; 4) the ecological perspective emphasizes the complexity/interrelated-ness/wholeness of all phenomena and the host of wider mediating variables (economic, historical, educational, political, cultural etc) influencing family life; and 5) the researcher can learn and absorb the most in a different culture by assuming a “not-knowing” perspective as opposed to a all-knowing, white, missionary, professional role.

**Church’s Role in Africa:** Adrian Hastings (1990) has stated: “Black Africa today is totally inconceivable apart from the presence of Christianity, a presence which a couple generations ago could still not be unreasonably dismissed as fundamentally marginal and a mere subsidiary aspect of colonialism.” (p. 208) I believe that the Christian Church is a key element in the civil society of Sub-Saharan Africa and will assume increasing significance in the creation of just, pluralistic democratic states. Not only can it exercise an influence in
speaking courageously about international and national political and social behavior, but can also have a great impact on the developing/exposing/healing/strengthening of marital, familial and gender relationships. I agree with Don Browning (2003) that the church (not only in Africa but worldwide) needs to wrestle more openly with the question: How should Christianity respond to the forces of globalization and modernization as they affect marriage and family issues? I hope to contribute to this international conversation.

**Gender Assumptions:** I have adopted the Lutheran World Relief’s “Principles of Gender Equity” as one of my presumptions. These theological and ethical principles state succinctly that men and women are equal in the sight of God and they also outline a commitment to the pursuit of social justice. One principle is particularly pertinent to the goals of this research:

> Men and women need to learn about each other and their relationship with each other. Each needs to learn to respect each other’s contributions in the household, community, work place, and nation. Both men and women should be fully incorporated in the re-evaluation of the current power structures. LWR supports the empowerment of women and men so that each may exercise power in equitable, though different ways. (LWR Principles of Gender Equity, 1996)

**Marriage and Family Beliefs:** I believe that marriage is both a public institution and a deeply meaningful personal and spiritual relationship. As a husband, pastor and therapist I espouse marital relationships of mutuality, respect and equality. Such presuppositions were in conflict with several of the more traditional respondents I interviewed. My strategy, through the questioning process, was one of helping individuals to reexamine or reassess their lives through conversation and by disclosing aspects of my own marriage and family life. On other occasions I openly questioned and disagreed with the ELCT’s policy concerning the indissolubility of marriage and prohibition against divorce even in abusive and violent situations.
John Witte (1997) has pointed out that the historic western Christian tradition has acknowledged the family in a variety of forms: the “extended household” – encompassing servants, students, visitors and relatives of many generations; the “single household-” with one parent alongside children, adopted children and grandchildren; the “spiritual household” – of brothers and sisters in a monastery or religious house; and the latest phenomena, the “nuclear household” – of parents and children. I’ve come to realize that this historical understanding has largely been forgotten in my home church culture amidst the debates among the politically right and left. Doing this research in Tanzania has helped to lessen my dogmatism privileging a particular form and continued to broaden my perspective and widened my tolerance of marriage and family life. I hope that this research will not only produce information and insights for the global family research but empower people to a deeper level of thought and action.

**Dissertation Organization**

Ballaquer and Markman (1992) have argued that a program for the prevention of marital distress would include an identification of risk and protective factors based on up to date theory and research in order to therapeutically target specific components of a couple’s relationship. Risk factors are those variables which might contribute to a marriage’s disintegration. Protective factors may be defined as assets or strengths that build up and enhance marital relationships. No research has been published, to my knowledge, which has attempted to identify such “risk and protective” factors, or for that matter, portrayed or detailed the experience of such factors in an African Christian couples’ relationships.
This inquiry is "phenomenological" in nature whereby the researcher attempts to elicit and understand the meaning of various marital and familial experiences provided by African Christian couples. Such a phenomenological stance strives to identify those "risk and protective" factors by endeavoring to evoke: how couples see their world, the imagery they use, the references and symbols they find significant, the stories and analogies they summon, their view of regional history and how their religious beliefs influence their understanding of marriage. Such a stance does not try to "impose" various psychological, anthropological or sociological constraints upon respondents, but holds to the primacy of their expressed experience.

At the same time, the researcher must be careful not to ignore the already accumulated research and "ecology" by making an individual's experience the sole source of information. I believe that this is one of the potential dangers of phenomenological research. One walks a tight rope between imposing conceptual constraints and allowing extremely idiosyncratic experience or unintentional researcher bias to monopolize the description of complex psychological and relational phenomena.

This dissertation attempts to walk this tight rope. It is compose of seven chapters. Chapter Two begins by reviewing pertinent literature regarding the general nature of Sub-Saharan marriage and family life. Great diversity exists within the kinship structure of the many tribes in Tanzania and over 130 ethnicities have been identified (Forster, 1995). Here, general themes from anthropological and sociological literature are highlighted, noting William Goode's "modernist" identification of an emerging nuclear family in the world. Then, recent findings, largely from feminist literature, are discussed concerning women's current position in the family and their workload. The following section examines the
various cultural and social ingredients that make up a marriage and family’s ecology: African traditional religion, fertility issues, demography studies, education, the effects of structural adjustment policies, AIDS, and women’s growing economic autonomy in the informal sector.

Finally, valuable materials from the reports of two of the most recent church sponsored research projects ("Christian Marriage in Africa" – a joint Catholic and Anglican study (Hastings, 1973) and CROMIA’s “African Christian Marriage” (Kisembo et al, 1977) are detailed. They provide a fascinating perspective on the issues which the church has held as important in the marital lives of their parishioners.

Chapter Three profiles the pilot study completed at Iowa State University, upon which this inquiry is built. The intention of this pilot study was to gain a precursory understanding of the complex nature of African Christian marriages and to sharpen and refine the questioning process. Four Christian graduate student couples, who were at various stages in their academic careers (from Tanzania and Kenya), participated in this initial inquiry, who were at various stages in their academic careers. Three Tanzanian Lutheran pastors (two female and one male), studying at Wartburg seminary (in Debuque, Iowa) were also interviewed in this pilot study. These individuals had, at one time, studied at Makumira University College. These interviews, in sum, provided me with an invaluable introduction to African Christian marriages and family life.

Chapter Four delineates the phenomenological methodology I have used to investigate this subject. Though the heart of this investigation was the actual semi-structured interviews at Makumira, my “fieldwork” also became the homes, dining room tables, classrooms, buses and local regions (Pare Mountains, Arusha, Moshe, Dar es Salaam) where I was invited to visit with members of the university and church. My goal was to become as familiar as
possible with people’s lives and their familial relationships. This chapter will relate some of the challenges, politics, stresses and benefits of doing research across cultural borders. This chapter also provides a description of my respondents.

Chapter Five and Six provide a “rich description” of the participants’ experience of marriage life, amply incorporating their observations and interpretations. These chapters seek to assist the reader to get a glimpse into these Christian couples’ experience of marriage, including the distinctive religious qualities which in striking ways make them very unique in the surrounding culture. Chapter Five details three changing spheres of marriage: courtship, family history investigation and bridewealth practices. Chapter Six portrays the respondents’ varied meanings and hopes for marriage as well as the issues they perceive are affecting their own marital lives and those in their surrounding cultural milieu.

Finally, chapter Seven concisely describes the resources available to assist couples during difficulties and crises. It then discusses the possibilities and practicalities of the development of a marriage enrichment program at Makumira University College – noting some of the cultural lessons learned and issues to be aware of in such a project.
CHAPTER TWO – LITERATURE REVIEW

Scholarly studies of societies may be compared to aerial photographs which provide only broad outlines: they locate a church within the general layout of the town, but they cannot show us what a church is really like. A work of literature, on the other hand, presents something like a personal or family portrait, etched sharply, in which we see individuals and situations for what they really are. It is true, of course that most modern African writers respond quite actively to the stresses of the old and new ways that social scientists have constantly emphasized, but the life studies which they provide open wider insights than are possible when a whole society is herded together. (Okpewho, 1987, p.337)

This chapter begins by providing an “aerial photograph” of Sub-Saharan African marriage and family life. The first view is from a very high altitude and offers a general perspective of what is known about African families from an anthropological and sociological perspective: the variety of marital forms, and the alleged “conjugalization” or nuclearization of the African family. From the second elevation, research on Tanzania’s ethnic groups and marital relationships is presented. The perspective provided here is largely from Tanzanian women’s experience of inequality, oppression, and increasing workload. The literature describes a blurred picture of growing tension and antagonism between genders.

The third view is more of a panoramic ecological vision. The significance and influence of African traditional religion, fertility issues, education, structural adjustment economic policies and AIDS on couples and the family is related and assessed. Finally, research of the Church in Africa is presented on African Christian marriages. The unique view from this perch examines why fewer and fewer couples are being married in the church.

In the review of the literature, rarely if ever are portraits of couples in conversation presented. This is equally true of Christian couples. We know very little about couples’ experience of marriage, their inner dynamics, struggles, tensions, hopes and dreams in their
marital relationships. It is precisely in this “phenomenological” realm where this research project intends to fill the void and increase our understanding of specifically Sub-Saharan African Christian couples.

General Anthropological Insights Mingled with Sociological Ones

Since the beginning of the colonial enterprise, anthropological studies of African marriage and family life have undergone a change in the analysis of themes (Burnham, 1987). In the early colonial period, most of the early studies were descriptive works on kinship and family networks based on the reports of missionaries, explorers and anthropologists (Moore, 1994; Steyn & Viljoen, 1996). Moore (1994) argues that these reports and descriptions served the colonial administration in the “civilizing” of the “backward” Africans. Later, from 1920-1960, the British school dominated African research, focusing on the formal kinship structure: lines of descent, affinity (the social relationships generated by marriage), and residence (which family the spouse lives with) (Guyer, 1981). With the introduction of a cash economy, colonial taxation and emergence of migratory labor, anthropologists and social scientists (Guyer, 1981; Omari, 1990) studied both urban and village life and noticed a variety of changes in the “household.” These include changes in membership (prompted by men’s high mobility); changes in the relationships (in lineage and inheritance) and roles between older and younger men; changes in men and women’s roles (with many men working far away from home), changes in the control of household sources (with women making more decisions); and changes in marriage patterns – with a more “conjugal” family structure emerging in cities among the urban elite. In the last twenty-five years, feminist Africanist scholars (Obbo, 1980; Reiter, 1975) observed that most researchers were male and
had little access to women’s experience. Feminist researchers saw the asymmetry in gender relations and focused on awakening and eliciting women’s experience (especially in the area of reproduction and workload stresses (Bantje, 1995) and in assisting women and their children to secure their maximum rights (Guyer, 1981; Moore, 1994, Obbo, 1980).

The focus of the earlier studies was largely upon the framework or skeletal structure of the household (lineage, membership, economics). They, in many ways, provided the illusion that family life is more standarized than it really is. Researchers’ classifications provided little place for variations or exceptions or couple’s descriptions of the experience of people living together (Lewis, 1994). Feminist research, on the other hand, began to examine the interior of the skeletal structure chiefly from the women’s experience, focusing on inequities in gender relationships and on the power element (Forster, 1995). What remains largely unexplored is the internal region – the blood, tissues and organs – and texture of both women and men’s married experience (the meaning of their marital relationship, their hope and dreams, the issues and conflicts they face). The discussion that follows in this chapter will take us on a safari through the marital “skeleton” and onto what is known about men’s and women’s experience of marriage.

The introduction to Radcliffe-Brown and Forde’s (1950) classic study, *African Systems of Kinship and Marriage*, is still regarded by scholars (Hastings, 1973; Moore, 1994; Parkin & Nyamwaya, 1987) as providing a cogent aerial perspective of African marriage customs. Although Radcliffe-Brown (the author of the introduction) was not an Africanist anthropologist, his great gift was in the organization of massive amounts of other ethnographers’ evidence into an intelligible order. Structural-functionalism was the reigning paradigm which assumed that all parts of the social and cultural features of a society had
logical reasons for existing and were part of an interdependent system that could be
discovered (Moore, 1994). Though there is immense diversity in the particular expressions
of marriage through the great variety of African cultures, Radcliffe-Brown argues that there
are several commonalities. First, marriage is perceived not as a union of two individuals (as
in contemporary American and European traditions), but as an alliance between two bodies
of kin (including deceased ancestors). Second, the making of a "marriage payment", most
usually from the husband and his kin to the wife's kin (and sometimes a "counter-payment"
of the wife's kin to the husband's family) helps to establish the "legality" of the union. If the
series of recognized presentations or gift exchanges have not occurred, the marriage is most
likely considered illegitimate. Radcliffe-Brown understands these payments as setting up
and solidifying mutually recognized obligations and responsibilities for both the husband and
wife (as well as their respective families). Third, one of the most important stages in the
marital relationship is the birth of the first child. It is through this birth that both the husband
and wife as well as the two families are united - by having common descendents – and the
lineage or chain of life is continued. All three components, in varying degrees, are still
considered to be important aspects of being married.

There are a variety of traditional marital forms in East Africa. Bahemuka (1997)
describes four types of marital unions in East African traditional society: monogamy,
polygamy, ghost marriages, and child marriages. These types of unions were developed in
order to insure that each marriage produced children and the lineage and “chain of life” was
continued. Monogamy was and remains the most practiced form of marriage. It predates
colonialism but was also affirmed by colonialists and early Christian missionaries. The
African Christian mainline church, says the C.K. Omari (1990) (Lutheran pastor,
anthropologist and sociologist) has always only accepted monogamous marriages. *Polygamy* has traditionally been the desired form of marriage by men and has been a sign of social prestige and wealth. However, only wealthy men could historically afford the bridewealth payments for more than one wife and cost of maintaining numerous households (Bahemuka, 1997). *Ghost marriages* were arranged by parents of a son who died before getting married. In these cases, the parents arranged for the son to be married “in absentia” to a woman by providing a close male relative to act as a genitor. The family took care of the woman and children and rested assured that the family name was preserved and the chain of life was continued. An elderly couple who had a son in their old age sometimes arranged *child marriages*. Here, the father would choose a girl for his son and make marital arrangements with the girl’s family. If the brideprice negotiations went well, one of the father’s male relatives was chosen as genitor until the father’s son came of age to act as husband. This “child marriage” was developed to ensure that before the father died, his son would have children that remembered him (Bahemuka, 1997).

A form of union which Bahemuka neglects to mention is the *levirate marriage* (Mungure, 2000). In these cases, when a husband died, the widow was “inherited” or taken by her brother-in-law to be his wife. On the one hand, she and her children were taken care of socially, economically and spiritually. On the other hand, however, she often had no freedom in the choosing of her husband. As one widow commented to a Makumira pastor (Mungure, 2000), “how can I share a bed with a man whom I do not love. Is it really sexual intercourse or punishment” (p. 149). The early Christian missionaries forbade this practice as sinful on the grounds that the widow was having unlawful sexual relations with a man who was not actually her husband, but her brother-in-law. Mungure, however, raises the question:
because widows receive little or no support (from society, church and extended family) cannot the reason for the levirate marriage tradition be revisited by the church so that adequate care may be given them?

Other marital forms were arranged marriages by parents and elopements. Malle (1992) describes such arranged marriages as "forced" ones where a man was given a wife (in childhood or adulthood) by his parents without his or her choice. This practice in much of Tanzania has begun to disappear, though it is prevalent among the Maasai and Iraqw. Elopements took place when a couple determined to marry despite the opposition of their parents, elders and extended family. Poorer individuals also usually eloped if they were unable to provide the bridewealth payments (Hastings, 1973). In recent church studies (Hastings, 1973; Kisembo et al., 1977) elopements and a recent phenomenon, "trial marriages" (co-habitation to see if the couple is compatible) are becoming more prevalent in African society.

As described above, monogamy, polygamy, ghost, child, levirate, arranged and elopement marriages were all part of traditional East African society before the colonial era. Bahemuka (1997) observes that social changes have been uneven and affected individuals, rural communities and urban communities differently. Individuals are in a period, says Africanist scholar Mbiti (1969), where they are paradoxically involved in the change but alienated from it. The African individual is in a precarious place where he/she, becomes an alien both to traditional life and to the new life brought about by modern change. He is poised between two positions: the traditional solidarity which supplied him with land, customs, ethics, rites of passage, customary law, religious participation and a historical depth; and a modern way of life which for him has not yet acquired any solidarity. The change at best offers him a hope for the future, an aspiration and an expectation. The traditional life is being brushed into the past, and the further back it recedes the more golden it looks (Mbiti, 1969, p. 214).
Such unrest, claim these authors, can be seen in the change in values and traditional customs of bridewealth and role of the extended family in the marriage, the purpose of marriage (procreation vs. companionship), the preparation for marriage (with the loss of preparatory instruction for marriage in the eradication of initiation rites) and an individualism which trumps the solidarity of traditional life.

Little has been previously documented about the internal dynamics or the “texture” of the marital relationship in Sub-Saharan Africa – whether or the degree to which “romantic love” is beginning to replace arranged marriage; the nature of emotional intimacy, the desires and expectations and the quality of marital relationship. Indeed, such questions may reflect a prejudice of our own time in the fairly recent development in the notion of “conjugal” marriage. William Goode was among the first to observe such worldwide changes in his book, *World Revolution in Family Patterns* (1964). In his macro-sociological study of governmental data of some fifty European, American, Asian and sub-Saharan cultures, he identified a trend away from the extended family network. In fact, he believed that the forces of modernization (industrialization, urbanization, increased mobility) were producing smaller nuclear households (parents – child unit) marked by several characteristics: 1) less control by extended family; 2) mate selection based upon choice and the development of romantic love as a criterion for mate selection; 3) the disappearance of economic exchanges (for example, bridewealth or dowry) between families; 4) a more cooperative, egalitarian, but emotionally intense spousal relationship; 5) more education of both sexes and more women entering the wage economy (Browning, 2003; Goode, 1964; Starbuck, 2001). Goode maintained that these changes in family structure were being imported all over the world and in doing so
were laying the groundwork for the industrialization of society. There has been a tendency among social scientists, argues Lasche (1975), Burnham (1987) and Potash (1995) to regard modernization as a relentless, homogenizing force affecting marital relations world wide in much the same way everywhere. In fact, these researchers believe that Goode’s thesis concerning the nuclear family has had such a powerful influence that it has obscured the distinctive qualities of African marital relations and exercised an undeserved and ethnocentric effect on many researcher’s conclusions. Potash (1995) argues that the “modernization” assumption in non-governmental organizations (NGO’s) - that husband and wives should share decision-making, pool their incomes and have their first loyalty to each other rather than the extended family – has made women more vulnerable and contributed to marital conflict.

I find that most research, in subtle ways, compares African relationships to the conjugal western model, noting the high degree of sexual segregation and making projections/contrasts concerning western emotional relationship ideals such as display of affection, emotionality, open communication, complementarity, and equality of partnership. For example, in their fertility study, Caldwell and Caldwell (1990a) state that there is little communication between spouses in Sub-Saharan Africa, with sparse documentation on how they arrived at that conclusion. Marshall (1970) argues that women and men in Africa live in very different worlds that rarely intersect. Solivetti (1994), studying the Hausa in northern Nigeria, believes that "marital coolness" is a crucial ideal that helps to reduce tension between the various families. He writes:

First, attitudes towards the sexual and affective involvement of young people are negative. The idea of falling in love, as an individual experience, beyond (or, even worse, against) one's family’s will is associated with images of danger and antisocial
selfishness...In short, although a public contract and domestic fidelity and cooperation bind husband and wife, their life together is structured by a rule of separation. Their relationship is characterized by complementariness and cooperation rather than togetherness. Indeed, local people characterize the behavior of European couples they have seen as ridiculous and 'unnatural': 'they were always together!' (Solivetti, p. 260).

Radcliffe-Brown (1950), in the following statement, also remarks that there is little romance in the marital relationship, but alludes to other qualities which help to build-up and sustain the marriage.

The African does not think of marriage as a union based on romantic love although beauty as well as character and health are sought in the choice of a wife. The strong affection that normally exists after some years of successful marriage is the product of the marriage itself conceived as a process, resulting from living together and co-operating in many activities and particularly in the rearing of children. (Radcliffe-Brown, p. 46)

Kenyan sociologists Kayongo-Male and Onyango (1984) note that it is the public display of affection (holding hands and kissing) which is culturally frowned upon. Culturally appropriate forms of affection are expressed in other subtle ways through showing respect and caring. Though companionship is a recent quality to African marriages, it takes a different form than the open demonstration of romantic feelings. For example, in some groups it is believed that a wife who is mistreated by her husband is thin and tired-looking, but one who is well taken care of is physically ample.

While the above research points to a certain reservedness and distance in the public expression of affection and intimacy between husband and wife, some researchers (Lewinson, 2000; Mbughuni, 1991; Omari, 1990) observe a quality of love, respect and caring which is most likely to be expressed privately within the household. Whether the African family is moving toward the conjugal model of the West, as put forth by Goode, still remains unclear. Other researchers of Tanzanian culture hold different views depending on
the aspect of marriage life they are examining. Omari (1990) sees emerging conjugal family structures in urban areas, particularly among the educational elite and the emerging business class. Yet also, in this group, members find it difficult to untie themselves from the extended family structure and the many expectations which the larger clan has of them. Omari believes that the extended family has not been killed but is weakening among the urban elite.

Creighton (2000), in contrast, argues that the kinship relations of urban residents (of all classes) is still very prominent. Rural family members often use their urban relatives to help them with emotional, material, and social support when they migrate to the cities. From his perspective, the bonds of kinship have not been undermined but have been changed in nature and form. However, Lewinson (2000) in her study of the weddings of urban professionals of Dar es Salaam notes a number of fundamental shifts among couples. First, whereas in the rural traditional marriage men and women sought the influence and advice of parents and elders in the marriage process, the urban educated (and especially Christians) freely chose their own spouses with little if no parental input. Second, whereas clan reproduction and the alliance of two families was at the heart of traditional marriages, love, emotional security and companionship are holding central place in young urban couples’ discourse. Third, whereas many children were indicators of a successful marriage, emphasis is now upon the interpersonal relationship of the husband and wife and their ability to work as partners. Interestingly, professional women still have preference for a large family, but acknowledge with their husbands, that the present day high costs (school fees, medical expenses etc.) is prohibitive to traditional larger family size.

Thus far, evidence in the literature points to changes in marital and family relationships especially within urban areas. Other researchers (Boserup, 1979,1989; Tripp, 1989, 1997)
have observed changes in marital roles and family structure as a result of having to adjust to
the economic crises of 1980’s and 1990’s (with Tanzania’s adoption of the World Bank and
IMF’s Structural Adjustment Policies and ensuing currency devaluation, loss of jobs, and
65% drop in value of real wages). More will be said of this later.

**Family Life in Rural Settings – Women’s Position and Workload**

Other anthropological studies in Tanzania’s rural areas have yielded different
perspectives. In 1995, seventy percent of Tanzania’s population resided in rural areas
(Bryceson, 1995). Here, Foster’s (1995) survey of the ethnographic literature on kinship
from 1935-1985 in Tanzania is invaluable. He notes that with over 130 ethnicities on the
mainland, Tanzania is highly complex ethnographically. A majority of Tanzanians are
Bantu-speaking; but Cushitic, Nilotic (Maasai pastoralists) and Khoisan and Swahili speakers
are represented as well. Forster (1995) asserts that despite the effects and interactions of
western culture (colonialism, the missionary enterprise, modernity) and the government of
Tanzania’s national integration or “ujamaa” policies (during the leadership of Julius Nyerere)
cultural customs have been more resilient than expected: bridewealth continues to be given
from the husband and his kin to the wife’s kin; the son’s father and kin assume responsibility
for providing bridewealth; a married couple’s identity is still found in the organic unity of the
clan; and reproduction and the added value of a wife as a laborer are seen as the main goals
and purposes of marriage from the male perspective.

A majority of the cultures on the mainland of Tanzania are reported to be of patrilineal
descent (based on kinship with the father or descent through the male line), though there is
considerable variation in the way different tribal groups operate. Most of the anthropological
literature describes the oppression of women by men inherent in the patrilineal system (Foster, 1995). Foster views the present day marital relationship as an antagonistic one with deep historical roots.

Several examples of those inequalities and inherent antagonisms, as seen by anthropologists, are in order. Schneider (1970) describes the Nyakyusa tribe where men’s and women’s relationships operate upon the “premise of inequality.” Men are largely in control of the wealth which in the past was seen in terms of the number of cattle owned. Women are expected to obey the men of the family without question and do not play any part in the public political life. Among the Kwere, Vuorela (1987) describes a familial system where a women’s adult identity depends upon her ability to reproduce. She is responsible for the upbringing of the children, but it is the man to whom the children belong. Winans (1962) states that among the Shambala, women have income from subsistence crops but do not have legal claims to the main cash fields. The man has the right to take the woman’s fields and use them for cash crops. Beidelman (1971) portrays the matrilineal Kaguru household as peculiar mixture of antagonism and interdependence between men and women. Women are perceived as sources of disorder, which justifies male’s control over women. Girls are expected to marry soon after puberty and their economic activities are under the male governance. Kaguru men, however, are permitted the same non-accountable behaviors of traveling, drinking and multiple sexual partners even after marriage.

Themes of patriarchy and oppression of women are prevalent in the anthropological literature (Oduyoye, 1995; Oduyoye and Kanyoro, 1992). Forster (1995), interestingly, calls for a “balanced” reading of the ethnographic literature given the complexities of male female relationships. Citing the works of two anthropologists, Hurskainen (1984) and von Mitzlaff
(1988), studying the Parakuyo Maasai of Tanzania, Hurskianen (a Finnish male anthropologist) perceived this tribe as thoroughly male dominated and women’s role as entirely restricted to the cattle kraal, domestic duties and reproduction. Von Mitzlaff (a German, female anthropologist), on the other hand, saw Maasai women as having much more room in which to maneuver. She saw Maasai men as visitors to the women’s world which was largely separate from that of men. Women had their own business enterprises and additional male lovers on the side. As a group, the women were mindful of hiding such economic and romantic affairs from their husbands. Thus within a highly patriarchal Maasai culture, women had considerable freedom. Complexities abound in this traditional culture and researchers must be vigilant as to how their perspectives and expectations affect the information provided by informants and how it is recorded. For my part, I question if Maasai women’s “maneuverability” to have and to hide business and romantic relationships through artifice or subversion is the best means of regularizing gender relationships and emancipating women in the long term. Nevertheless, I admire women’s abilities to cope and to “maneuver” in difficult situations. We can see such artful subterfuge especially in the words of one older Christian woman in the life histories of Ngaiza and Koda (1991):

My solution was to be clever [mjanja], to fool the man. I didn’t mean that they should really be obsequious towards men, only that they should pretend to be so, or to please the man until he calmed down. Men are so unintelligent, all it takes is a few nice words, some apparently-compliant behavior, for them to be won over. We have to manipulate their egos in order to rule them, and rule them we do. (p. 144)

Women, here, are not simply pawns in the marriage relationship, but employ their own strategies to achieve their desires and wants.

Despite the complexities, the ethnographic literature documents the overall cultural view that marriage (and motherhood) remain the only acceptable role for women and that
marriage largely serves male goals (Bryceson, 1995; Foster, 1995; Oduyoye, 1995). Women are molded to conform and to depend upon their male providers through the various phases of their lives: formal and informal education, preparation for marriage, brideprice, motherhood, production (control of expenditures and the division of labor) and widowhood (Cambell, 1995; Foster, 1995; Ngaiza & Koda, 1991). Ngaiza and Koda’s (1991) recordings of Tanzanian women’s life histories provocatively illustrate how many of their respondents were born into particularly onerous family relations,

in which power was concentrated in the hands of the father, followed by other male members of the household. This team could use their power either to make or unmake the lives of the rest of the members of the household who were either daughters, wives, and even mothers and workers. Where these groups lived, and what they did for their future was basically determined by the controllers of the means of production, the men, both within and outside the household. The men decided who went to school, when and how long, and what they did after that, including who married whom and when. The role of of the actresses in their own life drama or that of their daughters, was originally of a supporter or complier. (p. 221).

Gender inequality discloses itself in many ways and its study needs a variety of approaches. It is estimated that women work about 14 hours a day and men about 8 hours (Omari & Mbilinyo, 2000). Malle (1992), a Tanzanian Lutheran theologian, asserts that women’s labor in agriculture and on the domestic front is more like 15-17 hours a day all year round. They rise up early before sunrise to start a fire and prepare breakfast, sending children to school, taking care of animals, fetching water and firewood, hoe and weed the farm, and prepare dinner. Swantz (1985) observed the tight schedule of the women of the Haya culture (Bukoba, northwest corner of Tanzania) who worked from morning to evening all days of the year except Sundays (if they were Christians), holidays and when there were funerals in the community. These women were responsible for much of the farm
management and strained to provide every family member (in-laws, other relatives and their own children) with the necessities of life. Swantz (1985), observing the male-female relations states:

The pressure is made greater by the demands of the husband or father who expects constant readiness on the part of women to fulfil his demands and needs. One example of this is the fact that, in accordance with the tradition, a wife has to prepare food for her husband for each meal whether he comes home or not, and she is not supposed to eat from that food until the husband comes, whether it takes the whole day or even two. If she has children for whom to cook she does that separately from the husband's food and she is then likely to eat from the children's food what is left over. There are households in which this is no longer followed, but such demands of double work in food preparation are still common. The right to demand the services of a wife at his will, and the duty to punish her physically, even by severe beating, is approved as belonging to the husband's authoritative role as head of the household. (p. 59)

Women were not only subject to their husbands, in traditional and today's rural society, but to his extended family. In addition to taking care of the family farm and attending to their children, they often tended to the many demands of the in-laws. The key marital relationships were intergenerational, not conjugal. A man's responsibility for assisting his family (mother, father, brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles) outweigh the claims of his wife (Potash, 1995). Women were expected to work for the mother-in-laws (fetching water and firewood, cooking for her family) and to run errands and perform services for her husband's brothers. The sisters of her husband also provided her with supervision and advice as to how to adequately take care of their brother. If she didn't perform well, major conflict could arise between the wife and the in-laws (Kayongo-Male & Onyango, 1984; Malle, 1992).

With the introduction of cash crops (coffee, cotton, tea) and a cash economy, women's workload increased further. A variety of authors (Hodgson, 1999a; Howard & Miller, 1997; Swantz, 1985) argue that colonization had the effect of reinforcing and intensifying male's
traditional authority. Hodgson (1999b) contends that women's economic autonomy and responsibility for trading for food and household supplies (among the Maasai) was supplanted by cash transactions which were controlled by men. Whereas, in pre-colonial society, men's and women's interactions were complementary and interdependent, through the influence of the colonial administration, the traditional male domain of the public and political became more antagonistic to the female domains of the private and domestic. Maasai women's role in the community, from Hodgson's perspective, became increasingly more isolated and subject to the authority of male elders. Whether women's position in traditional society was better than it is presently, cannot addressed here. I, however, agree with Swantz (1985) that: "Women have continued to uphold the cultural values that were part of pre-colonial society and which often strengthened during the colonial period. The women's position, however, has been weakened by the way cultural forces have been turned against them. Oppression has been give a cultural dress" (p. 4).

Men's migration in pursuit of work and cash to urban areas has had a number of ill effects (male absenteeism, spousal separation, increased infidelity, inadequate financial support for family) and has also increased the responsibilities and workload of women. The migration of men, beginning in the 1900-1920's and increasing in the 1980's (Setel, 1999) has been a factor in helping women to gain more economic independence, but has been a source of tension within the family (Hollos & Larsen, 1997). By virtue of men's absence, women have become the de facto heads of households and have had to manage its affairs (McCaulley, 1992; Omari & Mbilinyi, 2000). Traditionally, the wife was dependent upon her husband's extended family for direction and support when he was away. Money sent home to the wife from the husband was expected to shared with his parents and siblings. It was believed that
the husband should first assist the extended family before he considered the needs of his wife and children. Wives who kept possession to the husband’s assistance were often accused of selfishness or lack of respect and were verbally reproached by the rest of the family (Kayongo-Male & Onyango, 1984). Such a rebuke was considered legitimate because women, according to long-standing rural practices, were not in control of money and were not the main decision makers in the household (Koda, 1995). It is said that African men not only controlled the income, assets and inheritance but did not share with their wives information on how much their salary is (Koda, 1995).

Researchers note that marital conflicts and tensions are taking place in rural areas as a result of women’s situation. Potash (1995) states, that the concentration of cash in the hands of men sometimes leaves women without adequate resources to acquire goods for the family. Such dependence on cash remittance from men coupled with an ever increasing workload (with children workers going to school) have increased tensions over resources. In fact, according to Koda (1995) and Potash (1995), women are becoming increasingly resentful and refusing to work on their husband’s farms. Koda (1995) sees the division of labor shifting with men and women sharing the farm work. On the other hand, she observes in Tanzania an increase of marital conflicts being presented to the community based courts.

In recent years, the major research theme coming from rural areas is the power that men (and the extended family) hold over women. As mentioned above, researchers are observing more marital tension and conflicts over work and resources. This power extends not only over production but over reproduction as well. Although this power is still strong, it appears to be on the wane. The next section discusses some of the more recent research concerning changes in gender roles, nuptiality patterns, reproductive behaviors, and resulting marital
strains in relationship to and as a consequence of greater ecological changes in Tanzania culture: economic change, the education of women and the diminishing of African traditional religion.


The ancestors are angry. For those who believe in the power of ancestors, the proof of their anger is all around us. For those who do not believe in ancestors the proof of their anger is given another name... Things are not working in Africa. From Dakar to Dar es Salaam, from Marakesh to Maputo, institutions are decaying, structures are rusting away. It is as if the ancestors had pronounced a curse of cultural sabotage. (Mazui, 1986, p. 87)

Marriage is one of the most powerful means of maintaining cohesion in Gikuyu society and of enforcing that conformity to kinship system and to the tribal organization without which social life is impossible. (Kenyatta, 1938, p. 164)

The so-called primitive races are not childish organisms and easily manageable, as some believe. Not only does the spirit of past generations live within them, but also extinct cultures dream within their souls. Would, therefore, that, in addition to bringing in the disintegrating influences of our civilization, the colonial powers might come soon, and with increasing emphasis, with constructive and considerate development programs so that the indestructible life forces do not flare up unexpectedly like flames from a ruined structure, but that they be engaged creatively and effectively in indigenous forms for service to the total community. (Gutmann, 1914, p. 14)

**African Traditional Religion/Philosophy’s Power**

As respected German anthropologist and missionary Bruno Gutmann (cited above) said concerning the Chagga ethnic group he ministered to: “Not only does the spirit of past generations live within them, but also extinct cultures dream within their souls.” Gutmann was one of few missionaries who appreciated, studied and took seriously the African traditional religious worldview and saw how it abided and pervaded the imaginative universe (amidst the social change of his day) within the community and within relationships between
men and women. Other contemporary scholars in the fields of fertility studies, gender relations, and AIDS (Bryceson, 1995; Caldwell, 1980; Koda, 1995; Malle, 1992; Setel, 1999; Stambach, 2000) also allude to African religion, its presence beneath the surface, its hold on the corpus of beliefs and practices on Africans, and its capacity to shed light on many academic issues. At the same time, they see women contesting the burdensome and repressive practices and values of such traditions which have kept women under men’s control.

John Mbiti and Laurenti Magesa are spoken of as the preeminent scholars regarding African religion and philosophy. In Tanzania, time and time again, I was referred to Mbiti’s (1969, 1973) works (African Religion and Philosophy and Love and Marriage in Africa) and Magesa’s (1997) book (African Religion – The Moral Traditions of the Abundant Life) by many people (seminary students, professors, theses) related to Makumira University. Mbiti and Magesa essentially argue that there are many traditional religions in Africa, but one underlying philosophy which: 1) embraces all of life and works for its continuation and preservation; 2) is communal and hierarchical; and 3) respects and ensures that the relationship between the visible (living) and invisible (ancestors) world remains intact by adhering to various rites. From a traditional religious perspective, marriage is of utmost importance and is the focus of existence. Mbiti (1969) writes:

It is the point where all members of a given community meet: the departed, the living, and those yet to be born. All the dimensions of time meet here, and the whole drama of history is repeated, renewed and revitalized. Marriage is a drama in which everyone becomes an actor or actress and not just a spectator. Therefore, marriage is a duty, a requirement for corporate society, and rhythm in which everyone must participate. Otherwise, he who does not participate in it is a curse to the community, he is a rebel and a law-breaker, he is not only abnormal but ‘under-human.’ Failure to get married under normal circumstances means the person concerned has rejected society and society has rejected him. (p. 130)
Once the process of marriage begins (the successful negotiation between two families, the giving of bridewealth) procreation is the most important aim in African religion. It is a woman and man’s duty to the clan to give birth in order to ensure that the chain of humanity is perpetuated. Children are proof of the preservation and the transmission of the life-force. Through procreation the “living dead” or the ancestors are remembered. Offspring, in turn, are obligated to perform the various duties, libations and rituals to preserve the memory of the dead. The moral duty is the “maximization” of life, for a marriage “without children – who are the transmission and preservation of the force of life – marriage has no meaning” (Magesa, 1997, p.119). In fact, according to Magesa (1997):

But what truly completes the humanization of a person in this world is the mystical union with the ancestors, which is achieved only through the generation of children. The moral requirement to transmit life is achieved, and the ethical need to preserve life is attained through the actual re-presentation (or making present) the ancestors through naming. Any “marriage” that does not result in all of these things – social unity and ancestral communion – is seriously flawed. In fact, as far as African religion is concerned, it is no marriage. (p. 121)

Again and again, Africanist scholars echo words like the above. For example, Benezet Bujo (1998), argues: “In plain language: To be a man means to be a father, and to be a woman means to be a mother. Man and woman become marriage partners properly only after the birth of their first child...In the African context, to die without a child is to have perished for good; at the same time, damage has been inflicted upon the lineage” (p. 95).

Many of the norms and expectations of appropriate female and male behavior are found in the traditional marriage religious customs of the African community (Bryceson, 1995). It is here where feminist scholars voice their objections and provide insights into how these profound beliefs of the African imaginative universe continue to pervade men’s and women’s
relations. Although African traditional religious scholarship seeks to rejuvenate and reclaim the riches of sub-Saharan traditions, it fails, according to Malle (1992) to disclose the oppression and domination of women by men. Furthermore, it is argued (Bryceson, 1995; Oduyoye, 1995; Malle, 1992; Mungure, 2000; Swantz, 1985) that marriage, in the African tradition, is primarily and essentially an institution for procreation. Fertility is the foundation that rules male-female relations. Women are “looked upon as a ‘basket of eggs’, whose role is to hatch children every year” (Omari, 1995, p 261). Motherhood, highly valued by both men and women, is the “channel by which men reproduce themselves and continue the family name and is the source by which women actualize their psycho-religious need to be the source of life” (Oduyoye, 1995, p.142). A woman’s status, as a wife, is largely dependent upon giving birth. Numerous sayings and proverbs attest to the importance of having children. In Chad, one proverb reads: “A woman without children is like tree without leaves.” Among the Haya of Tanzania, a woman’s status grows in proportion to the number of children she has. Kamuzora (1987) states that a Hayan woman may even be recognized and consulted by male elders when she has had many children. Among the Meru (in the near vicinity of Makumira University) there is the proverb, “You rather remain poor than lacking children” (Mungure, 2000). Among the Chagga of the Mt. Kilimanjaro region, it is said that a wife is doing what is divinely prescribed when: “She cooperates with her husband, the ancestors, even God, in creating a child.” (Raum, 1973).

Demography and Fertility Studies

The field of demography and fertility studies has only within the last fifteen years linked high fertility with the traditional religious beliefs concerning the concepts of lineage and
ancestry. The Caldwells (1990b), well-known Australian demographers, write concerning the cultural forces (the cult of the ancestors) that sustain high fertility:

It is important to recognize that the African worldview and social structure are part of a seamless whole. The religious belief in the supreme importance of ancestral spirits and in overriding need for descendants to ensure the survival of the lineage is continuous with the social structure: the centrality of the lineage and the concept of it as an almost eternal institution, for which those now living serve as temporary caretakers. The belief in the power of the dead ancestors is continuous with the awe of living ancestors and who will soon pass over through death and with the belief that both can effectively curse ungrateful descendants to whom they have granted the boon of life. (p. 119)

That is to say, the spiritual world of the ancestors is felt in daily life among the living. It is a solemn duty to contribute to the lineage, to give honor to those who have died by remembering them and having children. That is why childless women are considered an offense to the honor and integrity of (usually) the paternal family. Relatives of the husband of a childless wife often urge him to quickly divorce her and to send her back to her family (Bryceson, 1995; Gwako, 1997; Oduyoye, 1995; Sonko, 1994; Gwako, 1997).

Sub-Saharan population studies and census reports illustrate the region’s and women’s difficult predicament. The report of the ninth session of the Conference of African Planners, Statisticians and Population and Information Specialists (United Nations, 1996) note that “unabated population growth” with only slight economic performance and increased external debt has been the recent outgrowth for a majority of African nations. At the turn of the 20th century, the region’s population was 118 million; by mid 1999 the continent’s population had reached 778.4 million. In the year 2000, Africa had the highest population growth rate in the world at 2.7% (United Nations, State of the Environment, 2001). In Tanzania, from the period of 1967 to 2002, the population has nearly tripled from 12,313,469 persons to 34,569,232, averaging a 2.9% annual increase from the last census in 1988 to the most recent
census (2002, Population and Housing Census – Tanzania). The United Nations has been at work throughout the 1990’s, in collaboration with African governments to reduce population growth rates, fertility rates, maternal and infant mortality and increase contraceptive prevalence (UNFPA, 1999).

Women, however, are presently beginning to redefine traditional notions of fertility and what it is to be a woman. A variety of researchers (Chege, 1995; Doddo, 1998; Gwako, 1997) in Kenya have found that women with the greater number of years of education use family planning methods and have a lower number of children. These researchers suggest that older cultural traditions and institutions which support high fertility may be disappearing. Chege (1995) cites the decreased birthrate of 8.1 (in 1979) children per women to 6.7 in the 1989 demographic health surveys in Kenya. Such change is said to be taking place in urban areas where the traditional understanding of corporate descent seems to be fading in importance (Campbell, Mwami, & Ntukula, 1995). Kenya’s most recent census in 1998 (KDHS) presented a fertility rate of 4.7 children per woman. UNICEF (1999) reports attribute this rapid decline to a higher level of economic development and higher levels of educational attainment for girls at primary and secondary levels of education (in comparison to Tanzania and Uganda).

Changes in women’s reproduction are observed to be taking place in Tanzania as well. The fertility rate for women aged 15-49, was 6.9, 6.5, 6.3 and 5.6 respectively in the national censi that took place in 1978, 1988, the 1991/92 DHS (Household Demographic Survey) and 1994 KAPS (Knowledge, Attitudes and Practice Survey) (Hollos & Larsen, 1997). The World Bank’s (2002) fertility estimate for 2001 and 2002 is 5.2 and 5.0. The recently published Household Budget Survey 2000/2001 (2002) indicated that from 1991/1992 to
2000/2002 the household size declined from 5.9 to 5.1 in rural areas and from 4.8 to 4.3 in Dar es Salaam, suggesting declines in fertility has occurred.

**Education of Women and Transformations in Fertility and Gender Relations**

The education of women is seen as a primary factor in the reduction of fertility rates and a change in women's status. Omari (1989) found that women with an education (at least at the level of secondary school) living in the urban areas of Tanzania tended to have smaller number of children than the national average (6.5) at the time. In a study at Dar es Salaam, Mgaza and Banje (1980) found that educated women in the higher income groups had lower birthrates. It is well-documented in most regions of the world that education not only has a direct effect on fertility through skills, knowledge and behaviors learned through schooling but also indirectly by enhancing women's autonomy and control over childbearing decisions, delaying age of marriage, increased use of contraceptives and control over economic resources (Caldwell, 1980, Cleland and van Ginneken, 1982; Vavrus, 2000).

Various studies in the Kilimanjaro region (Moshi) illustrate some of the effects that women's education is having on gender relations. Stambach (2000) in her study of female secondary students sees the beginnings of a new consciousness emerging in the modern Tanzania woman. Such a woman asserts: "I don't need any man to buy dresses for me. Education is my husband" (p. 90). She sees education as a means of liberation. She pursues an independent income and aspires to have her own land and home. She wants to have children but avoid going through the traditional marriage process. She wants to have heirs who will inherit from her (maternal) line. Other educated women search for men who equal or exceed their schooling level. They work within the patrilineal framework in order to achieve their goal of independence. One woman remarks:
George [her husband] is a good person to marry because he'll be away most of the time. I'll get to know my sisters and brothers-in-law well and they can help take care of my children. That's the way it works, you know; they'll have to do that. They'll be the caretakers of my husband's kids. Then I'll have my freedom (Stambach, 2000, p. 93).

By no means are these new Tanzanian women the majority. However, Stambach says that many young women in secondary school were articulating the desire to not be like their mothers, but to leave their village, continue their schooling, establish their economic independence and have children. Many of these female students said that they were planning to have one or two children without marrying because “the benefits of having children without marrying would outweigh the costs of having a husband” (Stambach, 2000, p. 97). Wife-beating and men’s control of women’s salaries were reasons given for avoiding marriage.

Stambach sees two forms of marriages emerging in the Kilimanjaro region. One, the traditional model, defines women according to the patriline and follows the local rituals. The more modern model characterizes women in terms of their education, their desire to be self-reliant and such a marriage is usually formalized in a Christian (often Lutheran) church. Such a wedding usually blends the traditional (presentations of offerings such as banana beer or Fanta, sometimes bridewealth negotiations) with elements of the pageantry of “Christian” weddings (white wedding dress, tuxedos, rings, large receptions). Women speak in terms of both the romance of a marriage based upon mutual attraction and an equal partnership where both would be employed and share in the duties of child-rearing. One of Stambach’s informants aptly describes the wedding and marriage she would have:

What I want is a man to love me, to bring me flowers, not this nonsense of beer. And he should bring it to me directly, not going through my fathers or uncles. Then when I have agreed to get married, he should ask my father if it is okay, but this should just
be a formality. We really couldn’t care what my father or uncles would say... That is the way it really ought to be, because after all, I am educated. I’m not like the women in Dodoma [a city in central Tanzania where according to stereotyped views in Machame people are unschooled, ignorant and backward]. There, girls’ fathers accept hundreds of cattle in exchange for some boys to marry them. I’m educated and my husband will be too. He’ll know that banana beer and cattle are foolish. (Stambach, 2000, p. 68)

Men, however, seem to view educated women as a threat. Stambach quotes several young men and siblings of the women in secondary school as saying: “they’re too educated to marry,” “they know too much,” “they are too strong-willed,” “when they’re educated, they’re even harder to boss around, that’s why nobody wants to marry them” (p. 104, 105) Stambach provides interesting evidence of women’s shifting self-understanding and their challenge to men’s traditional rights.

Other studies in the Kilimanjaro region note other kinds of changes. Swantz (1985) observed in the early 1980’s that having a great number of children was not considered the asset it once was, but a burden. A growing number of husbands and extended family members were neglecting their traditional role of providing materially and caring for the children of the clan. Setel (1999), who studied the impact of AIDS on the culture of this region, sees the “disconnect” taking place between men and women and traditional responsibilities as a result of twenty-five years of men’s migration (beginning in the early 1980’s) in pursuit of work in the urban areas. The economic hardships of the early 1980’s and the diminishing amount of arable inheritable land prompted men to seek work elsewhere. Their removal from daily life, failure to provide for their households, and their reluctance to get married (traditionally or in a church wedding) has helped women to become more self-reliant, but also has been instrumental in producing an ambiance of distrust between the
genders. Setel provides fascinating a verbatim report of the complexity of the current situation:

Setel: What has changed to make conditions between men and women so bad?
Esta: Our culture hasn’t changed as such, but it has completely faded away. The youth no longer stay around, and they don’t know or practice the customs. There is no more initiation training and they don’t know the proper cultural ethics for living.
Setel: So how are things now?
Gloria: There used to be much more trust between women and men. That disease [i.e., AIDS] is bad; it shows the condition of trust between women and men. We have to get the fathers involved [in AIDS prevention], not just the girls and the women. It takes two people working together to protect against AIDS. It depends upon love and trust. In the current atmosphere there is very little trust.
Setel: How did these circumstances come about?
Gloria: These days, the condition of the economy is such that men are only concerned about their immediate families; before we were concerned with everyone. They travel so much, and we don’t stay together. It decreases our togetherness. They only come back once in a while.
Setel: So what about the women who are left here?
Rosy: The women have surprised themselves – and the men too – by developing a really keen business sense. When the women get money, it sometimes builds a wall between the sexes. The men sometimes don’t know how to adjust. (Setel, 1999, p.74-75)

A variety of themes emerge from this brief conversation with three female informants: 1) the youth have not learned how to responsibly relate to one another because of fading of the tradition culture and its initiation rites; 2) men’s work outside of the community has distanced and alienated them from their family and community; 3) AIDS has further increased the distrust between men and women; and 4) women’s exercising newly found business skills is threatening men’s authoritative position.

Throughout the literature, men are by and large silent concerning gender relations except in the realm of demography and family planning. Here researchers have only recently noticed that men exercise considerable power in the arena of family reproductive decisions.
(Bankole, 1995, Dodoo, 1993, Dodoo and van Landewijk, 1996, Dodoo, 1998). This is in itself remarkable in that a considerable amount of funding and programming for family planning has been directed toward women. This growing body of literature confirms that men, by and large, have dominant power in this area and their preferences often prevail over women's desire to use contraceptives. Men's leverage in this reproductive arena is acknowledged by both sexes in a variety of studies (Bongaarts and Bruce, 1995; Caldwell and Caldwell, 1990; Dodoo et al., 1997; Hollos & Larson, 1997). Interestingly, in a study examining data from the 1989 and 1993 Kenya Demographic and Health Survey, Dodoo (1998) found that the use of contraceptives was highest when both partners wanted to stop having children. The next highest levels in ranking order were when: husbands wanted to stop but wives wanted to space (have a child after an agreed upon interval); when wives wanted to stop and husband wanted to space; and finally, when both wanted to space. The results of this study suggest that marital consensus and communication is an important factor to the future of planning population programs. Hollos and Larsen (1997) in their fertility survey and case study of couples in the Pare district in northern Tanzania found similar results. Couples who talked with each other about fertility matters were most likely to use contraceptives.

In the future, marriage and family research should examine which factors and marital dynamics contribute to such a consensus or disagreement. Omari (1995) states that men's role in fertility decision needs to be reassessed and challenged in order to help lift the heavy toll that frequent pregnancies place on women's health and energy. At the present, no research has studied such inter-spousal communication of couples.
Societal and Economic Shocks & Women’s Growing Autonomy in the Informal Sector

Since independence in 1961, the economy of Tanzania can be characterized by a series of internal and external shocks. The first President of Tanzania, Julius Nyerere, with his TANU party (Tanganyika Africa National Union) adopted a socialist platform, with the Arusha Declaration in 1967, which nationalized all major industries. There was a great hope that a benevolent, large government presence which provided all social services (universal primary education, health and medicine for all, employment) would produce a just and equal society (Campbell & Stein, 1995). Nyerere’s Ujamaa (familyhood) policy was promoted in rural areas which required all scattered villages and homes to be moved to community areas where social services would be available and farmers could work together in a collective enterprise. The slow pace of voluntary villagization led to the compulsory villagization where large numbers of households were forced to relocate their homes (Sarris & van den Brink, 1993). In 1970, 531,000 Tanzanians (almost 5% of the population) were living in 1,956 villages. By 1977, roughly 13 million people were living in 8,000 villages relocated in these new settlements by the military (Mapolu, 1990). Tremendous changes took place in the rural landscape but the literature is strangely silent about the effects of these relocations on the family.

Due to many factors through the 1970’s and 1980’s, including the dramatic quadrupling of oil prices, deterioration in trade, trade deficits, military interventions (in Idi Amin’s neighboring Uganda), economic mismanagement, increasing large balance of payments, high rates of inflation, over-valued currency and very low economic growth rates, Tanzania adopted in 1986 the Structural Adjustment Policies (SAP) of the International Monetary
Fund (Caplan, 2000). The traditional recipe of economic adjustment (regardless which society) involves: 1) devaluation of the currency; 2) liberalization of prices; 3) reduction in budget deficits; 4) raising interest rates to normal market values; 5) elimination of government subsidies to industry and agriculture; 6) divesting state enterprises; and 7) encouragement of the private sector (Campbell & Stein, 1992). One consequence of this Structural Adjustment Policy was the reduction of moneys devoted to development, especially in health and education. Lugalla (1995) argues that the immediate effect of the SAP was to intensify already existing social problems: earnings of most households declined sharply, unemployment swelled, malnutrition increased, social services deteriorated in quantity and quality and health problems (especially malaria, dysentery, diarrhea, scabies, skin diseases, typhoid, and intestinal parasites) increased. These difficulties were especially endemic among the urban population. In the late 1980’s and early 1990’s, with economic liberalization, prices for staple items such as flour, sugar, clothes and soap had risen shockingly. High prices, coupled with an average 35% inflation rate made life very difficult for the family (Caplan, 2000)

With the collapse of many of the state’s social services and the dramatic decrease in men’s earning power, the economic situation had the effect of forcing women into the informal sector of the economy in order to supply their family’s needs. Tripp’s (1989,1997) research, taking place in Dar es Salaam, notes changing roles and attitudes within the urban population. Previously, in 1971, only 7% of the women were self-employed. In the 1990’s 65% had their own small businesses (beer brewing, hair styling, food processing, retail selling, food vending, tailoring, dairy and poultry keeping). Tripp maintains that there is a growing acceptance by men that women must work in the informal sector for the family to
survive financially. Previously, female ownership of a small business would have been unheard of. However, with 90% of the household income coming from the informal sector (from women, children and the elderly), a reversal of traditional dependencies has begun to take place giving women more financial autonomy and freedom from dependence upon their husbands (Tripp, 1989). There is a common rhetorical question on the streets of Dar es Salaam: “Who will feed and clothe the children if the wife doesn’t?” (Tripp, 1997)

Gender relations are in flux. Men’s responses to their wives’ income generating activities range from down-playing their role as unimportant, to minimizing their activities, to being openly hostile. Some men simply keep quiet, as one of Tripp’s respondants reported: “They know they can’t support the family and they need the woman’s income. Some men are even getting ambitious and are trying to find businesses for themselves” (Tripp, 1997, p.115). Other men and women are forming more of a partnership or conjugal relationship, where they are sharing the duties and tasks of family life and mutual support.

Koda (1995) sees conflicts arising in the household as a result of the many changes. Women’s growing control of cash income, however small, is altering gender relations. Women are growing more assertive over their rights to resources, their allocation and control. Women seem to be more organized and consistent about saving money than men (Tripp, 1997). They are building homes, paying rent, managing family enterprises, contributing to school fees and helping relatives financially. An important change in family structure is the growing number of households that are headed by single women in both rural and urban areas. The Household and Budget Survey 2000/2001 (2002) indicated that from the 1991/1992 survey, female household heads had increased in rural areas from 16.7% to 22.1% and in Dar es Salaam from 14.1% to 20.9%. In other urban areas of Tanzania single
female headed households averages 28%. The survey also disclosed an increase in both rural and urban areas of the proportion of women divorced/separated (from 5.1% to 6.5%) and widowed (5.8% to 9.0%). The significant increase in widowhood may be a result of HIV/AIDS (Household and Budget Survey 2000/2001 (2002).

Given the many changes, the reversals in dependencies and the reversals in the flow of resources, these authors (Koda, 1995; Tripp, 1997,1989; Bryceson, 1995, Omari, 1995) state the need for more research which examines the changing relations between men and women. Bryceson (1995) concludes her article noting the growing rift between genders, but emphasizes the need for the creation of a new kind of alliance based upon trust and mutual respect.

When men use women, women use men. Instrumentality, is self-perpetuating. Nature will not heal the gender rift that culture conventions have created. Until mutual respect and trust is achieved between the sexes, Tanzania will be fundamentally a divided nation. (Bryceson, 1995, p. 64)

AIDS’ Effects on Family Life

AIDS continues to have a devastating impact on sub-Saharan society, families and individuals. Of the 33 million people in the world living with HIV/AIDS, 60% of those infected live in the sub-Saharan region (Mutangadura et al.,1999). It is projected that between 2000 and 2020, of the 45 most affected countries, 68 million people will die prematurely and sub-Saharan Africa will experience the greatest losses with 55 million deaths (UNAIDS, 2002). The average life expectancy in this region is 47 years (without AIDS it would be 62 years). Life expectancy in Botswana, which has the highest adult prevalence rate at 38.8% has decreased to below 40 years. HIV prevalence projections predict that younger people will have a greater lifetime probability of becoming infected.
For example, in Lesotho, a person who turned 15 years old in 2000, will have a 74% chance of becoming HIV-positive by his or her 50\textsuperscript{th} birthday (UNAIDS, 2002).

Among sub-Saharan countries, Tanzania, with a 8.1% prevalence rate, ranks in the moderate range. This compares to: Cote' D'Ivoire, 10.8%; Ethiopia, 10.6%; Cameroon, 7.7%; Burkina Faso and Congo, 6.4%. Meanwhile, Botswana and Zimbabwe have the highest rates, 35.8% and 25.1% respectively; and Equatorial Guinea (.5%) and Senegal (1.8%) have the lowest prevalence rates in sub-Saharan Africa (Beresford, 2001). In 1999, the distribution of AIDS in Tanzania for both sexes fell within the age range of 20-49; with the peak age of infection for women being 25-29 years old and for men 30-34. Earlier in the epidemic (from 1983-1997) urban populations and communities along the highways were affected the most. However, since 1997, epidemiologists have seen rapid spread in rural areas, increasing what was once a low prevalence rate to as high as 10%. It appears that youth and women are the most affected groups due to high risk sexual behavior, anatomical and biological predispositions (women are more susceptible to infection), increasing mother to child transmissions, economic hardship, and young girls having sex with older men (HIV/AIDS in Tanzania, 1999).

Haslswimmer in 1994 stated that the impact of HIV/AIDS on the household and the community would be catastrophic. In the rural household health clinics the following agricultural consequences were observed where AIDS was rampant: labor shortages, loss of income, decline in crop yields, increases in pests and diseases, loss of agricultural and management skills, increases in cases of malnutrition and in the number of widows and orphans. Other observers (UNAIDS, 1999; Tanzania AIDS Project, 1994) see other effects on the family in addition to the erosion of the family income: change in adult and child roles,
forced migration, loss of educational opportunities (girls are more likely to be kept out of schools to become caregivers), depressive behavior, increased workload, homelessness. The recently published Household and Budget Survey 2000/2001 (2002) indicated an increase over the last decade, of rural women who have no formal schooling. Over one third of the women have never attended school and 41% are unable to read. These statistics may reflect the changes in household roles that women have had to make in order to care for ill family members. The Tanzania AIDS Project (1994) noted the transformations in families as they have had to adopt to crisis after crisis:

Changes in family structure and economic trends have created conditions where more families are vulnerable to HIV infection and less able to cope with the consequences of long term illness, medical costs, or the need to support orphans and fostered children. Although it is popular to say that AIDS is destroying the extended family system in Sub-Saharan Africa, it is more accurate to say that it is hastening its evolution. The extended family was stressed and changing in response to many challenges prior to AIDS, such as labor migration....The most important determinant of a family’s response to AIDS is its economic condition... in groups where women can own property, their welfare is more secure. In areas with high brideprice, the situation is less secure because the husband’s relatives felt entitled to the property. (p. 5, 14)

AIDS is having a major effect upon sub-Saharan Africa, according to the United Nations and Non-Governmental Organizations. Though public speech about AIDS on the radio and newspapers is ubiquitous, a great stigma is still attached to the disease. People are very reluctant to disclose their status even within their own community (Karim & Frohlich, 2000). If there has been a death in the community, it is considered demeaning to the family to attribute it to AIDS. In the past, the infected person tended to be isolated from their family and community (Tanzania AIDS Project, 1994). Setel (1999) illustrates the general desire to conceal the disease in the following conversation:

Interviewer: To whom would you turn to if you are worried about being infected by
the virus causing AIDS?

Interviewee: I would not turn to anybody. I would keep the worries to myself and I would not be tested.

Interviewer: Would you be willing to explain why?

Interviewee: Yes, I would not like anyone to know that I am HIV+ because they will be bad about me. They will think I have been misbehaving...I do not trust people in the hospital to keep the secret, that is why I will not be tested. I will keep the secret to myself even when I start developing AIDS; people may suspect, but the symptoms can be other diseases. I do not deserve the blame. (p. 222)

With AIDS research, as with fertility studies, it is said that men are the missing link in addressing women’s vulnerability. Men need to be part of the interventions to reduce women’s risk to acquiring HIV and they need to be part of the conversation concerning decision-making within sexual relationships. Men need to respect a women’s right to insist on safe sex practices and men need to become aware of their own responsibility within the relationship (Karim & Frohlich, 2000).

Setel’s (1996) research among the Chagga of the Kilimanjaro region is a groundbreaking incursion into this territory. His goal was to study how AIDS was understood among both men and women and how they, in turn, were perceived by their surrounding community. Setel, too, describes a complex changing social environment (population growth, diminishing of inheritable lands, men’s migration in pursuit of work, and the development of new economic sources or pathways for survival) which has had the effect of undermining the Chagga traditions and understandings of responsible and legitimate means of production and reproduction. A unique perspective of these transformations is gained from interviews with men who are geographically and culturally far removed from their society. Migration to the cities has had the effect of taking them away from the clan-based traditions which value farming as the basis of economic life and sexually responsible behavior. As the number of
casualties from AIDS grew, a negative association was made by the Kilimanjaro community which linked these “urbanized” men with the life and “business” of the city.

By the early 1990's in many parts of Kilimanjaro, there were women left behind to tend the kihamba [inherited family farm garden plot] who often claimed that their remittances from their men had diminished or ceased and that their husbands had redirected their resources toward new wives, and distant lives. Previously, the term 'doing business' was often applied to Chagga men with at least hint of positive overtones. It evoked the notion of Western educated, resourceful, diligent and worldly men from Kilimanjaro who moved away in order to seek their fortunes, but who would eventually return to their homes in Kilimanjaro. By the 1990s, the term 'businessman' had taken on pejorative connotations in many contexts - particularly in light of AIDS. It came to connote one who has abdicated adult responsibility and shirked more 'honest' forms of productive activity in favor of easy, rootless, peripatetic lifestyles - replete with opportunities for sexual excess. (Setel, 1996, pp. 1173)

Such “businessmen” became increasingly vilified, even more so than infected women with AIDS (who were seen as vectors of the disease). In fact, according to Setel, both women and men were caught and bound together in a political, economic, cultural and religious transformation that has been in motion for years. AIDS has thrown light on these larger processes at work by illuminating the suffering and death overwhelming this Kilimanjaro community. Setel recommends that both women and men be addressed more effectively by reproductive health services (Setel, 1999). To my knowledge, no research has been completed involving couples in conversation with regard to successful strategies for combating AIDS.

Research on African Christian marriage from the church perspective (Catholic, Anglican, Lutheran and “mainline) is discussed and assessed below.
African Christian Marriage

Study of Nyakyusa communities over several decades persuaded the anthropologist Monica Wilson that Christianity had fostered a degree of self-awareness which, particularly, for women, had been impossible in what she regarded as the highly parochial and communal world of the precolonial Nyakyusa...Moreover, her view of Christianization as a process through which the individual personality is liberated from the constraints of communal tradition may have concealed a much more complicated intertwining of opportunity and dilemma which, as we shall see, resulted elsewhere from the encounter of Christianity. (Giblin, 1999, p. 310)

...most of the missionaries failed to recognize the way traditional beliefs and practices pervaded every aspect of the community, deepening and enriching it. Due to this attitude, Christianity remained foreign to most African societies. In Meru, for example, and the other neighboring societies like Chaga, Christians went to church but thereafter continued with traditional rituals because they felt that they were not satisfied in their spirituality. Since the approach of missionaries to Africans/Wameru was not successful in contextualizing the gospel, Christianity has been in continuous conflict with the culture. To accept a new religion for some Africans/Wameru was to accept an order from the ‘master.’ As long as the master was not in sight, other rituals and practices could continue. Thus Christianity was regarded as the religion of the masters; it has never been the people’s own religion. (Mungure, 2000, p.121)

The Christian church has long struggled with the complexities of African Christian marriages. Missionaries were immediately forced to deal with the issue of African traditional customs and how to integrate the marriage norms of the Western Church with a very different cultural context. Eventually, they asked the question: What is the essence of a valid Christian marriage? Their answer was threefold: 1) absolute monogamy; 2) the absolute indissolubility of marriage; and 3) and the ritualization of marriage in a form recognized by the church (Hastings, 1973). The western church’s norms for marriage were in almost immediate conflict with those of the African tradition.

Upon my arrival to Makumira University, I was quickly immersed in the Christian Church’s long involvement with the study of marriage and family life. Polygamy was the hot button issue debated at countless missionary conferences. Should polygamous families
be admitted into the church? Should the wives and children of polygamous husbands be allowed to be baptized and receive communion? In the first half of the 20th century missionaries held three positions: 1) those who identified polygamy as a sin, equal to adultery; 2) those who perceived it as an imperfect form of marriage, but would not allow such families to be baptized; 3) those who saw it as an imperfect form, but permitted baptism of polygamous families. Hastings (1973) states that the second position was predominant among missionaries. One of the greatest tragedies of Christian mission work was the demand that polygamous men, who desired to convert to Christianity, have only one wife and release the other wives from their position. Untold misery, abandonment and poverty was often the lot of these women.

The second issue dealt with customary marriages. Should a monogamous marriage using the customary rites be recognized by the church? Does the practice of such customary rites imply the acceptance of unacceptable practices (the right of sexual access by brothers-in-law to wife (in some localities), brideprice, use of alcohol during marriage negotiations, arranged marriages etc.)? Most churches, especially the Roman Catholic and Anglican, only recognized marriages solemnized within the church. Those Christians who were not married ecclesiastically were placed under discipline or excommunicated (Hastings, 1973). Nevertheless, certain customary practices (bridewealth, the complex set of obligations to the extended family, local marriage practices) continued to exist and thrive with and without the approval of the church.

Among the many church conferences on marriage life, three early research projects stand out: 1) A. Phillips' *Survey of African Marriage and Family Life* (1953), a landmark survey sponsored by the International Missionary Council and the African Institute; 2) Adrian
Hasting’s (1973), *Christian Marriage in Africa* a survey among Anglicans and Catholics; and 3) CROMIA’s (Churches’ Research on Marriage in Africa) *African Christian Marriage*, (Kisembo et al., 1977) an ecumenical, sociological, pastoral survey/investigation involving 16 churches and 8 countries. To my knowledge, no extensive follow-up studies have been published in the nearly 30 years since these major surveys have taken place.

Phillip’s detailed five year study became a major resource for future studies, but was much too immense and complicated to stir the church to action. The study noted the gradual disintegration of the tradition (the disappearance of initiation rites, the questioning of rigid sex roles, the doubting of elders’ authority) in the face of rapid social change. Phillip’s conclusions leaned more toward conservative Christianity. To the question, how far can Christian marriage be expressed in and through the African form, Phillip argued: “If a conclusion is to be drawn from the evidence of this subject, it appears that the widely held view-point that Christian marriage can be built upon the foundation of customary marriage and in fact completes it, is not sustainable in face of the fundamental incompatibility between the two conceptions” (Hastings, 1973, p. 22).

Hasting’s study (1973) surveyed Anglican and Catholic priests (in five countries: Kenya, Tanzania, Malawi, Zambia, South Africa) with the intention of discovering trends and changes in Christian marriages and families in relation to problems arising out of African marriage customs. It was reported that at least 50% of the Christians in these countries never marry in the church. In fact, in the period between 1950–1970, there seemed to be a “massive” moving away from church weddings. Individuals gave the following reasons for not being married in the church: 1) the costs are too expensive (men had to save for years to pay for accessories and reception); 2) bridewealth may also need to be paid to wife’s family
(making costs prohibitive); 3) the church recognized by the state may be too far a distance to travel; and 4) the marriage commitment (with its indissolubility claims) makes it a too irreversible step (Hastings, 1973).

To his chagrin, Hastings (1973) perceived the church as largely focusing on extraneous factors of keeping church rules and regulations. He writes:

The African church has a great witness to offer in this field [marriage]: the reconciliation of the best positive values of the African tradition of kinship with the Christian vision of the one-flesh union of equal partners interacting in reciprocity. That is a challenge and many people are rising to it. At the same time one feels that the Church has become increasingly bogged down in an unimaginative preoccupation with law and its enforcement through exclusion from communion, so that is coming into a state where, to put it strongly, in many places the Church is in a process of excommunicating itself. Does it need to do so? These are questions we have now to attempt to answer. (p. 59-60)

In *Christian Marriage in Africa*, Hastings (1973) does not attempt to study the inner dynamics or "the personal struggles to realize the claims of love, of equality, of monogamy, of indissolubility, of responsibility at the same time to both wife (or husband) and kinship, the conflict of seemingly incompatible loyalties…" (p. 45). However, Hastings believes that this is the direction which future research should explore. From his perspective, the greatest problems in couples' relationships arose out of a growing contrast in marriage expectations. In fact, Hastings describes men's and women's marital relationship in terms of a battle. A battle as to "how they understand themselves in relation to marital and family responsibilities; as to how they realize the Christian ideal of marriage as a union of persons, essentially equal and free, in closeness of "one flesh" Sacrament of Christ and his Church, within their own society and cultural tradition…" (p. 44).

CROMIA's (Churches' Research on Marriage in Africa) research, as summarized in *African Christian Marriage* (Kisembo et al., 1977) built upon Hasting's earlier work. Many
of the individuals who participated in the project became national leaders in their respective churches (for example, Anglican Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Lutheran Bishop Eliwaha Mshana of Tanzania, Catholic Archbishop Nicodemus Kirima of Kenya). CROMIA’s study agreed with Hasting’s overall conclusions concerning declining marriage rates within many churches (though relatively few statistics are presented). Not only did an increasing number of Africans not marry in the church, but they failed to see the relevance of a church marriage in the Christian life. As one woman stated: “Christianity does not mean marrying in the church” (Kisembo, 1977, p. 215).

CROMIA’s researchers observe great transformations in young people’s relations where Christians: 1) chose their own partners and handle their own affairs; 2) are apprehensive to enter a marriage relationship fearing the irrevocable indissolubility demanded by the church; 3) are besieged by a surrounding social instability; and 4) are presented and taught an impoverished notion of Christian marriage by the church itself. Hence, many are electing to live together in “trial marriages” or are simply eloping to avoid the many familial, ecclesiastical, financial and social responsibilities and expectations. For example, in one study among Catholic catechists in Tanzania, 89% believed it to be no sin for a Christian man and woman to cohabit after a customary engagement. Seventy-four percent of this group thought it better for them to get to know each other by living together before marrying immediately (Kisembo et al., 1977). CROMIA maintains that the church’s common practice of disciplining (excommunicating or denying communion) those “living in sin” is seen as no use whatsoever.

These authors (Kisembo et al. 1977) also identify a basic incongruence between customary (African traditional) and statutory (western, Christian) marriage conceptions.
Their research suggests that African Christian laity are wedged between these two models and the pastoral leadership has espoused the western model. Statutory marriage is founded upon a contractual understanding of marriage where the contract: 1) takes place at a specific moment in time; 2) involves a ceremony; 3) is concerned with the effects of validity; and 4) and assumes the Christian conditions of monogamy and free consent of partners. Customary marriage, in contrast, is seen as more of a process involving a whole series of exchanges and rituals. It is more concerned with relationships between persons and groups and less with validity and consent. In identifying itself more with the western statutory tradition, church leadership has quarantined itself by limiting its portrayal of marriage to proclamations of what it is not (and then chastising/excommunicating disobedient offenders) rather than creating a positive conception or vision of what marriage is or could become in the African Christian household. Kisembo et al. (1977) recommend a greater leniency, a shepherding and encouraging of couples to the road of Christian marriage through marriage seminars and patient education.

On a legal level the Tanzanian 1971 Law of Marriage Act addressed this issue (of statutory and customary marriages) by the statutory recognition of different kinds of marriages (civil, Christian (monogamous), Islamic, and traditional African customary). The intention of this law was to integrate and codify the various extant marriage practices before 1971. It also led legal reform in continental Africa by making important modifications in the status of women and children (Rwezaura, 1998). The far-reaching changes were immense! Some of these statuatory transformations were as follows: 1) marriage had to be voluntary for both persons (contrary to customary law); 2) girls’ minimum age for marriage was 15 and boys 18; 3) a couple had to register the marriage as polygamous or monogamous (men registered as
"monogamous" were not free to marry another wife); 4) a couple who had lived together for 2 years were considered duly married and the children legitimate; 5) the transfer of bridewealth ceased to be a precondition to the validity of marriage; 6) a ban on corporal punishment of spouses; 7) the right to joint property and child custody after divorce; and 8) the right to inheritance of wealth and property upon husband’s death (Bryceson, 1995; Kisembo et al., 1977; Mungure, 2000; Rwezaua, 1998). There remains a lag, however in both Tanzanian society and the Church’s acceptance and practice of these laws (Bryceson, 1995, Mungure, 2000).

The Church in many ways is ambivalent in its views of changing gender relationships within Christian marriage. The CROMIA’s report, for example, stands against the traditional African understandings that all women are considered minors. It also stands against the prevalent metaphor of the “garden concept” (described by American missionary, Walter Trobisch) of marriage where,

the woman is a garden in which her husband, the owner of the garden, plants seed. the children are the fruit of the garden and belong to the sower. The garden is valued for the fertility of the soil; so is the woman. Moreover, it is the sower who who chooses the garden, not the garden that chooses the sower. If the sower plants seed in another man’s garden, he deprives his own garden of nothing, but he is accountable for his adultery to the owner of the foreign garden. (Kisembo et al, 1977, p. 45)

The authors of the CROMIA report assert that the garden theory of marriage is not Biblical in that it places too much emphasis on the fertility aspect of marriage. Producing children is not the raison’d’etre constituting marriage, from a Christian perspective.

The report is also critical of the commercialization of brideprice when it becomes excessively expensive and difficult for young men to pay. Brideprice is identified, by these churchmen, as more of a “child-price” in that ensures it that the woman and her offspring
belong to the man. However, in their theological descriptions of “becoming one flesh,” the unity of marriage, the equal status of men and women before God, and the necessity of cleaving and belonging to each other – a husband’s possession (or ownership?) of wife and children seems to be left unchallenged.

As one further examines the theology of *African Christian Marriage*, it is argued that the ideal Biblical relationship between men and women is not really equality but mutuality – a sharing and interdependence at every level of life. However these authors also argue that traditional African marriages, as exemplified in the Xhosa ethnic group (of South Africa), were in actuality equal because:

> there are established sex roles and the sex-lines must not be crossed. At no time and at no age may a male undertake a female role or participate in jobs set aside for women. Neither may a woman, for that matter, assume a male role. Among the Xhosa this sex division was maintained in social life where men and women (boys and girls) sat on different sides of the house; in marital life where husband and wife each had a separate mat and only the man could cross and join his wife on her mat. (Kisembo et al., 1977, p. 122)

Furthermore, a wife’s duty, in the Xhosa ethnic group, is to show “respect” to her husband and his people. A wife may show her respect by: knowing and keeping her place in the family; not saying her husband’s or father’s name aloud; and not speaking publicly unless spoken to. Husbands show their disrespect by continually being with their wives and other women. It’s a man’s duty to be with other men and it is an undignified man who helps his wife with house chores.

How does a male Christian researcher, sympathetic with women’s struggle for equality, recognition and remuneration for labor, evaluate the apparent discordant messages being sent about gender relations? The Christian research literature, in my mind, mirrors the complex, hopeful, idealistic, time-established, habitual, oppressive gender relations of the larger
society, which are in a state of flux. It may also reflect the polyphony of New Testament voices ranging from urging women to keep silent in the church to claiming that there are no male and females – no debilitating gender distinctions in Christ – all are free.

The church research literature (Kisembo et al., 1977) calls for more study into marriage and family relations. However, this call, seems to me to arise, almost solely out of the church’s desire to increase the number of “church weddings” to provide a simple means of classifying, and sanctifying “true” Christian marriages. Their chief means of accomplishing this is liturgical – through bringing customary and church marriage rites together. The Christian research literature also acknowledges the wider necessity of building a loving community within marriage. This is founded on the Eucharist – following Jesus’ pattern of handing Himself over in loving service. The CROMEA reports speaks ever so abstractly, however, on the pragmatics of fostering such an ideal in the life of the family. CROMIA’s study briefly acknowledges tensions and strains in marital relations, particularly in households where women are challenging men’s traditional dominance. It describes men as becoming more suspicious and jealous of educated wives (who have become the breadwinners) and act out by “chasing other women” as way of punishing them. But this is mentioned almost as an aside to the real problem of dwindling marriages solemnized within the church’s building walls.

As the above discussion indicates, previously published studies point to large gaps in our knowledge about African women and men’s experience of marriage and family life. Women, it is said, are beginning to challenge the status quo and research literature points to stresses and turmoil in gender relations. Ecological changes (education, economic crises, AIDS) in society have been instrumental in transforming traditional African society where
roles and expectations were clear. Presently, life and family relations and roles are a little more uncertain and indefinite.

That being the case, I have decided to use a qualitative phenomenological research approach to study the experience of marriage among Sub-Saharan African couples. The description of the pilot research project that follows offers a glimpse of these relations as well as some of the issues affecting African marriages and their extended families. More importantly, I believe this research will provide the practical foundation for a marital intervention program that will open areas of communication and joint plans of action for families under stress or hardship.
CHAPTER THREE – PILOT STUDY AT IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY, 1999

My pilot study was conducted in the spring of 1999 at Iowa State University. There were several objectives to this pilot project. The main purpose was to initiate the inquiry into the complex phenomena of sub-Saharan African Christian marriages, by conducting semi-structured interviews and obtaining verbal descriptions from student expatriate couples concerning their perceptions of their own marriages and the marital issues they face in their African cultural milieu. A phenomenological qualitative methodology was employed with the goal of describing the meaning of lived marriage experience of these couples. This methodology will be delineated later in Chapter Four. My primary intention was to determine if indeed further research for my dissertation was merited and feasible in a sub-Saharan country. A second goal was to familiarize myself with the qualitative methodology and “fieldwork” issues and also to refine and sharpen the questioning process. Third, I wanted to begin the process within the Division of Global Mission of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (the church which I am an ordained pastor) to search for a sub-Saharan African seminary or university which would support such a research project. A letter of recommendation from the ELCA- DGM was later given and discussions began with the Provost of Makumira University College of Tanzania.

The research questions for this pilot study were as follows:

- What is the meaning of marriage for African Christian couples who are currently students at Iowa State University?
- What issues or concerns are they and other couples in their culture wrestling with?
- How have they negotiated these concerns given the great change African society has experienced within the last several decades?
- Would a couples’ program for enriching marriage led by a pastor be culturally appropriate and helpful?
Co-researchers (an ISU graduate student from Sierra Leone who had just received her Ph.D. in education and my wife, a Lutheran pastor, who taught at a seminary in Central African Republic) were enlisted to help in framing of the questions, recruitment of couples and analysis of data. The original semi-structured interview was greatly simplified after my first interview. The following open-ended questions were used:

1) How did you come to be married?
2) What is the meaning of your marriage? How would you define or describe your marriage?
3) What issues or problems are couples in your culture wrestling with?
4) What strengths, assets or resources do couples have to deal with these problems or concerns?
5) What role does the Christian church/clergy have in dealing with these family concerns?
6) How might a marriage enrichment program be helpful?

Four couples, mostly from Kenya, participated in the study (one spouse was from Tanzania). The average age of the men and women were 40.5 and 36 respectively. All of the men were either in graduate school or doing post-doctoral research. Two of the women were graduate students at ISU and the other two had received teaching degrees in Kenya, but were staying home to care for children. Two of the couples shared the same ethnic background (Luyha and Luo) and the other two were “mixed” marriages (Chaya and Kikuyu; and Kalenyia and Kikuyu). Three couples were of the same denominational background (Lutheran, Catholic, and Church of Christ) and one couple was Anglican and Campus Baptist. The number of children generally fell below the Kenyan national mean of 4.7 with 2, 3, 2 and 5 children respectively. The small number of couples were obviously not representative of the general population, but were exceptional individuals who had lived a significant amount of time in western society. One couple had not only lived few months in the United States, but had spent a number of years in Sweden pursuing a graduate degree.
Additional participants in the pilot study included three pastors (two women of the Chagga tribe and a man from the Maasai ethnic group) of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Tanzania. They were graduate students at Wartburg Lutheran Seminary in Dubuque Iowa, and had graciously consented to be interviewed. The information these pastors supplied richly complemented much of the data received from the couple’s interviews and helped to prepare me for my research at Makumira University (all had studied there at one time).

Several clear themes emerged during the course of our conversations and are briefly reviewed in the following paragraphs. I include this summary in the body of this dissertation for two reasons. First, I plan to contrast some of the findings of this pilot study of professional graduate student couples with the later Makumira study of clergy marriages. Second, I think it is at least useful (and perhaps instructive) for the clergy of Makumira to take notice of what upwardly mobile and highly educated Christians are saying about their own marriages and the Church, be it Protestant or Catholic.

Overarching Theme – A Climate of Change – “We are in Transition”

A repeated theme disclosed by many of the participants was the enormous change that has taken place within their lives. Time after time, couples and pastors described an environment knit together from three cultures: traditional African, "modern" culture of the West, and the culture of Christianity. The knitting process has been a fractured one, done in part coercively (through colonial and missionary enterprise), sometimes arbitrarily (through the haphazard of a free-wheeling capitalist enterprise) and sometimes discerningly (through wise weighing, sifting, and purposeful appropriation from all three of the aforementioned cultures). The
present day product is not a harmonious tapestry but a somewhat clashing patchwork of cultural fabrics.

Many of the comments of the participants were preceded by the words: “We are in a time of great change;” “This is a time of incredible transition.” One man described the period of his youth and adulthood as a “breaking of the rules.” He continued, “Our parent’s generation...was a different set of rules. But for ours, we tried to break most of those rules.”

Another husband spoke critically of modern culture’s feminist movement and nostalgically of the traditional hierarchical structure, where power was located in men’s hands: “…there’s a lot of conflicts in our family because of that competition. Whereas in the tradition, the marriages had...that everybody had their place. The father, the mother comes next and then the children. And the decisions had to come from above and go downward.”

Women acknowledged this period as one of great change. They saw themselves, to an extent, as beneficiaries of a cultural shift in gender relations. By and large, they did not perceive themselves as active change agents, but I saw them as using less confrontational means to challenge their husbands to slowly accommodate to a newly emerging world. They spoke rather eloquently of the need to study things carefully and to discern which ideas, rites and practices would be appropriate for the future. One woman said:

I don’t think there is any trouble in the modern as long as we take it and weigh it with the traditional. Because I think the modern also empowers individuals. We are no longer in a traditional setting; it has changed so much. But if we bring the best of the traditional and the modern, then things could be quite good.

One of the female pastors expressed the need to consider and assess where the culture has been and where it is going. Though quoted in the opening chapter, I once again include her thoughtful musings for its sheer perspicaciousness:
It is hard now on families and because now the social structure which is imagined is now becoming different. There are intermarriages; we are going to the cities. We are meeting there and they get married there. We are kind of moving the tradition and creating a mix of the old tradition and a kind of Christianity. But this is my experience that I would prefer to revisit our traditions and we can say that now, according to modern technologies and education, these ones...they are not really fitting in our context but we can just see how to change them to fit in our context. But not leave the traditions completely because a person is a being in a community. This is something which is hard to approach from the heart of an African. It is very hard.

The couples' and pastors' words provided evidence of the colliding and shifting in the massive subterranean plates of the cultural ecology. It was clear that the tremors were felt especially in the area of marital and family relations. The following sections describe some of those movements and transformations.

**Courtship, Dating, Family History Check and Brideprice**

Marriage for the current generation was experienced largely the result of individual free choice. Among the participants, none of the parents on the husband's side played a traditional role of choosing, or sending a "go-between" to search for an appropriate daughter in law. Couples described a variety of traditional tribal practices which included: 1) the need to receive parental permission to date someone; 2) the forbidden nature of having a "hidden" (from family and clan) romantic relationship; and 3) the necessity of investigating the family history of both woman and man before bridewealth negotiations take place. These three regulations seem to form the core ideal expectations of the traditional society.

What happens in reality, however, is very different from the traditional ideal. One male echoing the theme of change within the context of courtship and marriage remarked:

...our traditional way has been disintegrated a lot and we have lost touch with our code of conduct as far as marriage is concerned. And we have tried to, to keep or
incorporate the western style, but we have not yet copied everything fully the western way and we have left part of our traditional way behind. We are not yet...we are not completely there. So we are somehow hanging in between. We have left most of it and we have incorporated bits of the western culture but then we have not incorporated all western culture.

The couples in the pilot study, in varying degrees, by-passed tradition pre-marital expectations. All couples met away from home while studying at college. Thus parental approval of boyfriend or girlfriend was initially evaded. This seems to be one of the main ways the tradition was thwarted.

One couple described a clandestine relationship, where the wife said it was necessary to “cheat” on her parents in order to see her boyfriend. They managed to visit one another, without her parent’s knowledge at various “uncles” homes, including the relatives in the subterfuge. They said it was a tense time, because it was necessary to enlist their brothers’ and sisters’ support. Brothers and sisters are obligated to inform their parents of such romantic meetings. In the end, however, when her parents had heard that she had been “seeing a boy” for over six years without their knowledge, they refused to meet with him. A cooling off period was necessary. The family’s first gathering took place a year after the first child was born. The husband described their world as “everything was turned upside-down.”

The couple, nominal members of the Church of Christ, did not get married within the church, nor were they married traditionally. They, however, had a civil marriage at the local government office.

This couple’s explanation of their parent’s reaction provided some useful knowledge of the expectations in the courtship process. The wife’s parents seemed to be caught between a rock and a hard place. They felt they were defrauded of their rights in three ways: 1) they were not able to examine their future son-in-law’s family background and history; 2) they did
not know how “restrictive” or generous monetarily he would be with his wife’s family (for example, would he allow her to contribute to her younger brothers’ and sisters’ education?); and 3) their bargaining position with regard to bridewealth was lessened (the wife’s parents had to more or less accept the brideprice, knowing that it would be difficult for a single woman with a child to find a spouse).

Other couples also made reference to these possible dangers in having a “hidden” relationship. Women often become pregnant in these romances. Parents and the extended family want to avoid such pregnancies for the above reasons. However, participants did not speak in terms of a social stigma (unacceptability, immorality, or reprehensibility) to having a child before marriage. It seemed like a perfectly “normal” thing to do. Children seemed to be considered a blessing regardless of the marital status of their parents. The Tanzanian pastors, nonetheless, spoke of birthing children outside marriage as against the Word of God. In doing such a thing, mothers (and fathers) had in effect “excommunicated themselves from the church.” But it was the role of the pastor to go and find these persons, listen to them with an “open mind,” and hear their confession.

The couples, however, emphasized their parents’ concern about possible results from neglecting to check the other family’s history and background as well as the weakened financial and material bargaining position if the couple should elope and have a child. For example, during another couple’s courtship, one woman became pregnant. In this case, her mother welcomed the child, but could not rest easily until an investigation took place of the future husband’s family.

Traditionally, this examination of the family history was absolutely essential and always preceded bridewealth negotiations. This research would either be done by an official “go-
between" village investigator or a member or friend of the family. One female participant colorfully describes this practice among the Kikuyu:

I think first of all the dowry [brideprice] does not come in as the first thing...The way it used to be, these guys would come in...they’re all guys now...the grandfather and the people that know your family very well. They ask you, who’s your father? My father is so and so. Okay, so your father is the son of so and so? They want to avoid things like, if there is something like insanity going on in the family. If there is someone, like one of the uncles going insane fifty years ago, or some funny diseases running in the family...they will insist that you cannot be married...Like something in particular, like epilepsy; some traumatic experience people go through or which runs in the family. There is no way we are going to get involved in that. Before anything is negotiated...you can’t get married. Let’s go! And that’s that!

In response, to his wife’s (above) words, the husband responded: “this modern thing has cured all of that. You don’t know when you meet someone; you don’t know their history. You just meet the two of you.” Nevertheless, all four couples involved in the study did eventually undergo a family background check although for them theirs took place after they had lived together. Their parents required this. The traditional lineage based system still exerted its influence among these university trained couples.

Though there were mixed opinions of the practice of background investigations among the couples, the pastors lamented the passing of this rite because they perceived it as a vital tool in strengthening the marital commitment of the couple. One female pastor said:

[The family history check] made a very important impact on marriage. So for me, here, I just want to point out it’s not a matter of how Christians approach it, but also the traditional way was more convincing...more disciplined, more than we do today.

These Tanzanian Lutheran pastors saw the pre-marital materials of Wartburg Seminary (using William Hiebert’s and Robert Stahmann’s, *Premarital Counseling: The Professional’s Handbook* (1987)) as much too “artificial” for Tanzanian society. They argued for a more extensive program involving the couple’s extended family members as well as witnesses (or
mentors) to the marriage. These people would be "really behind" the couple providing guidance, support and care in the building of their marriage. The three clergy respondents noted that this communitarian aspect was absent from Wartburg's understanding of marriage. Wartburg Lutheran seminary marriage preparation materials was considered "artificial" both because of their short duration (several hours as opposed to four days, 3-4 hour sessions in Tanzania) and in so far as they did not sufficiently unleash and enlist the power of the community.

Brideprice (or bridedepayment or bridewealth) is the giving of animals, goods or money from the bridegroom (or his kin) to the bride's parents and extended family. A surprising finding in the pilot study was that many of the female participants were in favor of this tradition. Their husbands, on the other hand, had more mixed feelings - especially when a higher brideprice was demanded than could be afforded. Before conducting these interviews, I had thought of this custom in pejorative terms: the "giving away" of another human being for goods; the "buying" of a wife; the woman as a "commodity" to be sold. Several of the women were explicit that these were western misinterpretations of this practice. One wife adamantly said:

Another thing I would like to add on is this misconception that brideprice is like trying to buy another girl. It's like the man's family is paying something for the girl. But what I have learned through my traditions back home is...it's an exchange process for the two families. It's a consent between the two families. It's not like I'm paying you 50 bucks for you to give me that girl and that's it. It's something that is continuous and something that goes on. There never reaches a point where they say that's it.

One woman, who was labeled a feminist by her husband, brought to light a very different understanding that I had ever known. She said:
I see it as more as an exchange of animals. It's not really money. But I see it as an appreciation. It's like, if animals are brought to my home, because you value cows, then you know, they can always see that cow...it's a life, you know? The animals are respected, they are taken care of, and they grow and multiply, and are used to generate wealth. Which is probably a contradiction...our way of getting money! My brothers then are also needing to pay dowry for the women that they are married to. So it is really just for me, an appreciation and exchange to facilitate the home to continue. I value, I think I still respect it and I want my daughter...I would want to have some animals for her. For some reason, I just think it is a sign of good will, a sign yes, you have done a good job. This is a gift. But not a gift that you can just put here and not care for. An animal needs to be cared for.

Her husband followed her comments by describing the bridewealth gifts as "a good marking" that their daughter is not really lost. The parents can remember her through the animal that is in their care. Thus on one level, bridewealth seems to provide a means where livestock overlaps with kinship and the continuation of the circle of life. There is a certain poetry and complexity about it, at least, in the idealistic terms it is described above.

Another couple, however, provided a different view of the custom. They were not as enthusiastic as the other women were. This particular wife said that it was "not a bad thing," but the tradition had been used improperly to control and burden wives, especially, when it was understood solely in terms of an economic transaction. She said:

It is not a bad thing. Since that we found it going on. But then, to some extent it is not the best. Because in cases where they [families] may have cheated and the demanded a high pay...you find that life becomes a bit difficult back in your house. then, it is sort of you are treated as if you were bought. This man tends to treat you as if he bought you. Everything you do is the man's decision. That's because this tends to think that he bought you. You are bought to be used, according to what the the man wants. So to some extent it is not really the best.

Men, by and large, perceived bridewealth as a necessary custom that they needed to respect for the sake of family harmony. One couple admitted that they had not yet "done it" and needed to "do it" when they return to Kenya (even after six years of marriage). This particular husband commented about his in-law's family: "I don't know what they need, but
if I have it, I will give it to them. If I don’t, they may not always get what they want [laughs]! I have no grudges, I guess.”

Two of the men, however, while conceding to the custom of bridewealth also saw it as creating significant problems, especially when a higher brideprice was demanded than could be afforded. One husband described himself as “brainwashed” by the tradition. He and his family nevertheless did what was required. Another husband noted that in times past it was a little bit easier to provide 10-20 heads of cattle for a brideprice, but as the economy collapsed and family wealth diminished, it became increasingly more difficult to give what was asked. The custom seems to be changing character and some young couples and families have agreed not to provide bridewealth. One man stated:

It [bridewealth] is something that has been our system, but for the older generation, it is something that has to be there. And it has been appreciated all along. But we, our time, it is a bit harder to even afford it, so our generation is sort of disintegrated, we have a flexible way of accepting it [lack of goods, cattle, money] if they cannot...if the boy cannot afford it. So long as they can stay peaceful in their family, it is acceptable. So modern people have stayed happy without paying the brideprice. But later, you find you pay it one way or another.

Some of the couples referred to the inhibiting or preventive role that bridewealth played. If a divorce was to take place, the brideprice had to be repaid by the wife’s family to that of the husband’s. The custom had the effect of enlisting and rallying the aid of the kinship network to help save the marriage. Sometimes it would be a real chore to find the cattle and goats and to return them to the husband’s family.

The pastors from Tanzania agreed that “marriage is still very much in the traditional understanding.” However, they suggested that the gradual loss of these customs may be responsible for the increasing number of divorces and single parent households in the larger society.
The above emerging themes, concerning courtship (free choice of partners, family history examination, and brideprice) all piqued my curiosity concerning the Christian clergy community of Makumira. How do they go about their own courtship? To what extent are their extended families involved? What is role of such pre-Christian traditions as the family history examination and bridewealth in their lives? Do men and women have different perspectives of bridewealth? Is it really a custom that oppresses women, as the west and many feminists view it, or is it a sign of good will which helps to seal a marriage? What is the church's opinion and role concerning these traditions? What customs need to be revisited and refitted into present marriage and family life?

**Meaning of Marriage**

A Tanzanian pastor initiated his comments about marriage with the saying: "I am because we are and since we are, therefore I am." That is to say, an individual receives his or her identity by fitting into the network of the clan. The "we" is not the couple, but the whole extended kinship line. The pastors described a model of marriage in Tanzania that conformed to this traditional understanding.

The couples in this study, however, described a more conjugal model of marital life where: women and men freely chose their spouses, interests and responsibilities were shared; smaller number of children filled their households; and a more egalitarian relationship between partners was articulated or at least considered. Traditional expectations of their families still weighed on them, however. Parents had less control of their children's choice of spouse, but these respondents needed to obtain at least post-factum approval of both their own and their "in-law" parents.
Marriage was conceived in traditional terms as a process involving a series of steps. There was really no agreed upon specific point of time when they considered themselves married. It seemed that it took place along a course of events: living together, family history check, receiving the blessing of parents, bridewealth negotiations, birth of first child, and the obtaining of the state or church marriage certificate. It seemed that to ask a perfectly relevant western question - when were you married? - was neither appropriate or a significant question. All of the couples lived together and generally considered themselves married sometime during this period of co-habitation. Although they defined themselves as practicing Christians, only one couple was later married in the church; the others were married by the state.

When asked about the "meaning" of their marriage, husbands preferred to speak abstractly and offer objective or detached type descriptions (not portraying any emotional or romantic meaning of their marriage). Both underscored the practical nature of marriage: spouses are primarily helpmates and not lovers. Upon more questioning, men and women differed greatly in their descriptions. Men tended to describe marriage either in impersonal terms of community expectations or officiously as a document to be signed, a marriage certificate recognized by the state and church. Apparently, in Kenya and Tanzania, the accessibility to the various social services and some aspects of the job market requires a couple to obtain such a certificate.

Men also tended to emphasize the expectations of the community. One husband described his family's wish for a "working class" wife because she would contribute monetarily to the family:
Especially if they know that the would-be sister-in-law is a working class person. It is a bit different from marrying a housewife. That means you have to shoulder all the responsibility. But especially if she is someone who is going to work, you know she is going to contribute to the well-being of the family. Because in our cultural background, a wife is supposed to be of the family, not an individual. So she shoulders the responsibilities. We have this extended family system so marrying a working class wife is a big advantage because she contributes to the well-being of the entire family.

Another male respondent downplayed the church's role but accented the importance of the marriage being recognized by the community.

I think that marriage would be like...it doesn't necessarily have to go through the church. There have been traditional marriages. If it is recognized by everybody, that is the husband and wife...and living happily and everything going for them. It is respected by everybody. Nobody will come and say you guys have never been married. These two are married. I think going to the church has nothing to say; this one is mine and this one isn't.

Women, upon further questioning, tended to speak in more relational or personal terms. Their statements varied in nature. One Tanzanian woman had a practical, solution focused understanding of marriage. She described her marriage's meaning in the individualistic terms of making a personal decision and tussling with her husband through their daily life together without any assistance from outside relatives.

To me, I have always believed that if I make a decision to get married it was going to be the most important decision for me and if there were going to be any problems outright, I would solve the problems. I know that this is where things are difficult, but for me, I believe that if you're a woman, just being willing to work it out. It doesn't mean it's going to be "Hi honey" everyday. No, there will be days when you don't want to see each other. And they'll be days when you want to be next to each other all the time. During the tough times and the good times you work it out. To me, what is called divorce here doesn't come that easy. It will have to be the last option. But I believe that marriage is two people coming together, working together, for better or worse, just like it's said. I know it's hard, but to endure. It's the most important decision in my life. Once I got married, I believed that I could work it out.
Another woman described the meaning of her marital relationship in reference to her husband's assisting her side of the family. The parents of this particular woman had refused to meet with them their first year of marriage because of their six year "hidden" courtship.

It is not bad, it has never been bad since I married. Because I should say that I have been helped much by him since we have been married. My sisters and my brothers have gone to school using his money and to an extent my parents have always appreciated [him], although they were not liking the idea [of our marriage] at the time. They have appreciated what he has done.

Another couple was undergoing marital conflict at the time of the interview and later separated. The woman candidly related some of the difficulties of being in a marriage where responsibilities were not shared and her goals are not respected.

We are both home in the morning, we both work at night, both having the same amount of work to do out there...If the role of the woman is not recognized and given due respect and then problems will arise. And in my own marriage that has been a big problem...I am going out working more hours than he is, maybe not, it could be different in other situations. And then we both return. Our life has to go on. We are both tired, we have children to feed. We have school to get good grades. We have everything to achieve. I have my dreams, he has his dreams. But if those are not respected....I think if that continues, that is a very bad thing. These need to be dealt with, if the marriage is going to succeed.

Two of the women interviewed characterized their lives from a position of resignation or uncomplaining endurance: "it's not hard, but I'll work it out" or "It's not bad and it's never been bad." This researcher sensed, perhaps, a longing among the women for a different kind of marital relationship. One wife intimated such a yearning in her response to the question: What might we talk about in a program designed to enrich marriages? She remarked:

I think it would be helpful to talk about how to help spouses walk...to walk side by side, as far as to talk and share with each other and learn to love and to be with each other...in terms of strengths and anger...and also have some time together...to just be with each other and there's no time for [him] to be with the children.
Marriage seemed to have an array of meanings for the respondents I interviewed. None used religious terms to describe their experience except the pastors and their depictions were accounts of what they told parishioners: marriage is a lifetime commitment and it is God's expectation as well as the church's expectation that couples will live together "until death do us part." In fact, these pastors claimed that they are bound by their church constitution to not recommend divorce as an alternative. One pastor said,

Ok? We stand on that [marriage is a lifetime commitment]. But to some extent, and this is totally me, I've done so many marriage counseling and you can tell that this marriage is not going to work. It is not. I mean you know what I'm talking about, you observe, you see there has been too many conflicts between these couples. You have...they have tried, the families, both sides have been involved. but things aren't getting better. Beating is taking place, you know. And there is so much abuse between these couples. But since the church discourages divorce, we cannot step in and say, "Heh, this is not going to work out." You cannot because the church constitutions state clearly of the church, that the church does not encourage divorce. And you have to abide with that [by the constitution] otherwise they [the church authorities] will say, "You [pastor] do not belong with us. you have violated the church constitution.

A variety of questions arose from these interviews: Do such Sub-Saharan African men perceive marriage in terms of community expectations and documents to be signed? Do the women from these cultures see their marital relationship from a position of resignation, as something to be endured? Do African Christian couples want to walk side by side and grow in love for each other? Or is this a very unique view from a small pool of Iowa State University respondants? To what degree, is marriage defined by the Christian church's constitution in Lutheran clergy couples' minds?
Significant Problematic Marital Issues

Generally, respondents shared similar responses to the question: What issues or problems are couples in your culture wrestling with? All of the participants mentioned most or all of the following as significant marital issues: 1) the importance of having children; 2) disagreements concerning family finances; 3) the influence of the extended family; 4) wife-beating; and 5) infidelity, single parent household and AIDS. Below, I provide a thumbnail sketch of these issues that need to be explored in more detail:

Importance of Having Children - The pilot study echoed both anthropological and sociological literature concerning the necessity of having children. Bearing children, according to the participants: “sealed” the marriage, strengthened it, helped the couple to gain status in the community, and “increased the respect” women received as a mother and wife. Nearly all couples agreed that a wife’s infertility provided justification for the scorn, if not contempt, of the community and led to many of the divorces. An interesting parley took place between one couple as the husband was explaining the significance of having many children:

It is very important in our cultural background because a marriage without children is not taken very seriously. You have to find a reason for why there is not a birth because we believe your existence or your inheritance is supposed to go to your children. Or in your absence, it is your children who carry on, or whatever. So in our system, in our cultural background, children are very, very important...a marriage with children is much more compacted than a marriage without children. I think our love for each other has grown over the years with time. And I would say...we are among the people who have many children [5 children] but a few people are deciding to have a fewer number of them. Our generation up to now is resisting family planning...the control system. Because in our society it was regarded that the more children you had, the better, or because in the old days the survival rates were not guaranteed because of diseases and things like that. So the more you had, the higher probability of some of them growing up.

His wife responds:
Children are good, but for what I went through I can't really say that I liked it. Because if you consider children that are closely spaced, it never gave me any time to rest. And it was not a peaceful time for me. Because I was letting the other ones fight the other one. It seems to me they were always there. I had to take care of them. I never rested. I did not like that very much.

A woman's fertility, indeed, seemed to be the biological foundation of marriage. The burdens of numerous, closely spaced children fall, by and large, on women's shoulders. Dire complications arise particularly when there is no pregnancy the first years of marriage. Often extended family members begin to inquire if there are any marital difficulties. Many times, they will counsel the husband to divorce his wife because of her infertility. Many of the couples said that the woman is nearly always seen as the guilty party at times like these. Traditionally, an infertile woman would be divorced and sent to her parents' home to eke out an existence or her husband would find an additional wife.

Two of the women pastors argued for the revival of the tradition of surrogate parenthood which the missionaries stopped upon their arrival to Tanzania. These pastors pointed to the Biblical story of Abraham, Sarah and Hagar, where Sarah asked her husband to sleep with her servant, Hagar and later gave birth to Ishmael. These pastors have witnessed so many divorces (as well as depression and stress) as a result of childlessness that they believe the Lutheran church should consider re-examining alternative possibilities. At the same time, they strongly asserted an admittedly counter-cultural religious teaching that a "Christian marriage is a complete marriage even without children."

Financial Decisions – Who is in Control of the Money? Only one couple referred directly to the macro-economic repercussions of structural adjustment policies. All of them noted, however, marital conflicts among their friends and acquaintances resulting from issues of control and economic gate-keeping – who should manage and make decisions about family
income. Among the couples, tensions arose (while talking about other couples' dilemmas) over women's income and whether she had the right to manage it as she pleased. They all mentioned that men were the traditional family income gatekeepers. Their income was a well-kept secret from their wives. In fact, women needed permission from their husbands to purchase household and family supplies. One couple's dialogue provides an illustration of such tensions:

Husband: Yes, she has brought up another point. If both couples are working than how to allocate funds to the things they need at home...I think there is a misunderstanding most often.
Wife: Usually from our division of labor, once the man is married, whether the the wife is working or not, he has to provide for her. So her paycheck is just for her, but she has a right to a share of his paycheck.
Husband: Yes, in one case, but in another case since the wife is considered part of the bridewealth, she is considered part of their family and she answers to the husband; the husband decides or approves the matter. So it's variable. In other cases it may be equal, but due to the income level...say the woman brings in more income than the man, she may have more say by virtue of the income she brings in. Not because of the traditional role. Or the man may have more say in what they do because the income brought in, not because of the tradition, but because he's the man who brings the income.
Wife: But he's usually the one who demands the right to decide.

Another female participant, described by another couple as being in more of a traditional marriage, was even more adamant about the wife's right to make decisions in the family economics sphere.

What I've always noticed in others [marriages] is normally money. Where you find both the couple working, with the husband working and the wife working, there is always a quarrel about money. This is sometime where they disagree. Because you find the man would like to control the wife's money as his. But the money is yours. that is where I really see problems in coming in a marriage.

The findings of the pilot study corroborate the recent sociological literature, suggesting that women are contesting the traditional decision making constraints with marital disagreements escalating as a result.
The Extended Family - The extended family was described as both a blessing and a curse. Couples, in some ways yearned for the care, support, and wise counsel of their parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, brothers, sisters, and friends. In other ways, they said that the extended family's role and expectations can be very adverse – from advice given to divorce or beat a wife, to certain assumptions with regard to the wife's work in the household (to cook, do laundry, and errands for the men of the family), to demands to financially support the extended family.

A typical scenario shared by several couples was the pressure the husband's family could place on a wife upon moving to her husband's family home. One male respondent explains:

And I was saying one of the big difficulties is communication between the couple and the relatives of the couple. Often they don't understand each other. And then when relatives come in, it complicates things even more. So the relatives usually have expectations. They may view her as belonging to the community. You know, like I was saying, say my brother (as an example, it didn't happen to us, but I've seen it happen) say my brother wants her [my wife] to cook for him or to do his laundry or run errands for him because she is married now finally, but not because he expects to pay her. And he expects her to do it now because she is married [to his brother] now.

This man's wife immediately responded that her husband's brothers and uncles "have the right to send her to do anything." They mentioned, however, that this custom has begun to change as many couples leave their villages searching for work elsewhere. The men said that a considerable amount of friction might develop between them and their brothers if they were to intervene on behalf of their wives. Living a good distance away from their villages and extended families has helped them to avoid such conflicts.

Another area of conflict was the demands of financial support by the larger family. Their kin usually assume that relatives who study in the west live extravagant lives. They, in turn, expect to receive some of these benefits as well. The couples said that they come from a
"background of being helped," so they consider "helping" to be one of their primary responsibilities. Their decision to assist or not to assist certain family members often strain both marital and familial relationships. One couple remarked:

I think the big contributing factor is the economic values. Because of economic hardships is quite a lot in our place, which tends to contribute to broken marriages or unfaithfulness in marriage or lot of hardships because we still practice the extended family system. Your family they still feel you should pamper them which to some extent is a burden to you, but if you look behind it, you find they are really coming for your assistance not because they like it, but because they don't have any other source. So you find it a burden to a lot of marriages. Because the demand is so much that you cannot bear it. You cannot afford to educate your own children, you cannot afford to take care of your own family. So in the case, sometimes you find you just say, "No I cannot help the extended family." But then you become an object of criticism because in those cases you are also helped to be where you are, and now you cannot afford to help others. And then it becomes a strain on the family because your family might think now, either you are only helping the wife's family, you are not helping your own family...while, maybe, you are not even helping her family.

The expectations on successful couples to financially support their respective families may be immense. Presumptions that a wife's duty is to serve her husband's family could also be a source of marital and familial tension. A particular subset of support issues pertains to Christian clergy couples in that the clerical vocation in the African Church, by and large, is not a financially lucrative position. However, what it lacks monetarily may be gained in other social arenas – the respect of the people and access to resources (church schools, funding for grants, influence, education abroad). The extended kin of clergy families may exercise its power particularly in these areas.

**Wife-beating** - It was said that wife-beating is a common and all too prevalent practice in marriages. The informants indicated that sometimes women are even killed. Couples did not spend much time explicating this issue and it certainly needs to be addressed given the alleged extensive nature of the practice. One couple said that though marital violence is usual
in the village, such attacks would be stopped by family member and neighbors. Furthermore, the guilty party would be identified and a penalty assessed. Three couples stated that with the migration of many people to larger cities, the anonymity of urban life and the accompanying reluctance of neighbors to intervene, the violence has actually increased between men and women living a more "modern" marriage.

**Infidelity, AIDS and Single Parent Households** - These subjects were briefly touched upon in the pilot study. Several individuals spoke of the increasing number of single parent (female-headed) households in the context of infidelity and the effects of AIDS. Women spoke of the propensity of men to be unfaithful and the task of helping wives to refuse unprotected sexual relations with their mates due to the threat of AIDS. One female participant believed that "feminism" as a philosophy could help women and men to make and respect personal choices.

I mean, look at a situation that is common, like the spread of AIDS and how to help a woman to say "no" to her husband who has just come off a relationships with [someone]. I mean, how do you deal with a situation like that? You can say, yes, a feminist is a feminist, and I think feminism for me is more appreciating and accepting; women must make those choices and respect the choices they make. Let them [women] make their own decisions about their own lives. And men should also be given the same information.

Men spoke of economic hardships, diminishing household cash resources and increasing suspicion by wives that they may be having an affair. One husband characterized infidelity as a problem involving both genders and as a consequence of economic difficulties:

Either the woman would be accusing the man or the man would be accusing the woman. Normally unfaithfulness comes in time of economic hardship, whereby either the woman, maybe she knows how much her husband is earning and due to economic hardships, he’s no longer contributing as much to the well-being of the family. Then she will start suspecting that he is having some affair somewhere; he is using the money. Likewise, if the husband knows how much the wife is earning, and maybe he finds that her contributions to the family kitty is diminishing;
unexpectedly she...supporting some other, or maybe it's imaginary accusations. So you find in a family, there will be sufficient [accusations] in both ways, these always are not true.

Pastors observed the incredible burden placed upon women to support and maintain such families in a context where the extended family network is increasingly unable or unwilling to support such families. A female pastor remarked:

That is the unfairness of broken marriages also. Because the father, very seldom, you find the fathers who will be totally responsible after divorce. Always the mother is going to bear the bullet. Well it works that way even when the marriage is still working. Most of the men don’t take care of the family fully. The burden is about seven times on women than men. And it gets worse...

Consequently, poverty, illness and depression are the “lot” of these families.

**Strengths and Resources for Couples and the Role of the Church**

Couples identified their extended families and aspects of their traditional culture as being their chief resources in dealing with marital conflicts. The role of the church teaching, pastors and local faith community, was largely secondary (providing emergency transportation or making temporary loans) to those already mentioned. These couples related that traditionally, both spouses had access to family members in whom they could confide and expect wise counsel. Grandparents, aunts, uncles and mothers usually provided this kind of care and this counsel began at a very early age and continued into adulthood. It was surprising to me that both men and women turned to grandparents with regard to marital sexual difficulties. When I asked one couple if it would be appropriate for a pastor be involved in such issues, the woman replied, “The pastor is not my grandmother!”

When marital conflicts surfaced a variety of family members were to be sought for advice. Men usually went to their uncles and brothers. Women, living with the husband’s
family, usually sought their husband's sister or another sister-in-law. Family members were readily available to give advice!

Nevertheless, this family information was considered highly private. It seemed that wives were often cast in a double bind. On the one hand, they had a number of family resources to consult for help. On the other hand, they were taught early not to complain and to maintain a social façade. Two female participants emphasized these themes:

Usually the women take care of the kids more than the men. So the conflict may arise out of frustration. But at first we don't say...the woman back home, we are brought up not to complain...

But I think still, even traditionally...a woman would not want to show that she is not having a good marriage....and hiding it. And the sense of responsibility is on the woman. A sign of a good marriage is when the woman is not to show that there is a problem and she is healthy and her husband is healthy. So really, the responsibility is more on the woman to show that it is really working. At least, that is what I think.

A wife may even be labeled a traitor by the family for telling an outsider her problems.

At the end of the interviews, both female pastors encouraged me to interview women separately saying:

If you want to get to the reality you have to talk to women. They will give you the reality and because up to now our society is patriarchal...so you can find few people who really open up, but still men are dominating. If you have 2 men and 10 women in your discussion, don't expect one woman to speak...but in some cases...those will open up to you and especially the younger generations. Even some of the older. But there are some things which you would be afraid of if the wife were to speak everything, even about the bad things, bad experiences in her marriage would be like betraying her husband. And that would not be good. And they, in most cases, it is the women who are like pushed down and are having pain, painful experiences...they tell more and more and more about what they've experienced, their experiences in marriage. Of which, their husbands wouldn't like it to be revealed. Even for us as pastors, we sometimes get these issues.
One wife echoed these pastors’ words, when she said at the end of the interview: “there were probably some things I wanted to share but...I would do them [the interviews] separately...I’d feel better if I was alone in the interview.”

Such words of advice and caution sensitized me to the inherent perils involved for women in revealing family secrets or exposing marital difficulties. During the interviews of this pilot study, I began to understand the vigilance required of the researcher as to when he or she might be treading in a potentially difficult territory risking the possible safety of a woman. Indeed, I was later contacted to counsel one the husbands of the informant couples in lieu of a restraining order placed by the local court. This was the husband of the wife who expressed that it would have been better if she had done the interview alone. It was noted that every precaution should be taken to ensure the safety of the women who participate. It must also be said that the above words provide additional rationale for having gender specific focus groups for the later research at Makumira University.

By and large, in the couples’ experience, the church community played a minimal role in their marital lives. The Tanzanian pastors believed that the Lutheran church could be of more help to couples by reinforcing and vitalizing the role of sponsors or witnesses in Christian weddings and marriages. Sponsors have ideally undergone pre-marital counseling with the particular couple and have been taught to listen and support the husband and wife especially during difficult times. Unfortunately, pastors said that they often do not take their role seriously. One husband stated that the church could conceivably have more of a role in family life in the future. With many children leaving home for education and work, there no longer exists the support structure of the extended family. He recommended:
now that we are living in a society where we don’t have a lot of contact with our parents, most of our generation stay in the cities and there your closest family or the people who know your intimacies are more or less your work mates or your church colleagues or those are the people you can go to for any arbitration of if you feel your marriage is not working out, or if something is wrong somewhere. So those, sometimes you might not have even a very close brother, being in the vicinity where you are. So the church or the workplace is always a next alternative.

At the present time, it seems that the church prefers that extended family or sponsors play the primary counselor role. This might be because of the severe clergy shortage and limited time to do counseling. Often, however, pastors are the last persons to be contacted after the community (extended family and elders) resources have failed. There also may be cultural parameters that restrain what may be shared between pastor and parishioner. But the pastoral and church sponsor’s role may possibly be enlarged in the future, particularly in the cities and larger towns, where couples have no extended family support. Further study is needed to clarify some of these issues.

Marriage Enrichment – a Possibility?

"Marriage enrichment," was described as a small group opportunity for healthy couples to gather, share stories, develop some insights and gain new skills in order to strengthen their relationships and to develop more effective strategies to deal with difficulties. When asked if they thought such a program might be possible in their East African context, the couples and pastors said yes. Typically, the women in the pilot study seemed more enthusiastic about it. One wife, already quoted, spoke of helping spouses “to walk side by side…to talk and share with each other and to learn to love and be with each other.”

In another family, where marital difficulties were evident and a struggle for power and respect was taking place, this woman said:
I think there are a lot of different topics [to be talked about in such a program]. I think there are so many issues that tend to lean more toward the woman, but then I see issues where it is important in these discussions to help empower the woman. But then men don’t always understand what they are telling the woman. That they are telling the woman this...and they are beginning to make informed choices and able to understand things more. But then they are not helping the man to know what a woman can do. So I think it is important to empower both and to share this information when the two of them are there, not women separate from men. And that way they will both learn at the same time and see what, how far they can go.

Among the men in the study, one individual related that it would be helpful “to deal with their problems and their relatives...spouse abuse...not having enough support for themselves...how to improve the love between couples...and just how to solve problems...to have an approach to solve problems...how to react to each other.”

The idea of “marriage enrichment” seemed very new and foreign. It seemed that such a program is quite plausible, at least for highly educated and articulate couples who have had experience with western culture.

Many of these couples mentioned after the interviews that they greatly appreciated this time to talk together about the experience of their marriage. They said that they had never really conversed with each other about these issues. One husband (in the conflicted marriage) said that he had never directly conveyed his traditional view of marriage to his wife. For him it was very helpful to do so. This couple separated several weeks after the interview took place.

At the end of this pilot study, I was optimistic that possibilities exist for enrichment for both men and women. It was also reinforced that such research should be conducted with great sensitivity and respect for couples and culture alike.
CHAPTER FOUR - METHODOLOGY

Research Questions

Traditional action research still formulated its problems from the point of view of the researcher and of science and did not approach the situation from within the framework of the people's own problems...the first step was to learn to formulate the problems with the people and to perceive the research together with them. (Swantz, 1985, p. 9)

The literature review proposed that there was much to be discovered about African couple's experience of marriage. The findings of the pilot study at Iowa State University presented a silhouette or sketch of the respondents' hopes, dreams, struggles, tensions and marital dynamics. Participants in the pilot study also made valuable suggestions such as interviewing not only couples but each gender separately (especially women). The qualitative methodology for this dissertation research project, by and large, followed the phenomenological interviewing procedure of the pilot study, but also widened its approach taking on a participant observation stance – making good use of visits to student and faculty homes for dinner, trips to nearby church communities (Pare Mountains, Arusha, Moshe, and Meru Diocese) and those more distant (Dar es Salaam). A conscious effort was made to establish a spirit of inquiry which was reciprocal, seeking counsel, guidance and critique not only from the Tanzanian faculty and research assistants but also from those respondents who were interviewed.

The following research questions were adopted and slightly revised from the pilot study for the Makumira study:

- What is the meaning and experience of marriage for Tanzanian Christian couples at Makumira University College?
- In a time when gender roles are being renegotiated, what is the experience of being married for husbands and wives individually?
• What issues and concerns are they and other couples in their cultural context wrestling with?
• What cultural, familial, and religious assets do they perceive as strengthening their marriage and family lives?
• What is the church (seminary) doing to enhance marriages? Would a couples program for enriching marriages be culturally appropriate and helpful? What might they suggest be included in such a program?

Why a Qualitative Phenomenological Approach?

To study these questions a qualitative research methodology was employed, specifically a phenomenological methodology. Such an approach seeks to discover the “meaning” of a lived experience, in this case, marriage within the Tanzanian Lutheran community. Given the duration of this study (10 weeks) I believed that such an approach was the most respectful and expedient academic way to penetrate the complexities of marital life of Tanzanian Christian couples. My previous experience teaching at a seminary in the Central African Republic helped to sensitize me to the general issues. While credible objections can be made of yet another white person coming to study Africans and claiming to understand their situation and concerns, I do not believe that only black persons can research blacks and white persons can study white persons. I think much can be learned about our own and other cultures as well as our cultural biases and racism by humbly plunging oneself into another world. As the Jamaican anthropologist, M.G. Smith said to Sally Moore (1994, p. 76), “One does not have to be a triangle to understand geometry.”

The heart of this study or the primary data was derived from the semi-formal interviews that took place largely in my residence at Makumira seminary. Follow-up “member check” sessions took place at a variety of locations: couple’s homes over the dinner table, outside under the trees, at the chapel, on the local public transportation going to Arusha or at a local
restaurant. I saw these meetings as opportunities not only for clarifying people’s described experiences and beliefs, but to observe them on their own turf and attend to my perceived discrepancies and consistencies between words and deeds.

The qualitative tradition itself is founded upon several governing assumptions which provided a guide for the study (Boss, Dahl & Kaplan, 1996; Creswell, 1998; Guba & Lincoln, 1988; Janesick, 2000). First, the nature of reality is complex and is encompassed by multiple realities, individual and socially constructed (Denzon & Lincoln, 1994; Gergen, 1985; Gergen and McNamee, 1992; Moon, Dillon & Sprenkle, 1990). In cross-cultural studies, Angrosino and Perez (2000, p. 675) argue that “Ethnographic truth has come to be seen as a thing of many parts, and no one perspective can claim exclusive privilege in the representation thereof.” Rather, contemporary social and behavioral scientists are increasingly inclined to expect differences of perspective and opinions based on gender, class, and ethnicity. No monolithic view of a culture or segment of society exists; rather a polyphony of voices which may be in harmony or dissonance. In this study, at the suggestion of my co-researchers and the faculty of Makumira, I intentionally sought respondents with wide-ranging perspectives – coming from different dioceses, ethnic backgrounds and locations in order to gather a rich array of perspectives and interpretations. It was hoped that such a sample would provide a mirror of the great diversity within the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Tanzania (ELCT) itself.

A second governing assumption is that knowledge of human relations takes place in the context of human interactions, processes, language, and meaning (Boss, Dahl, & Kaplan, 1996; Gubrium & Holstein, 1993). That is, the understanding of different human realities is for the most part gained through people in conversation reflexively talking about and within
their meanings. Third, there is the assumption that qualitative researchers do not generally assume an expert’s role, but prefer to develop a collaborative research approach with those they are investigating (Denzon & Lincoln, 1994; Geertz, 1973; Woolcott, 1994). The researcher’s position in this scenario is to be an active learner, ideally detailing the story from the participant’s perspective (Denzon, 1989). Such a joint or cooperative process encourages an elastic or discovery oriented methodological design allowing for the use of different techniques or procedures which permit the refinement of questioning process or the addition of new but important materials to be examined (Creswell, 1998; Grigsby, 2001; Janesick, 2000). Such a heuristic method actively encourages a shared construction of reality with new interpretation and connections discovered during the research process. Fourth, qualitative research procedures are particularly appropriate for initial forays into a topic area which will provide a close-up view rather than a distant panoramic perspective (Creswell, 1998; Moustakas, 1994; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Thus it encourages and assumes that researchers will be studying individuals in their natural setting spending extensive time in the field and collecting substantial data. Fifth, this tradition assumes that each researcher holds a set of personal beliefs and values that influence his or her world-view, beliefs, including those actions pertaining to the research itself. The qualitative research approach advocates a rigorous transparent reflexivity or self-awareness that allows the audience into the intellectually, emotionally, philosophically biased world of the researcher (Boss, Dahl, & Kaplan 1996; Creswell, 1998; Gouldner, 1970; Janesick, 2000). Sixth and finally, the qualitative research tradition advocates the generation of a thick, rich description which will ideally uncover and present the “insider’s” perspective or the voices of lived experience (Denzon, 1989; Denzon & Lincoln, 1994, Geertz, 1973).
There are a variety of methodological approaches available to qualitative researchers (Creswell, 1994, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). Each approach is uniquely suited for the particular research questions being asked. Since I was interested in exploring the meaning and experience of marriage for Tanzanian Christian couples at Makumira University, a phenomenological approach was selected as a method of choice for this research project.

Phenomenology seems to have different meanings to different people. Its origins may be found in a variety of disciplines. Its philosophical roots are based upon the writings of Edmund Hussurl and later upon other authors such as Heidegger, Sartre, and Merleau-Ponty (Creswell, 1998). Boss, Dahl and Kaplan (1996) state that this European tradition was given expression in the United States at the University of Chicago school of sociology, primarily in the works of George Herbert Mead's symbolic interactionism and Erving Goffman's dramaturgical model. Other expressions of phenomenology can be found in Schutz's logical analysis of the social structure of everyday reality, Berger and Luckman's sociology of knowledge, as well as labeling theory, existential sociology, sociology of the absurd and ethnomethodology.

For this dissertation research project, a psychological approach to phenomenology was utilized as recommended by Creswell (1998) and described by Moustakas (1994) and Colaizzi (1978). Phenomenological psychology underscores the reality of meaningful experience as the focal point of our knowledge, as opposed to mainstream psychology which sees human behavior more in terms of learned responses to stimuli (Polkinghorne, 1978). Moustakas describes this method as a way of determining "what an experience means for the persons who have had the experience and are able to provide a comprehensive description of it. From the individual descriptions, general or universal meanings are derived, in other
words the essences of structures of the experience” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 13). Colaizzi emphasizes that there is no such thing as THE phenomenological method. Instead, each phenomenologist employs a variety of descriptive methods in concert with his or her objectives to evoke the phenomena at hand. Creswell (1998) summarizes the major tenets of psychological phenomenology as follows:

1. *Epoche* - the researcher needs to be aware of his own biases and preconceived ideas concerning the phenomena he or she is studying.
2. *Research Question* - the researcher writes research questions which relate the experiences that individuals have had and asks them to describe the meaning of those lived experiences.
3. *Collection of Data* - the data is collected through long interviews (with time for searcher reflection) with 5-25 informants.
4. *Data Analysis* - Involving a series of steps: a) horizontalization where the original narrative is divided into statements; b) these statements are then transformed into a cluster of meanings (expressed as psychological or phenomenological concepts); c) a textual and structural description is constructed of the experience.
5. *Conclusion* - A description of the essential structure of the particular phenomena, enabling the reader with a better understanding of the experience of such a phenomenon. (p. 54-55)

Essentially, according to this approach, I asked the respondents to think deeply about their lives, to reveal how they saw themselves and their marriages and how they both lived the reality and constructed it in their own minds. I was not particularly interested in Moustakis’ search for “universal meanings” or the “essences of structure.” In my mind, it would take a foreigner, such as myself, a lifetime’s investment to have such deep knowledge of another culture. Rather, my chief interest and goal was to uncover, richly describe and make available to the marriage and family therapy profession and the Makumira community the variety of lived marital experiences, and to do so as accurately and faithfully as possible.

Richardson’s (1994) notion of crystallization provides an apt metaphor for doing research in other cultures in a postmodern era. The image of a crystal connotes a multi-dimensionality and invites the researcher to peer through the many variety of shapes and angles of approach.
What we see through a crystal depends upon how we view it and how we hold it up to the light. Richardson argues that the incorporation of a variety of disciplines (art, history, dance, architecture, music, literature etc.) is of utmost importance in the research design in order to better understand the phenomena. In my case, I was well aware of the complexities of working in Africa and possible difficulties in relying solely upon the interviewing procedure. Often, out of respect, power issues or self-protection, an interviewee’s views and responses may well depend upon who is asking the questions and why. I will explore this issue more in depth in the next sections. But suffice to say, my methodological strategy was to look through as many of the facets of the cultural crystal as I possibly could in order to order to understand segments of Tanzanian Christian marriage and family lives. At the same time, I wanted to avoid the mistake of many development organizations which have implemented projects without the participation of the target group at the initial research exploratory stages (Swantz, 1985). Specifically, in my case, the possible development and realization of a marriage enrichment course for Tanzanian Lutheran clergy should be grounded in their experiences and perspectives rather than in mine own American marriage and therapist milieu!

**Crossing Cultural Borders – the Research Adventure**

**Gaining Access – Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania and Makumira University College** - An introductory letter from the Division of Global Mission of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America was instrumental in beginning correspondence between myself and the Provost, Gwakisa Mwakagali, and the approval of the faculty to do my research at Makumira University College. This institution was recommended to me by directors of
DGM as it is not only the largest Lutheran seminary in Africa and most open to doing research, but it was presumed that many of the spouses of pastors could speak English.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania (ELCT) has a membership of 2.5 million and is comprised of twenty dioceses, geographically situated in most of mainland Tanzania. German Lutheran Missionary Societies (Harburg, Neukirchen, Berlin, and Bethel) arrived in the late 1800's, followed by Swedish, American, Danish and Finnish mission groups in the early to mid 20th century (Akyoo, 1987). These mission groups brought to Tanzania a form of Christianity wrapped in their own unique cultures, with their own church polities, pieties, as well as evangelical, health, and educational stratagies. The ELCT was officially formed in 1963 by a merger of seven churches having 400,000 baptized members at that time. Since then, the ELCT has developed numerous services benefiting Tanzania society, in partnership with international churches, NGO's, and the government of Tanzania: health centers (20 hospitals and 120 primary health care institutions), educational institutions (50 secondary schools, 20 vocational training institutions, 2 teachers training colleges, and one university with three colleges), and numerous development projects (dairy cattle, fish ponds, women's groups) (ELTC.org).

Serving as a delegate from my home Southeast Iowa Synod for the 100th year anniversary celebration of our Pare partner diocese, I had the opportunity shortly after my arrival to Tanzania to visit a number of these impressive educational, health and development institutions and projects. I was also able to attend an international partners' meeting and participate in our own synod's smaller consultations with the Bishop and staff of the Pare Diocese. These encounters often involved the requests for funding of a number of very worthwhile projects or institutions. I was once again struck by the economic and
technological imbalance of the North-South relations and the status we were given by virtue of our economic power and the historic relationship between our cultures and churches. If power can be understood as interventionist in the sense of seeking command and control in a spirit of non-mutuality (Christians, 2000) — I did not witness this spirit there on the part of the partners. I however, saw a tug and pull reciprocity and mutual respect in the dialogues. It also became more apparent for me, as a representative of the North and my ranking as a pastor and PhD. candidate, of how such an “imbalance” could enter and stifle the quality of conversations during research interviews. If as Benmayer (1991) states that, “Social empowerment enables people to speak and speaking empowers,” (p. 159) my ambition was to empower (encourage, embolden, listen, clarify) my participants to talk of their lives. If becoming vulnerable (sharing and exposing the graces as well as trials and tribulations within my relationships, within my own marriage, and with my own children and extended family) assists people in becoming more critically conscious of their own lives and relationships, as Paolo Freire (1970, 1973) articulates, I felt it would be important for me to allow people into my own life and expose my own experiences in a reciprocal, respectful and mutually empowering way.

Makumira University College (MU[CO]), formerly the Lutheran Theological College Makumira, is part of the Tumaini University System (consisting also of Kilimanjaro Christian Medical College and Iringa University College) of the ELCT. It is the oldest campus of the Tumaini University, begun in 1947 and developed by the different Lutheran churches of Tanzania for the purposes of forming pastors, theologians and other church leaders. It is located at the foot of Mt. Meru in northern Tanzania surrounded by luscious
coffee plantations. The snow-capped summit of Mt. Kilimanjaro is about 65 kilometers away and can be seen on clear days.

In 2000, Makumira had a student body of about 180 individuals. I also saw students from Kenya, Rwanda, Ethiopia and the United States. The seminary offers a Bachelor of Divinity program and Master's Degree courses for advanced degrees in theology. At the time of my study, there were 24 faculty members on campus including eight professors from partner churches in Germany, Denmark, Finland and the United States. I was welcomed as part of the Research Institute Humanities Program and graciously supported by the provost and faculty.

Anyone entering a field of research, particularly in a different culture, must be able to gain access to the group (Denzon, 1989) and connect with them, hopefully, in an atmosphere characterized by trust and in free and open exchange (Bogdan & Taylor, 1975). I believe this happened on two levels: a formal and an informal level. On a formal level, upon my arrival to Makumira I was asked by the provost to make a presentation to the faculty stating my purpose, research questions, procedures and rationale for such a project in order to gain their official approval. To my chagrin I was told that if I did not receive the faculty's backing, my study would be in jeopardy! I thought I had already received such an endorsement! This group proved to be the “gate-keepers” of Makumira and it was of utmost importance to obtain their sanction. In any case, I made my presentation in fear and trembling and was very happy that I had done so – very helpful suggestions, clarifications and advice were given: First, the faculty was very much against the remuneration of any participants in the study. As members of a research institution, they believed that students should grow accustomed to and also learn from visiting researchers. They did suggest,
however, that the participants would welcome beverages and snacks during the course of the interviews. Second, they graciously provided me with a vacant faculty home to do the actual interviews. They thought that such a home (located in the middle of the campus) would equip me with a relatively quiet, yet easily accessible surroundings to better facilitate the project. Third, after reading the informed consent forms, the faculty confirmed and emphasized the importance of upholding confidentiality. One Tanzania professor explained, “We Tanzanians are like the reserved Norwegians of northern Europe. The Nigerians are like Italians of the Mediterranean area. You have to somehow make sure that what we say will be held in confidence or we won’t talk!” Fourth, and perhaps the most important, one member said that he was glad that I was there to learn about their marriage and family lives. He believed that the Tanzanian Christian culture had much to teach the West and hoped that this might be included in the report.

The sanction or blessing of my research project was publicly announced after morning chapel when I was officially introduced by the provost to the student body. Dr. Mwakgali asked me to briefly describe my research and how the students and their spouses would be involved. He added that the faculty had endorsed my project and urged the students to participate so that the ELCT could learn more about strengthening and caring for their marriages and family lives. I added that our conversations would be entirely confidential and no one would be personally identifiable.

Gaining access on an informal level was of equal importance to gaining the approval of the “gate-keepers” of Makumira. Though I had gained the backing of the administrators, I knew I had to develop a rapport and a reputation among the student body. Thus the first two weeks (before I went to the Pare Diocese) I spent “hanging out”: getting to know the
students, attending classes, visiting with people in the shade of trees outside their dorm rooms, joining groups of people as they traveled by bus to Arusha, interviewing co-researcher candidates, visiting the spouses' class, attending morning chapel and tea time with members of the faculty. These times afforded me an opportunity to describe what I was doing on an individual basis and answer questions like: What are you doing here? Who will your research benefit? Who is funding you? Why do you want to learn about us? How long will you be here? Hanging out was one of my best and most enjoyable researcher skills and I continued to do this throughout my stay!

In retrospect, I believe I was perceived as a respected guest researcher who enjoyed being with Africans, and asked a lot of interesting and different questions, but was always conscious of his limited time. I probably emanated some distress as I felt like there were always so many things to do and discover and so little time. On a personal note, although it was exhilarating and energizing being at Makumira and a great privilege to do research there, I often wrestled with loneliness and anxiety. Being away for just 10 weeks from my wife and boys helped me to sympathize with many African students who chose to study far from their homes and families for much longer periods of time. The example of their diligence while pursuing lofty goals was inspiring for me. It must also be said, that European and American colleagues welcomed me royally with their delicious meals, occasional rides to Arusha and helpful suggestions.

Faculty Adviser – Co-Researchers – the Research Team. A very important person in this project was my faculty adviser, Dr. Andrew Kyomo. In my letters to the provost and to an American couple who taught at the University I asked for suggestions for an individual who: 1) the community trusts to uphold confidentiality; 2) is competent, knows the community and
can teach me about Tanzanian familial life; 3) is a “gatekeeper” (Creswell, 1998) or an insider who can provide access to the community; 4) can point to possible participants who would provide quality information; 5) is able to critique, challenge, supplement or confirm my perspectives; 6) will read selected transcripts of recorded information and provide analysis; and 7) possibly accompany and assist me during the interviews. Dr. Kyomo proved to be an excellent resource person and a bridge between Tanzanian and American cultures.

He was the chairperson of the Pastoral and Liberal Arts Department and had received his Masters of Divinity at the Moravian Seminary at Bethlehem in Pennsylvania, and a Masters of Theology at Princeton Seminary. Dr. Kyomo guided and assisted me in the first five duties described above. We had a variety of discussions together and he instructed me concerning key African concepts that were brought up in the interviews. Dr. Kyomo was above all instrumental in opening up resources at Makumira’s library (one of the largest theological libraries in Africa) pointing to Africanist scholars such as Benezet Bujo, Laurent Magesa and John Mbiti and directing me to theses completed by Makumira students at their internship sites. Through these theses, I was able to gain additional insights, ask more relevant questions and triangulate findings through the reading of local research subjects such as: Practices and Problems of Christian Marriage in Dar-es-Salaam (Ngalen, 1989); Brideweath as a Problem: A Case Study of the Kinga of the ELCT (Kyando, 1996); Separation and or Divorce and Re-Marriage from the Christian Perspective: A Case Study in the ELCT Northern Diocese Eastern Kilimanjaro District (Johanson, 1995); Marriage Customs and Rites Among the Meru Christians in the Diocese of the ELCT in Tanzania (Akyoo, 1994) etc.
Two additional co-researchers, a male and female, were interviewed and selected from among five candidates. Their names were provided to me by Dr. Kyomo and other faculty members as people who had assisted in previous research studies and had proven to be very able informants and assistants. Gerson Mgaya and Esther Nguomo were asked to be my co-researchers. Gerson was a second year bachelor of divinity student studying to be a pastor. Esther had been a pastor for a number of years and was in the masters degree program for advanced studies in theology. Both were excellent at speaking English and were not married. Esther came from the Pare Diocese (my Iowa Synod was in a partner relationship with them) and provided me with valuable insights to her ethnic group. Gerson came from the Southern Diocese and was of the Bena ethnic group. Both were well-liked and respected within the Makumira community by students and faculty alike. As co-researchers they assisted me in the following ways: 1) helped to identify, invite, and schedule respondents for interviews; 2) acted as translators for wives in several of the sessions; 3) listened to several recorded interviews or read transcripts and provided analysis (when given permission by participants); and 4) provided a “member check” for the interviews they participated in. These two co-researchers (with additional assistance from the faculty adviser) were largely responsible for the selection and invitation of student (and their spouses) respondents to participate in the study. It was my role to invite the Makumira faculty and their spouses to be interviewed.

I presumed upon my arrival to Makumira that all would be able to speak English. This was true for the seminary students (since all classes were taught in English), but unfortunately not true for many of their wives. In Tanzania there are three levels of education: basic (7 years of primary education); secondary (four years of ordinary level and 2 years of advanced level) and tertiary (up to three years of a specialization). The first seven
years of primary education are taught in the national language of Kiswahili. Only at the secondary levels are classes taught in English. Among the ten couples interviewed, three of the seminary student wives were fluent in English and had attended secondary school, one wife spoke French which I am relatively fluent in – the other six had attended several years of primary school and had not learned English. This proved to be one of hurdles in the study. We learned early during the debriefing sessions of the interviews that some couples would not be comfortable with having an unmarried individual doing the translating. They argued, from a traditional African perspective, that singles are not mature adults since they are not married – how could they possibly do the translating for us and know what we are talking about? Our research team dealt with this by providing a number of options: 1) we first gave respondents a choice of the co-researchers as translators; 2) we asked the couple to chose a trustworthy individual in the Makumira community they would like to translate for their spouse; 3) last, the spouses were given the option to translate for their wives. In the end, ten couple interviews took place (there were in total 15 student couples living on campus) with four couples choosing a co-researcher translator, two male students translating for their wives, three couples knowing English and one couple speaking in English and French. In the seven female focus and individual interview our groups, female co-researcher translated for only one focus group (all of the others were conducted in English). No translators were necessary for the male focus and individual interviews.

The presence of a translator added significantly to the challenge of providing a watertight confidentiality. We met that challenge by providing our participants with a number of safeguards and options for protecting their private information. I personally stressed to the research team the potential damaging effects for our participants and the community if any
personal information should be disclosed. I wanted to honor the advice and warnings of the faculty and the Makumira culture.

**Description of Sampling Technique and Participants**

Since I was determined to use a phenomenological approach to investigate how students and their spouses of Makumira University College see and experience their marriages, couples and individuals were chosen by the research team on the basis of criterion, opportunistic and snowball sampling method. A variety of types of interviews were completed: married couple's interviews, gender specific focus groups, and one-on-one interviews.

Initially, the criteria for participants were as follows: 1) they were born and spent a major part of their life in Tanzania; 2) they considered themselves to be Christians of either Protestant or Catholic background; 3) they had been married for over a period of a year; 4) they were members of the Makumira community; and 5) could expound or verbalize on the subject of marriage. These criteria, however, were relaxed during the course of the study to include (five) unmarried female students, a newly married couple (3 months) and two couples from neighboring countries. My reasoning in making this selection was as follows: First, in keeping with the notion of “crystallization” I wanted to be able to see how these individuals, as outsiders, perceived the quality of marriage and family lives at Makumira. Second, I wanted to discover and draw comparisons between the responses of the couples of the study and the insights of foreigners and single individuals. Third, I wanted to know how educated single women perceived the institution of marriage and whether marriage was
something they wished to participate in personally. Ideally, we would have interviewed single men as well, but none were available to be interviewed on campus.

In keeping with the objective of having a diverse sample and hoping to reflect the heterogeneity of the ELCT, the research team attempted to obtain participants from as many of the twenty dioceses and ethnic backgrounds as possible. We also endeavored to enroll couples representing a variety of types of relationships in order to further enrich the sample. The following “types” of marriages were sought: 1) “traditional African” (with strong cultural and gender defined roles); 2) a more contemporary “conjugal marriage” (marked by mutual decision making and de-emphasis upon the tradition); 3) “interwoven marriages” (those located between the “traditional” and contemporary conjugal type of relationship); and 4) mixed ethnic group marriages. My reasoning for making these selections were guided by suggestions in the literature (Creswell, 1995; Colaizze, 1978) that a varied group of participants would help to enrich the findings and augment the rich description of couple’s lives. This sample was limited to 10 couple interviews. Table 1 (on the following page) provides important general demographic information about the couples.
### Table 1 – General Demographic Information Concerning Ten Couples

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnic Groups Represented:</th>
<th>Bena, Maasai, Sukuma, Wahaya, Akambo, Chagga, Pare, Bena</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ELCT Dioceses Represented &amp; other Churches:</td>
<td>Eastern Coastal, Ulanga-Kilambero, Southern, Arusha Anglican, Kenya Evangelical Lutheran Church.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Age:</td>
<td>Men: 35; Women: 29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Years Married:</td>
<td>7.7 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Number of Children:</td>
<td>2.4 children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women’s Education:</td>
<td>All attended primary school. Three women attended secondary school. These women were spouses of pastors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men’s Education:</td>
<td>All completed secondary school and seven were in Bachelor’s Program and 3 were in Master’s Program</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

On the average these couples were married for 7.7 years, had known each other before their marriage 3.15 years and had 2.4 children (men’s and women’s average age was 35 and 29 respectively). Seven different dioceses were represented: Eastern Coastal, Ulanga-Kilambero, Southern, Arusha, Northwestern, Pare, and Northern Dioceses –with 2 couples representing the North-Western Diocese and two other couples coming from the Anglican church in Rwanda and the Kenya Evangelical Lutheran Church. A variety of ethnic or tribal backgrounds were represented: Bena (2 couples), Maasai, Sukuma, Wahaya, Akambo, Chagga, and two mixed marriages of Pare and Gwena, and Bena and Chagga. I was told that the Bena tribes are more prevalent in the southern areas of the ELCT. All of the men had completed the two levels of secondary school and were currently in the Bachelors of Divinity program. One had attended a church school for a certificate in theology and church
management and others had attended teacher training school and general agricultural school. All of the women had attended primary school through various levels with two women going on for degrees at pre-nursing and poly-technique schools. Three of the women had graduated from secondary school and had completed degrees in nursing, social work and received a diploma in medicine.

Two of the major techniques used by qualitative researchers are participation observation and individual interviews. For feminist researchers the one-to-one interview is still the most important research method (Finch, 1984; Wilkinson, 1998). These researchers have observed, however, that such individual interviews may reproduce the power (asymmetrical) relationships between the researcher and the respondents. Madriz (2000), in contrast, argues that focus groups have certain advantages to one-to-one interviews, particularly for women of color: First, focus groups may minimize or reduce the control and influence of the interviewer by tilting the balance power toward the collective. The power of the group may help to encourage people to more freely express themselves and exchange personal experiences. Second, focus groups facilitate a multi-vocality which may validate the participants experience and provide the researcher with a more complete perspective emphasizing the complexities and contradictions of the phenomena being studied. Third, these groups may help to counter the cultural politeness code (to say what participants perceive the interviewer wants to hear) through their own collective strength in numbers and be enabled to articulate their distinct understandings and perspective. Fourth, participants may be able to challenge and confront each other’s contradictions and responses in a manner that the interviewer would not be able to. Fifth, such groups may help to raise consciousness of their social situations and be instrumental in the fostering of social change. Sixth, Piercy
and Nickerson (1996) assert that having additional focus groups may help to triangulate other methods.

Heeding the suggestion by participants in the pilot study to interview women without men present, I decided to conduct gender specific focus groups and individual one-to-one interviews in addition to the above mentioned couples' interviews. Participants were selected purposely based on the same criteria described above for the couple interviews. Ultimately we conducted four focus groups and three one-to-one interviews with women and three focus groups and five one-to-one interviews with the men. Though focus groups are usually composed of 6-12 individuals (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990), I kept the number to 3-4 individuals and sometimes decided to continue the interview with just two members when there was an emergency absence. Phenomenologically, the focus of this project was in favor of depth over breadth and I found myself receiving illuminating information in these smaller groups.

Confidentiality measures were not water-tight in focus groups nor could they ever be. I, however, emphasized and encouraged respondents to respect and to hold as confidential that which might be said by the other participants. I assured them that they would be anonymous in the study (never be identified by name). I also said that not only did I hope to learn from them about their lives, but I hoped they might learn more about each other. In addition, I said that their responses to my question were purely voluntary. They did not have to answer or respond to any of my questions in front other participants, if they were not comfortable doing so.

As said above, there were three individual interviews for the women and five such interviews with men. These individuals, both females and males, were highly articulate,
seasoned, self-assured pastors or faculty members. They were proud of their African culture, intrigued but wary of the West. In Tanzania, where leadership behavior is known as authoritarian and respect to one’s social rank must be handled delicately (Ryen, 1999) these individuals enjoyed informing me about their culture and personal lives. I believe they saw me as an interviewer of equal rank or below them in the social hierarchy of the Tanzanian world.

Table 2 describes demographic information about the female respondents who participated in focus groups and individual interviews. There were four female focus groups and three one-to-one individual interviews.

**Table 2 – Demographic Information about Women Participants in Focus Groups and Individual Interviews**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnic Groups Represented:</th>
<th>Iraqw, Chagga, Nyaturu, Pare, Meru, Malila, Nyambo</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ELCT Dioceses Represented</td>
<td>Northern, Pare, Central, Meru, Arusha, Karagwe, Mbulu, &amp; Moravian Church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&amp; other Churches:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Age:</td>
<td>Women: 34.4; Spouses: 38.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Years Married:</td>
<td>12 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Number of Children:</td>
<td>3 children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education:</td>
<td>3 women completed primary school, 9 women completed secondary school; 5 women in master’s program, 3 women with master’s or doctoral degrees.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In total, thirteen women were interviewed in this gender specific category. The average age was 34.4 but most of the participants were in their middle or late twenties (7 of 13). Their husbands’ age averaged 38.8. The average number of years married for the eight married women in this sample was 12 (median 11.5) with a range from 1 to 33 years. Of the
seven women who had children, the average number was three children per household. On the Makumira campus there were 15 wives of students taking part in the spouse’s program, thirteen were interviewed (Ten wives in the couple’s interviews and three in the focus groups). Two faculty wives (of eleven) agreed to be interviewed and also the sole African female faculty member. All of the seminary five single students had attended secondary school and were presently enrolled in the Masters’ of Divinity program. The education for wives of the seminary students and faculty included primary school, home craft vocational school, teacher’s college, and an Associate degree in accounting at community college in the United States. Three women had received higher degrees (masters and doctoral degrees) in either Europe or the United States. Seven different ethnic groups were represented among the female participants (Iraqw (3), Chagga (2), Pare (4) Nyaturu (2), Meru, Malila, and Nyambo) as well as seven different dioceses of the ELCT (Northern (4), Pare (2), Central (2), Meru, Arusha, Karagwe, Mbulu). One faculty wife was a member of the Moravian church.

Table 3 (on the following page) provides demographic information concerning the male participants in focus groups and individual interviews. There were three focus groups and five one-to-one individual interviews
### Table 3 – Demographic Information about Male Participants In Focus Groups and Individual Interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnic Groups Represented:</th>
<th>Wanji, Masai, Kinga, Turu, Sukuma, Chagga, Meru, Pare, Malila</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ELCT Dioceses Represented</td>
<td>Ulanga-Kilombero, South Central, South-Western, Central, East of Lake Victoria, Northern, Arusha, Meru, Pare, Konde &amp; Moravian Church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&amp; other Churches:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Age:</td>
<td>41.7 years; Wife: 34 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Years Married:</td>
<td>16.2 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Number of Children:</td>
<td>3 children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education:</td>
<td>All men completed secondary school; 6 in bachelor’s Program, 2 in master’s program; 3 completed master’s Program, 2 have Ph.D’s and one law degree.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In total, thirteen men were interviewed, with five individual interviews and three focus groups. Their average age was 41.7 years old and they were married 16.2 years. Their wife’s age averaged 34 years and they had 3 children per household. All of these men had gone through secondary school and were either in the Bachelor of Divinity program or on the faculty having received advanced degrees. Seven different dioceses of the ELCT were represented (Ulanga-Kilombero, South Central, South-Western, Central, East of Lake Victoria, Northern, Arusha (2), Meru, Pare, and Konde) with one faculty member coming from the Moravian church. There were also eight different ethnic groups coming from a variety of locations in Tanzania: Wanji (2), Masai (2), Kinga, Turu, Sukuma, Chagga, Meru, Pare, and Malila. All of the Bachelor of Divinity student’s wives had received some education in primary school except one. There were six men who were in the bachelor’s of divinity program and two men in the master’s of theology program. Five respondents had
received additional degrees (masters or doctoral degrees) in either Europe or the United States.

All in all seventeen different ethnic groups were represented and fifteen of twenty dioceses were part of the sample. The number of children in their families (about three) was below the Tanzanian national mean of 5.1 in rural areas and 4.3 in Dar es Salaam. There was an average age difference of five years, between husbands and wives. Twelve of the thirteen wives of this study had attended and completed different levels of primary school and could read – in comparison to a recent report by Unicef (2000), where only 64% of the women in Tanzania were literate. Many of the women had pursued or were in the process of receiving higher training or skills and higher educational degrees.

**Interview Procedure and the Structure of Interviews**

My co-researchers were largely responsible for the selection and recruitment of the participants in the study. These participants in turn recommended their friends on campus who might be willing to share their experiences. Gradually, after news of the quality and substance of the interviews had disseminated around campus, I began to invite individuals and couples to participate (particularly among the faculty and advanced level theology students). The co-researchers asked me to prepare a letter to prospective participants describing the study and indicating some of the questions that would be asked. It was emphasized, in this letter, that I as the researcher was seeking to be educated by the respondents. There were no right or wrong answers to the questions I would be asking. What was important was that they relate their experiences. If they agreed to be interviewed, an appointment would be made to meet with me on a week day afternoon at my home.
Participants were given about a week to consider taking part in the interviews and I was available to meet with them to answer any questions.

We tried to intersperse the interviews (couples, women's focus group, men's focus group) but were largely dependent upon the respondents' availability. Often there were last minute emergencies where an individual was unable to attend a focus group or child-care difficulties prevented couples from participating. In these cases, the student co-researchers did an excellent job of providing last minute substitutions.

When the couples and individuals consented to be interviewed, they were given a one page questionnaire to complete and hand in at the time of the interview. Two copies were given to couples to fill out. Invariably, only one form would be returned, completed by the male seminary student. These men said that they completed these for their wives since they had difficulties with English. This "Background Information" form is located in the Appendix and asks for demographic data as well as several questions: 1) What important information about your church (or diocese) should a researcher/pastor like me, interested in marriage and family issues, know about? 2) What important information about your tribe should a pastor/researcher like me, interested in marriage and family issue, know about? 3) What are some of your hopes and dreams in your marriage and family life?

All of the couples' interviews (except one) and focus groups took place around the dining room table of my home. Several of the interviews of faculty and graduate theology students took place in their homes. Phenomenological studies emphasize the importance of investigating families in their natural settings. (Boss, et al., 1996, Creswell 1998). My previous experience in Africa visiting student homes complete with the pleasant pandemonium of children and the entering and exiting of many visitors, had taught me that it
would be very difficult to conduct interviews in that setting. Several of the interviews in faculty and graduate student homes confirmed my suspicions!

Upon entering my home, I greeted the participants offering them beverages and snacks. Photographs of my family and work afforded me the opportunity to describe little bit of my own personal and vocational life. I usually then asked them to show me where they lived in Tanzania on the map I had placed on the wall and describe to me a little bit about their region. I then commenced with an introductory statement, echoing what was said in the letter of introduction that they received:

I am interested in interviewing African Christian married couples in order to gain a better understanding of African marriage and family relationships. I would like to talk with you about your marriage and family relationships as well as about others in your community.

My hope is that these discussions may lead to the development of a marriage enrichment program at Makumira University... a program where marriage relationships are strengthened and increase respect and understanding between men and women. I also hope to take back to Iowa some of your beliefs and perspectives that could benefit American couples and families there.

Would you please help to educate me! Please remember that there are no correct answers. I’m interested in what your experiences are and what you think as individuals, as men and women and together as couples. I’d like to find out if there are any similarities and differences between men and women. Please do excuse me if I interrupt you to clarify a point or to hear your unique perspective or hear the perspective of your partner. In this room (among couples and members of the focus group) it will be ok to agree, disagree or even challenge other’s perspectives! I as a researcher will not consider such a challenge to me or others impolite! I also want you to know that what you say will be treated with strict confidentiality. [I would ask you to respect your fellow focus group members and keep confidential that which is shared in this room]

Participants were then given and explained the informed consent form (see Appendix) approved and mandated by the Iowa State University Human Subjects Committee. Many of the participants were perplexed by this particular procedure and wondered why it was
necessary. Time was taken to describe Human Subject Committee, the review process, the preventive measures taken by ISU to ensure the safety of the subject involved as well as the transparency and ethical considerations of the particular study.

The following seven questions formed the basis of the open-ended semi-structured interview. I was also ready with some additional questions, based upon the literature review and pilot study, to further stimulate the conversation and clarify meanings.

1) Describe how you came to be married? (How did you meet? How were your parents and other family members involved? Why were you attracted to him/her? Was there a “family history check?” What role did a brideprice pay? What do you think of bridewealth etc.) For the gender specific groups: How would you describe a woman’s/ man’s experience of being married? (Is it easier or more difficult to be a husband or wife? Why?)

2) What’s the “meaning” of your marriage for you? How would you define or describe marriage to me? What do you hope for in your marriage (How do your traditional ethnic beliefs and practices regarding marriage relate to your Christian beliefs and practices? Are there any extended family expectations? What role do children play in the defining of your marriage?

3) What do you see are some of the issues or problems that couples in your churches are struggling with? (Fertility issues? Decisions over finances? Role of the extended family? Wife beating? Infidelity? AIDS? Single parent households? Divorce? Migration?

4) Is there a problem or issue, that you would share with me, that you have wrestled with as couple during your marriage that you have overcome? How did you overcome it? (Who makes the decisions in your family? Do you have specific roles or responsibilities within the family?)

5) What would you say are some of the resource or strengths couples have to deal with these issues? (What is the role of the extended family? What traditions in the culture could be revisited? What is the role of the elders?)

6) What role does the church (pastors, laypersons and religious teachings) have in dealing with marriage and family concerns? (What is the role of sponsors? How might the church be of better service to marriages and families?)

7) Would / how might a marriage enrichment program be helpful at Makumira? What kinds of issues do you think might be discussed?

These face to face interviews – couples, focus groups and individual – lasted about 90 minutes, not including the introduction to the study period and the explanation of the informed consent.
A variety of measures were taken to help ensure everyone’s full participation. One statement that I made during the interview was: “What’s really important to me is the sharing of your experience. I don’t want you to think of how I might answer this question or what a proper response is…. I really would like your perspective.” Occasionally, when I suspected that the participants might not be offering their perspectives that reflected their lived experience, I would sometimes intentionally bungle my summary of their most recent point: “Now I don’t want to put words in your mouth but this is what I heard you say…Is this right? I really would like to you to share your experience and perspective.” In doing this, I hoped to encourage respondents to a higher level of participation by not only allowing (or even provoking) people to disagree but to affirm them in doing so. I hoped to demonstrate and make clear that their contention was not only permitted but preferred.

The women’s role, as seen in the couples’ interviews, was to remain inconspicuous and to give their husbands center stage. Some of the women said that it is considered not respectful for them to speak publicly in their husband’s presence. A female pastor, on the other hand, argued that it’s not a question of respect, but a matter of few opportunities when males and females were actually together.

Not that it’s a matter of respect, but you know the society [Maasai and Arusha] in which I am working right now…there’s no meeting of many women. If there is a meeting, there are men there and you find that women do not want to speak when men are there. But like myself, when I am with my husband, you will not find me speaking very much; it’s not because of the tradition, but my husband…Really my nature is that I don’t like to speak that very much, yeah. And I don’t know if all women are like that…So the tradition is not that women should not speak when men and women are together. But women here and men there. And bring them together…you know….men, they always, excuse me…but I …maybe you might tell me otherwise….that sometimes…men, they want to be seen that they know more! (Female Individual Interview)
With this tendency for men to monopolize the conversation in the couple’s interview, I made every effort to provide opportunities for women to speak and offer their perspective. I often found myself making statements like: “Thank you for sharing your thoughts with me (to the man). Now it’s really important in this study that I hear from your wife. What is your view?” Or “Let’s hear from your wife first with regard to this question!” The husbands, by and large, consented to my interruptions and we often heard astonishingly profound words come from their wife’s mouths. And these husbands did then listen.

Data Collection Procedure and Analysis

As said previously, there were four main methods of data collection: a brief written questionnaire (background information form), couple interviews, focus groups and individual interviews. Immediately after each of these interviews were completed, I conducted debriefings which asked three questions of the participants: 1) What was your experience of this interview? 2) What would you change about this interview (about the questions or my interviewing style)? and 3) What did you like about the interview process?

Each interview was audiotaped and later transcribed. A protocol form was used for the interview itself, which enabled me to organize my thoughts, and where thumbnail observations and field notes could be taken. Notes were also taken by one of the co-researchers when they were translating or given permission to be present at the interviews.

Due to the lengthy process involved in transcribing tapes, problems with frequent interruptions with the power supply and lack of transcribers, only eight of twenty-five interviews were transcribed in Tanzania (the rest were completed in the U.S.). Therefore adaptations were made in the methodology developed by Colaizzi (1978) which depends
upon the written word of the transcriptions. Whereas Colaizzi’s methods urges the researcher to read the transcriptions several times, I (and the co-researchers when given permission) listened to the tapes two or three times and took extensive notes on the conversations. When I was able to transcribe the tapes, I followed his method more closely.

Colaizzi recommends a rigorous seven step process that is described below. As in my pilot study, all steps were followed except the sixth one which recommends the construction of a “fundamental” or exhaustive structure. I believe that the nature, complexity and scope of the phenomena being researched makes it impossible to collapse the variety of themes into such a fundamental statement. Instead, steps four and five (the clustering of themes and descriptions) were methodologically highlighted and implemented. The following is a summary of Colaizzi’s process:

**Colaizzi’s Seven-Step Process**

1. The interviews are listened to 2 or 3 times or the transcribed interviews are read several times so that the researcher can get a sense of the narratives.
2. Extracting Significant Statements - Significant phrases and sentences related to the phenomena are extracted from each of the transcriptions. Similar or repetitive responses are tallied and eliminated
3. Formulating meanings - Meanings of the extracted statements are transformed into the words of the researcher. Colaizzi states that this is a particularly difficult step. On the one hand, one must use an "ineffable" quality described as creative insight where the researcher must attempt to discern the hidden meanings of what one’s participants have described. And on the other hand, one must never impose one’s own meanings severing the connection with the original narratives.
4. Cluster of Themes - From the aggregate meanings that are formed above, cluster of themes are formed. The difficulties of this particular step are similar to that of step 3. Here, Colaizzi recommends that the common themes be gathered. In my pilot study I diverged from the recommended procedure and retained the discrepant themes, because they contributed to complexity of understanding the meaning of African Christian marriages. I did the same in this study.
   a. The cluster of themes are then referred back to the original transcriptions in order to validate them. This step is performed in order to examine the concordance or discordance between cluster theme and raw data. If the clusters contain themes that are unconnected or foreign to the original narratives, then the preceding procedures must be re-examined.
b. In this phase discrepancies may be noted between the various clusters and judgment must be made as to whether the themes contradict, complement, or enrich the complexity of the phenomena. The inclusion of such discrepancies, states Colaizzi, depend upon the researcher's tolerance for ambiguity.

5. **Exhaustive Description** - The results are then compiled into an exhaustive description from the above results.

6. **Statement of Fundamental Structure** - The researcher attempts to articulate a complete or exhaustive structure of the phenomena - an unequivocal statement of identification of fundamental structure.

7. **Validation Step** - A return to each of the subjects to critique, affirm, supplement the researcher's descriptive results. (Colaizzi, 1978, p. 58-62)

This data analysis procedure was used for all of the interviews. For couples and individual interviews and focus group, I compared and contrasted the various clusters of themes for both men and women. Here, my intention was to understand the "reality" or unique experience of marriage and family life for women and men.

The validation step or member check (though very difficult to implement) was completed for all of what my co-researchers and I determined to be the most significant interviews (seven of the couples, ten of the thirteen women and nine of thirteen men). Key phrases and statements were noted, questions of clarification and interpretations of meanings concerning key experiences and concepts were asked and an exhaustive summary description of the content of the interview was presented orally to the participants for their correction or validation. This validation step occurred primarily at their homes during dinner, but also outside their dorm rooms, at a local restaurant or even in one case on the bus going to Arusha!

**Trustworthiness and Legitimacy Issues**

Qualitative researchers use a variety of research standards, techniques, data sources and indicators of rigor to achieve trustworthiness (Creswell, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994,
Lincoln and Guba, 1985, 1989). The categories of trustworthiness, legitimacy and verification, simply ask if the findings of the study are accurate, believable and right. Certainly, the value of the findings are contingent upon the authenticity and legitimacy of the results. Lincoln and Guba (1985) state that the criteria for establishing such a trustworthiness are: 1) Credibility, or the accuracy with which the researcher represents the views and experiences of the participants; 2) Transferability, or the applicability of the findings to similar settings; 3) Dependability, or the degree to which people who are not involved in the research can follow or track the research process and discern if the raw data corresponds with the conclusions; 4) Confirmability, or the process of checking interpretations and conclusions for researcher bias. While postmodern feminists (Christians, 2000; Lincoln, 1995) have pioneered important new criteria such as: community (does the research serve the interest of the community?); participatory voice (does the research give voice to the participants?); an ethic of care (Is there a spirit of interdependence, cooperation, intimacy and empathy about the research process?); and community transformation (Is the aim of the research to foster social justice through the transformation of relations in the community?) – The earlier criteria provide essential groundwork for these latter critical considerations. The standards of verification that were used to meet the criteria of trustworthiness were: clarifying of researcher bias and self-reflexivity, triangulation, member checks, debriefings, persistent observation, audit trail and rich description - which are described below:

**Clarifying of Researcher Bias and Self-Reflexivity** – This criteria, especially pertinent for phenomenological studies, acknowledges that researcher bias can never be fully removed. Qualitative research strongly advocates a rigorous effort by the researcher to be transparent and to openly articulate his or her presumptions (philosophical, methodological, theological,
cultural) which might influence the research process. Initially this was done by having the researcher write a section called "Personal Lens" in the introduction. The concept of self-reflexivity encourages the researcher to keep his "self" radar in default position – continually monitoring his position and location in the culture. Such a category is useful in that it encourages the researcher to be self-aware of how his position might be influencing every aspect of the research and how the study is affecting his development, not only as an investigator, but as a researcher (Moustakis, 1994). I believe that I have kept to such a discipline throughout this process.

**Triangulation** – With triangulation, multiple and different sources and methods are used by researchers to provide corroborating evidence to shed better light on the phenomenon. In this study, a variety of strategies were used. First, different groupings of people were interviewed (couples, male and female focus groups and individual interviews) in order to compare and contrast couples’ and individuals’ experience of marriage and also to discern their unique perspectives as men and women. Second, the findings from interviews were complemented, compared and contrasted by research studies completed by Makumira students’ bachelor and masters degree students theses located in the MUOCO library and other seminary libraries (Wartburg Theological Seminary and Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago). These studies opened the windows for me to Tanzanian village and city life and the various marital issues that pastors and their families were confronted with. Third, though the semi-formal interviews were the heart of this study, a participant observation stance was adopted as I had the wonderful opportunity to travel, meet, interview couples and church leaders (in the Pare Mountains, Arusha, Dar es Salaam) and have informal conversations with individuals and families who attended the Makumira campus church. I saw myself as an active "participant"
at MUCO, being asked to preach, teach a couple of classes, play the piano at chapel and interact informally with staff and students alike. Fourth, a research team (faculty adviser and two research assistants) helped not only in recruitment of participants, but also in educating me about marriage and family life. I was not only provided with new sources of data, but they helped immensely in analyzing the interviews (where confidentiality was not violated) and leading me to a deeper understanding of the Lutheran church culture and the Tanzanian culture. They were my peers in Tanzania who helped to review my findings and provided invaluable feedback.

**Member Checks and Debriefings** - Together with audio tapes, field notes and transcriptions that were generated during these interviews, member checks and debriefing were conducted after the interviews. Member checks, which is the most critical action to increase credibility (Guba, 1981; Guba & Lincoln, 1985) required me to go back to the respondents when I had any questions regarding the information received to ensure that I had captured the essence of their account and to confirm the accuracy of the findings. During member checks, I reported to the respondents my summary and observations (by going over my notes with them) and requested clarification when needed. I also asked for any corrections or additions to ensure that my views accurately reflected their perspective. In some cases, additional information was received which enlarged the researcher's insight.

During the debriefings which occurred after each interview in order to improve the research process, the respondents reported: 1) they enjoyed participating in the process; 2) they appreciated that I listened to them; 3) focus group members valued the opportunity to learn more about each other; 4) a couple of individuals suggested having married (or "mature") individuals doing the translations as opposed to single (or "immature") co-
researchers; and 5) three individuals suggested that the interviews be a little shorter in length. I used their suggestions to improve the research process as it evolved.

**Prolonged Engagement versus Short Term Observation; and Persistent Observation** - Admittedly, 10 weeks is not a long time to build trust with participants and to learn about a culture. This could be considered one of the weaknesses of this study. I believe that my four years of experience in the Central African Republic provided me with a foundational introduction to the complexities of the Sub-Saharan African world. The Tanzania world and church culture is, however, a different world with a different history. I would consider my research to be a short-term phenomenological observation study with a fairly narrow focus in a specific community. I believe that the various strategies used to triangulate the findings and my “persistent observation” (building trust, being with people not only at interviews but in their homes and environment, checking for misinformation) helped to compensate for my lack of time spent there.

**Audit Trail** - The data collection and analysis procedures were reviewed by an individual experienced in qualitative research and hermeneutics to ensure that the procedures were adhered to and that the interpretations that I made were consistent with the available data. She has experience in quantitative research, graduate school training in literary hermeneutics as well as several years of experience of living and teaching in Africa.

**Thick Description** - Thick description, as opposed to thin description, seeks to make the lived experience and meanings of ordinary people directly available to the reader. Whereas thin description provides a sparse account of events or allows the terms and concepts of social science to do the work of many little descriptive words (Denzin, 1989), thick description is a way of writing that attempts to capture and uncover both the life experience,
contextual and conceptual worlds of the respondents in the study. Therefore, my intention was to write in such a way which allowed the interviews to speak for themselves, using as many quotations and interactions as possible. I also wanted to include other materials from the theses of Makumira students which, I believed, helped to complete, complement and further illuminate the worlds of these African Christians at Makumira University. In using thick description, I hoped to “wed” my story as a researcher (pastor, husband, father, student) with their stories as participants and fellow human beings.

In sum, I believe that the research strategies described above were “trustworthy” by serving to ensure that credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability issues (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) were attended to: the use of triangulation, member checks, co-research debriefings, and persistent observation all supported the credibility of the research; the use of thick description and purposive sampling attended to the transferability issues; the use of various triangulation strategies (over-lapping methods) and an audit trail met dependability issues; the practice of disclosing my presumptions through a self-reflexivity and the use of an auditor attended to confirmability issues.
CHAPTER FIVE - FINDINGS - PART I

Introduction

But Christianity has brought freedom. I can marry a woman I like, but I have to inform my parents about the woman I want to marry. And they can say something – they can agree or they may decide...give reasons [for not marrying the woman I like] and if the reasons are convincing then I can accept, but if they are not, I can also convince them that what you are saying is not of the truth. So you find these days there is freedom...there is a bit of freedom. (Male Pastor Individual Interview #3)

My parents have a good relationship. They all work together and everyone has a decision; they decide together what to do. If father wants to go and cultivate the farm, he has to ask Mama first; they have to talk together. This is because he is a Christian – he is an evangelist. Maybe that’s the problem, that makes him to have this life. And we were born into that life. (Female Focus Group #3)

Separation and divorce was scarce among traditionalists, while it is not so among Christians. This is because the Christian religion has opened the eyes of many couples to the extent that many women are becoming more and more independent and liberated into demanding their rights, both socially and economically. (Johanson, 1995, p. 45 – B.D. Thesis)

It’s a system that we’ve inherited from the past...these relationships and because our parents lived this way, we have to live in the same way ...to agree with our husbands. If you want peace, you must obey. You have to obey even if it’s good or not good. (Female Focus Group #2)

This purpose of this project was to explore with the Makumira Christian men and women, wives and husbands, the meaning and personal experience of their own marriages and their perceptions of marital relationships in their surrounding milieu. The wider focus of this study sought to discern pertinent factors (issues, beliefs, feelings, attitudes) in the development of a marital enrichment program at Makumira University. The remaining sections in chapters five and six will relate the findings discovered in key areas. It was my intention to allow the respondents’ voices to speak for themselves. I have therefore provided ample space for their quotations. Chapter five will first narrate essential broad themes as an
introduction and continue with discussions concerning: 1) Courtship; 2) Family History Investigation; and 3) Bridewealth. Chapter Six will continue a discussion of the findings detailing respondents’ narratives of their experience of: 4) Marriage’s Meanings and Hopes; and 5) Significant Marital Issues - Personal and Cultural. Finally, Chapter Seven will report the resources respondents identified as a support and aid in dealing with marital conflicts. This final chapter (seven) will also include a discussion of the possibility or practicality of implementing a marriage enrichment program at Makumira University.

Broad Themes: We Africans are Foremost Christians – How Can We Africanize Christianity? – Education, Economics and Christianity as Catalysts for Change in Marriages – Women and Men in Three Worlds

Amidst the many economic, socio-political, and cultural transformations that Tanzanian society has experienced, stands a distinctive Makumira University Christian community endeavoring to adapt to, accommodate, negotiate and in some respects, initiate changes in gender and familial relations through its religious faith. The diversity and complexity of couples and individuals interviewed and the situations they have faced in their lives, extended family and ministry, reflect the struggles and contentions of the larger society as seen in the literature review and pilot study. In comparison to the Christian couples studying at Iowa State University of the pilot study, the Makumira clergy families were a more conservative and cautious group with respect to the boundary markers set by the church. Unlike the I.S.U. participants, they did not cohabitate or give birth to children before their wedding. In general, they sought the advice and consent of their parents concerning their future partner and they continued the practice of bridewealth. The couples’ interactions during the interviews suggested considerable variation in relationships ranging from
egalitarian to traditional hierarchical marriages. However, according to the evidence in the interviews, there is an emerging movement among these Christian couples toward a more conjugal model where: they freely choose their mate seeking not so much approval but parental blessing; there is less heavy influence exerted over the marital relationship by the extended family, and there are fewer children (the average number of children in the Makumira sample was 3 in comparison to the Tanzanian national mean of 5.1 in rural areas and 4.3 in Dar es Salaam). African marriage in the traditional sense of being primarily and essentially an institution of procreation is not at the forefront of the Makumira Christian understanding of marriage. There are other meanings involving cooperation and flexibility in roles. In addition, themes regarding social change heard in the pilot study, were again echoed by the Makumira respondents— as seen in one pastor's remark:

A pastor or nobody can resist the social changes taking place, but as pastors we have to revisit our cultural norms and try to take what is good and try to put it into practice...our very best...whatever can be found there. (Men's focus Group #1)

The Makumira University Community is an exceptional group, a heterogeneous Christian culture with a Biblical foundation and a constitutional ecclesiastical political structure which informs, guides, and structures their understanding of marital relations. The individuals interviewed were current and future leaders within the Lutheran church and I found them often yielding and deferring to those ecclesiastical structures which required compliance upon the threat of excommunication or the withholding of sacraments. At times, as I listened to people, the church structure seemed to be both a replication of an European missionary religious establishment and a substitute for a traditional society which had the reputation of extensively shaping men and women, sharpening their skills for their respective gender roles, but also demanding obedience, submissiveness and correct social behavior.
Although the large majority of the respondents had never undergone nor experienced the old life of traditional society (such as rites of passage and veneration of the ancestors) there was a sense that the form of Christianity which the West had provided was simply not sufficient. The appropriation of Christian replacements – Confirmation for the traditional rites of passage, the “church wedding” marking marriage as contract beginning at a specific event in time replacing the African understanding of marriage as a growing process linked to the community finally sealed with the birth of a child – was an uncomfortable fit and was not helping people to fully “ripen” or mature. There was general agreement that the rites of Christianity need to be Africanized, but I heard little conversation on how it could or should be done. One older professor who had experienced some of the traditional rites said:

Initiation rites were processes and not an act of confirmation, a one time....It was a process. You get instruction at this age and go to another age for more instruction...it was a process. And therefore, all of the time there was a kind of socialization process, until you died. Now the church has only accepted one stage for the youth and that’s confirmation. And that’s not enough...yeah we have pre-marital counseling and it differs from one church to another and sometime it takes a week...others it may take a day. But it’s more preaching than it is counseling. (Male Individual Interview #2)

Another pastor said that in his particular culture the initiation rites still existed, but only for women:

Another thing which is very essential is which in the cultural setting is usually before marriage there was an education. A traditional order of education that was given to the bride...to the girl...before the day of marriage or even some days before that. They were teaching her many things: how to handle a marriage, how to live a faithful life and many other things...how to have sex with her husband...so they were instructing everything. And in these days the church has taken over the role of this teaching. But now it teaches both of them [male and female]. The bad side of the traditional teaching was that it only taught the woman how to live with a marriage. How to be faithful...how to handle a husband...how to cook all these things...in my area it was only for the women. (Male Individual Interview #3)
In a later conversation, this pastor lamented that the church assumed the role of educating men and women for marriage, but was not doing it adequately. According to him, women were being trained to be domestic servants and men were being instructed to be the heads of the households, with little idea of Christian, mutual servanthood.

Although most would agree that the ecclesiastical rites have not adequately replaced the traditional rites, the study participants clearly saw themselves as members of a specifically Christian culture (amidst numerous ethnic cultures) relying upon a Biblical faith (the Word of God; a fervent belief in Jesus, the Gospel, the Church) which served as a powerful orienting mechanism – a compass or better yet, a global positioning tool – shaping their self, social understanding and future directions, hopes and plans. This was a major theme that emerged and took on greater than anticipated importance: in this phenomenological study of Makumira community members. It became quickly apparent that their lives as Christians superceded their ethnic identities (at least in the Makumira environment) and to some extent united them as members of diverse ethnic groups. The Bible was often spoken of as the foundation of their lives as the study respondents referred to Scripture to support their understanding of the marital relationship. Numerous times I heard people describe how their Christian beliefs made them different and distinct within their own ethnic background.

The church aims to help people live in harmony, if they are married to live in peace. Here, the aim is to help people live in love...to treat each other in a good way. And if there are some problems they are to share. And our problems are sometimes like that. And this is a real problem for some Africans, that most Africans have accepted the Gospel, that Jesus Christ is the Savior – you can find that some of our cultural traditions are being left outside. But if you are a Christian, but still hold your tradition strongly, consequently, you will mistreat your wife as a man. But if you are really accepting Jesus Christ and your life is governed by the love of God...than you will be able to be selective...to leave out cultural negative things which will harm your spouse. (Couple #2, Male)
Traditionally people have hopes in marriage like having many children. They hope to love each other, but actually from cultural or traditional grounds...like having more children. Christianity has come up with another thing...that I like it most. Our hope in marriage is that we should love each other, help each other. We should pray together and encourage each other when difficulties occur. (Male Focus Group #1)

In the Makumira community, Scripture and religious beliefs provided a comprehensive scheme for the interpretation of their world. It was such a faith that confidently enabled them to critique and challenge other cultures. On the basis of their understanding of the Bible, many of them criticized the Western societal and ecclesiastical tolerance of divorce and same sex relationships. They said that those practices would never be condoned in the Tanzanian Lutheran church.

The ethnic traditions of the students, however, furnished a multi-faceted backdrop only somewhat palpable to me – a Western observer. I glimpsed only the broad contours of the old pillars of the traditional life. The participants interviewed were adamant that they were Christians who held onto their ethnic identity – as seen in the following quotes:

You know we are Christians...but we still keep some of the traditions. I mean if not practicing some of them, but we have them in mind. (Female Individual Interview #3)

[Concerning the giving of bridewealth] But there are important signs that are not to be left out...you know we are Christians, but we don’t leave out all of the traditions. So instead of taking beer we take soda. Instead of having a specific number of cows or sheep or goats...that was not a rule...and one thing I can remember...there is a special cow that cannot be left out (Couple #4, Female)

Other participants emphasized how the older missionaries saw little if any cultural value in Tanzania. They came with an impregnable confidence and sense of superiority of the European West accompanied by a theological rigidity. Consequently, the traditional customs went underground. A female pastor, defending her culture said:
It's high time that we really reconsider these African traditions because they are not altogether bad. And there is a tendency to think that it has all died...it is still there somehow. And I think that some of those things are important so that we must not wipe everything for the sake of Christianity... I think that most of our people, Christians here, are missing that. And they have the right to be afraid because that is how they are taught. They were told that their culture is bad. Now most of them are saying: “No! It isn’t really. Everything in our culture is not really bad. It isn’t really contrary the Gospel.” (Individual Interview Female #3)

A creative tension existed between the Christian culture and the imaginative universe of the traditional culture that was “still there somehow.” The respondents were appreciative of a Christianity that reoriented their traditional worldview and old moral framework beyond the extended family, clan and tribe. It seemed that they did not want the old worldview to be overthrown; they yearned for it to be reconfigured in an African way – not an American or European way. I was and am, personally, excited about the possibilities that lie over the horizon.

The various marriage practices of the different ethnic traditions seemed to run alongside the Lutheran church’s understanding and practice of marriage. Certain practices (individual consent, parental affirmation, family history examination, bridewealth gifts, announcement of banns, marriage in a church building before a pastor and witnesses, birth of a child) needed to take place in their respective cultural worlds (church and/or traditional African) in order for the marriage to be recognized and affirmed. The church was adamant that its procedures had to be closely and accurately followed for the marriage to be recognized, and was critical of certain traditional practices or understandings of marriage (a birth of a child does not define or make a marriage). If a church wedding did not take place among Christian witnesses, in a church (or with the permission of the church to be held elsewhere), and before a pastor, excommunication or the withholding of sacraments were
used as punishments and corrective measures. If, on the other hand, certain traditional
customs were not fulfilled (like bridewealth, or the birth of a child) the marriage was not
considered complete and both the wife’s and husband’s standing were in jeopardy in their
own eyes and that of the extended family. This was part of the imaginative universe that was
“still there somehow.” Such competing claims of the church and of traditional society were
manifest in our conversations. The structures of the church reinforced a strict separation
between Christianity and culture, as evidenced in this article of the North Western Diocese’
Constitution: “In Christian marriage, the diocese does not allow pagan ceremonies.” In real
life, however, African customs, church and Biblical concepts both clashed and intertwined.
Individual perspectives of those claims were varied often linked to participant’s gender,
marital status, the presence or absence of their spouse at the interview and how they
understood themselves and their marital relationship in light of Christian Scripture.

In my mind, the marital lives and gender relationships described to me were like bubbling
laboratories where the customary social divisions between the sexes were breaking down and
perhaps reformulating into something new and as yet unknown. The catalysts for this
reaction, as described to me by the respondents, were education, economic hardship, and the
Christian faith. This “chemical breakdown,” so to speak, did not result in the collapse of the
familial structure, however. In the Makumira Christian culture, the changes in gender and
familial relations were an unfolding or cascading progression of new roles and family
structures in the process of being reformulated, as they were being carried on by a younger,
better educated generation. These transformations, specifically in generational and ethnic
conflicts, were alluded to in remarks by the wives of older professors at Makumira:
Here, we can say that the world is turning smaller and smaller. You know after education, the people are traveling all over the country... so they go and then meet and they agree to get married. So here, the relatives do not have any power... they no longer have the power. So the families are crazy now, because they meet at work; they agree to get married.

What do you think of that?

For me I can say that there is no problem with that, but for other families this is a problem. Especially now, you can get married to any tribe, but 30 years ago this was a problem, that you can go there [to parents] and say “I’m going to get married to another boy... or from the Masai... then the family can say: “No, no, no... this far away from here... to Moshi or Arusha, or to Tunga... You are not going to get married to that boy.” But for now, this is no longer a problem. But sometimes the couple has problems and it’s not easy to go back to the family and share those problems, because they are going to tell you: “We told you so before!” So sometimes it’s good to follow the clan and the parents. (Female Focus Group #3)

Men’s and women’s relationships at Makumira bore witness to the “craziness” of the ongoing revolution taking place. They seem to have gone a very long way in a short period of time. The women of Makumira seem to live in three different worlds. One of the worlds was the male dominated where women were the muted group, expected to listen to what their husbands had to say. In about half of the couples’ interviews men controlled the conversation and women contributed to the discussion when they were called upon. Nonetheless, their husbands respectfully listened to what they had to say and asked their wives for clarifications and additional questions. At the other end, was the women’s world – a lively, vivacious, boisterous world – where women, when by themselves, were free to express themselves. Many of the female focus groups were pure pleasures to conduct and difficult to manage as a facilitator! Generally, the younger and the more educated women of these groups were impatient and highly critical of the male world – which they characterized as determined to maintain male authority and control of marriage as well as the church. They perceived women as being exploited in both traditional and church settings. They saw
certain texts in Scripture being used by men to justify women’s secondary status and to silence women’s voices in the church. They wanted equal marriages where men and women shared domestic responsibilities and were romantically and emotionally involved with each other. These women were spoken of as “those feminists” in the Makumira community. The husbands who inhabited this world struggled with a bemused surrounding culture that ridiculed their efforts to have a cooperative marriage, where decisions were arrived at by mutual discussion and there were more flexible roles. In the middle was an estuary where both worlds flowed. There were men who said that they wanted complementary, if not equal marriage, but considered it hard, time consuming work to reach a common mind with their spouse. Some of these men admitted that educational distance between themselves and their wives made it strenuous and burdensome to attempt such a partnership marriage. Women, in this middle world, were mindful of the social convention to be quiet, but eagerly spoke up when addressed and offered their own unique views only occasionally however, publicly disagreeing with their husbands.

I wondered if this Christian community of Makumira was a leader along with other educational institutions in the change of women’s status and changes in marital relationships toward more non-hierarchical, complementary, perhaps even, egalitarian marriages.

One final point in this section: to my surprise, respondents described an over-all community where there was a lack of openness and trust of others outside their clan or ethnic background. One pastor said:

One thing, a lot of people hold things in their hearts without telling anybody… people are not very open. But here there are several you can trust, but I have not gone to anyone. But it’s kind of… families are tight and they don’t want to release anything out of their family and it’s also very difficult to establish who I can trust, but I think here there are people; it could be few. African
tradition, at least in our tradition...our ethnic group is that you trust older people. It's hard to go to others to talk. (couple #10, male)

Other men said that both academic interviews and the informal sharing about marital relationships were counter to their respective cultures. A couple of more traditional male pastors remarked in their focus group interviews:

Man #1: Openness is not present and this is one of our problems, in the marriage and in the community.

Man #2: And culturally it's a shame for a person to express the relationship with his or her partner with other people...that she loves me or hates me...either good or bad. According to our culture it's not fair to say before other people: "Ah, my wife loves me. She does this and this and this or she hates me...either of the two." It seems to me that it's shameful and he'll be seen as the one who is stupid and let me say so!

Researcher: Interesting.
Man #1: Not mentally fit.
Researcher: Why do you think it's that way?
Man #2: It's really the tradition. We have quite different traditions. It must be kept secret. (Male Focus Group #2)

Several students, coming from other African nations, observed these reticent or reserved characteristics in relationships among the Makumira community. One pastor's wife, a social worker from a neighboring country, saw it more in terms of an interpersonal or interfamilial rivalry:

People are not open here. Everyone wants their family...to make their family the best one or not anyone to know that I have problems. So it's easy for them not to say things frankly. This is the reality. (Couple #7, female)

Although the method and the interviewing process went against the tide of custom, people in the focus groups seemed to genuinely enjoy learning about each other's traditions and relationships. What seemed natural for women to do became gradually easier for men during the course of our sessions together. A couple of male pastors said during the debriefings:
Pastor #1: To me I think the process was good, because through this interview, yes we have learned about each other because we come from different places. So when you sit together and everybody explains their life experience in their marriage, the other is blessed. Also you have shared with us things from America...so it's ok.

Pastor #2: Even me, I am interested in this...there are some issues that I heard here, that I didn’t think was helpful. I stayed with this information in my mind and have a time to think this over. And I’m reminded of other things, which I didn’t think would occur to me...so it’s good. (Men’s Focus Group #1)

The interviewing process as an exercise in community growth and spousal communication seemed to be taken as a strange, awkward and unfamiliar process—a bit threatening to men and couples—and more naturally amenable to women when by themselves. Gradually, however, the interviews came to be considered a source of growth and mutual discovery within the Makumira community as well as between the Tanzanian respondents and the American interviewer.

The remaining sections in chapters five will relate the discoveries found in the following key areas: 1) Courtship; 2) Family History Investigation; and 3) Bridewealth.

**When Eli (Harry) Meets Diko Marie (Sally) – Courtship, Meeting Places and Engagement**

Embedded within a Christian understanding of marriage at the Makumira community lies the “traditional” African understanding of marriage as a process composed of a series of important steps of courtship and engagement, involving in varying degrees the parents and extended families. The respondents affirmed that a valid marriage in the past consisted of: 1) the approval of the couple’s parents or elders; 2) an exchange of gifts or bridewealth mainly from the male’s family to the female’s family; 3) participation by the couple and respective families in handing-over or blessing ceremonies; and 4) the birth of a child. The primary
The purpose of the traditional understanding of marriage was not growth in the personal and emotional relationship of the couple, although this took place (I was told) in the course of living together, but the continuity of family and clan through the birth of children.

I found that this conception of marriage has undergone a shift towards more a “nuclear,” “modern,” “Christian” understanding during at least a generation or so. Such a “modern” or Christian understanding is characterized by an emphasis on the union of the couple as husband and wife, working as a team to face the daily challenges of life and making decisions together. To be “modern” is to seek an education, have access to medical facilities and to stretch the idea of personhood beyond the established local ties and kin.

The participants of this study described changes in courtship and marriage patterns as being based on the right to individually choose their partners and they justified this right on Christian grounds. Parents still had the role of indirectly advising and approving their sons or daughter’s choice. This sudden change in the selection of marriage partners represents a dramatic new course for Christian African family life and should not be underestimated. This new ability to choose was identified, in the older Makumira bachelor theses, with the breakdown of the safety net of the traditional kinship customs and the weakening of the power of the extended family. For example, Pastor Nsova argues in 1979:

The problems today are caused by the way African marriages are treated, as the result of foreign influence. Many of the traditional qualities are broken and left out. So the youths make the choices of their own partners on their own principles, they do not cooperate with their parents who are senior to them and experienced people, because they have already gone through the business. These choices have encouraged divorces and the instability of society. There are the illegitimate children, who lack the proper childcare and therefore grow undisciplined...The main factor leading the choices, is the outside features, contrary to that of the traditional society (Nsova, 1979, p. 37 – B.D. Thesis)
In a slightly older thesis, Pastor Shatrack, a Tanzanian pastor, identifies missionary teaching on marriage that has contributed to this disruption. According to him, it was specifically the Western model of the Christian missionary understanding of marriage as an almost private affair, accenting the importance of choosing a spouse, that transformed the Kinga culture's traditional understanding and assisted in the disintegration of the kin's safety-net structure which intervened in marital crises.

The missionary teaching on marriage was mostly Biblical. The missionaries did not, however, interpret Biblical ideas of marriage into the African culture... What mattered to them was the agreement of the two partners involved in it, whether they had decided to get married, also whether they were ready to live a Christian life...The missionary teaching has destroyed the traditional marriage through, divorce, unmarried life, breaking the family ties etc. To start with we see that there were not many divorces in the traditional marriage as the two families were concerned in the decision of the two partners to get divorced. This was not as simple as it has become, because their teachings allowed two people to get married even if they had not considered their families and in this way the two partners could get divorced easily and no one could try to trace the reason which made them do so, except the pastor who had no idea of their home life. (Shatrack, 1979, p. 31 – B.D. Thesis).

Free choice of marriage partners was simply a given among the Makumira respondents. Christianity as a “new way of life” was seen as the mechanism which brought those changes to the African family structure as seen in the below comments by both a female and male pastor:

At this time, in the 1980’s and even in the 1970’s, there were a lot of programs, youth programs and one of the big discussions was whether the parents and relatives should decide for you whom to marry. And so pastors and church teachers, in groups and congregations, they were trying to teach youth and parents in congregations that parents should not be the one to decide for whom their children should be married, but at least take part in it. They should be responsible for helping them out. For example, like our society is a mixture of Christians and non-Christians – so the teaching was that it is good to marry the one that you have the same belief and things like that in the church they were teaching (Individual Interview Female #1)
Formerly, our parents used to chose your partner, then they prepared the possibilities according to our traditional customs... But in my case, my parents they tried to follow the new way of life. They decided to leave all of the choice on myself, but I can make my own choice, so I did...Choice is a good thing, because it helps you later not to blame others, because you made the choice yourself. (Men’s Focus Group #1)

Nearly all participants met and began a relationship with their spouse in the church culture, whether it be in the local choir, youth group, confirmation class or church schools. The church culture was their meeting place. It was fascinating for me to hear the stories of how couples had come together and how they went about selecting their partners. Many of them framed their marriage choices in individualistic terms, using both Christian virtues and relational traits as criteria for their selection. In the couples’ interviews, many women largely based their choice on what they perceived was their future spouse’s relationship with God and with others.

I saw that he was a God-fearing man, so that was one thing. And since he fears God, he can make a good husband. Second, I saw that it was easy for him to make friends, he greeted people in a humble way, that attracted my love for him. And third, since he was humble, I saw that he would be fit if we were married, since he was a Christian, a good committed one. All those things made me agree to be married to him. (Couple #2, female).

Yes, I knew that he was a pastor and that he was a good man and worshipped God and I prayed about this and I accepted. (Couple #7, female)

Some couples were friends for a number of years before becoming engaged. Again, such friendships involved meeting at church for choir rehearsals and youth events in public settings; sometimes walking home together, but rarely, if ever, meeting privately. It was difficult for me as a researcher to peer into these courtship relationships. Couples seemed to study each other from a distance carefully noting each other’s attributes. Courtship etiquette demanded that women play a remote, inaccessible role feigning little interest. The role of
men in the Christian culture was to politely pursue whether in person, by letter or through a 
relative or friend. They described marriage proposals where: “I sent my application orally” 
(Couple #1) or “When I was in form five I wrote her a letter informing her of our 
relationship. Then we came to the realization that we should inform our parents” (Couple 
#8).

The more conservative men sought characteristics like obedience and respect, but did not 
hesitate to voice their attraction to their wife’s physical attributes! An example of such a 
conservative discourse is given below:

When I saw her, I saw that she was very obedient because she was from a 
traditional culture...humble etc. and then she was cheerful, yeah, and she was speaking in a respectful manner (laughing). So this led me to admire her and 
even her physical appearance (laughing)...yes her physical appearance and the 
way she was committed to Christianity and to God and this was also one of the 
factors because at that time I was expecting to be a pastor. (Couple, #3, male)

This man later asked his wife, who was of a different ethnic background to marry him 
(she said yes a week later), but he considered it of utmost necessity to send a brother to 
inform his parents of the decision. Interestingly, he could not inform his parents in person. 
In order to show respect for them, he had to send a brother to inform them of his decision. 
His parents soon gathered the extended relatives to discuss each party’s contribution to the 
brideprice. The parents and extended families of both man and woman did not interfere nor 
question the couple’s choice for marriage partners

Of all the participants, only one man spoke of selecting his partners based upon being “in 
love.” He later described this to me as a passionate desire for her that would not let him 
sleep! It was astonishing, in my mind, how he shared and included his parents in this 
discovery. During the interview he said:
When I fell in love with her. I shared it with my parents...I went to her house. She did not live far from me in a different village...I saw her at youth meetings, choir meetings and at church activities and I loved her and I made a procedure to meet her. I shared with my parents about her, then I went to her house to see her and her parents...they knew me and my parents! And my parents went to see them to tell them that our boy has fallen in love with your daughter! (Couple #6, male).

He later explained to me that it was necessary in his Pare culture to communicate his romantic interest to both parents so that they could pave the way for him to become more acquainted with this woman. He described this as the beginning of his engagement. This is quite a contrast to the modern American-European notion of engagement. Whereas in the West, two people tend to become “engaged” after they have come to know each other, in this particular culture consent or at least acknowledgment by the parents was needed before the couple could either become more fully acquainted or even be seen publicly together. Both African and European conceptions of engagement seemed to share the understanding of engagement as a waiting period to discern the suitability and depth of their relationship.

Other men were initially charmed and captured primarily by their future wife’s beauty. I remember wives beaming or nervously giggling as their husbands described those features they were attracted to. Surprisingly, these men did not mention traditional attributes such as hard-working, humble, obedient, respectful of extended family and guests. Their initial meetings were often chance encounters and then men and women carried on a distant relationship, often by letter, consciously thereby circumventing parental surveillance or consent.

Three years before we were married, we got to know each other. I used to teach the choir, church choirs. So when we were preparing for church choir festivals they used to call me. So they called me and I used to pass her home on the way
to Arusha. One day after rehearsal we were talking together with other members, I saw her and that she was very beautiful and one day I introduced myself to her and said: "I am of the choir. If you please could you write me a letter so that I can remember you with the other members of the choir." That was really the first day that we talked and that was the real foundation of our relationship through writing each other. (Couple #4, male)

Somehow, it is done like that [obtaining parental consent to see each other]. But I don’t [think] if my case could fall into that because I just saw her for the first time at ___ and just by her appearance...know that she comes from my ethnic group. And that she was beautiful. Well, I was interested to say something but I didn’t. I went home and then I wrote a letter after one or two weeks or something like that. I was saying that I have this idea...via a theological student who was doing his internship there [in the village where she lived]. You see late I proceeded to ask about that issue through correspondence and then in one year we got married. (#1 Men focus group).

Women participating in the focus groups who had received higher levels of education looked for a cultivated and educated potential husband who would respect their vocations and share household duties and responsibilities. There seemed to be a consensus among the women that such men were difficult to find, because most men preferred unschooled women who they could easily dominate. One female pastor relates:

[At that time] I looked for a man with an education, because I was somewhat educated at that time in my life. I had to make sure that I married someone who was educated as I was...yeah...educated women like educated men, but it’s not easy to get them...The men here at Makumira are frightened of women who are intelligent...they are frightened to get married to such women, because they are afraid that women will change their society. (Female Individual Interview, #1)

Several single female seminary students spoke more pragmatically of wanting a man who would do his fair share of domestic work. In these interviews, they did not mention falling in love or romance as desired aspects of a marriage relationship. They wanted an equality that arose from a mutual respect of each other’s professional position.

Female 1: Because we are all going to the parishes, then we have to be equal. Then when I’m out he can maybe wash the clothes or do something. He would not wait for me to come back to cook, but we would share our work.
Female 2: Before that you know women here in Africa or I can say Tanzania...they were not working at a job; they stayed at home. Then it was good for them to have the home responsibility. But now days, we find women, a husband and wife work as teachers, so they are going outside to teach, then come back home together. So they have to have equality to do things to help each other. Now when you are going to teach, then you come home and because you are a man you just sit and just read a magazine and your wife does the wash and the home responsibilities! No I don't like that! That's why I say, we need equality. (Female Focus Group #3)

I was informed by the great majority of respondents that it was the man’s responsibility to ask a woman to marry him. Even the single women said that it was the African tradition for the woman “to wait for him to tell you something. But if you tell him before and your Mom or another African knows, they can insult you and you know you are out of line” (Female Focus Group #2). Though this appeared to be a hard and fast tradition, two of the participants had very different experiences. A male pastor related that there were three women (if not more) who proposed to him! He was known on the Makumira campus as a man of real integrity. I include his description for its sheer uniqueness!

But it later came to mind that this woman would be the right person even though I had many girlfriends who wanted to be married by me or wanted to marry me. You know in Africa we talk of passive women, though it is not good. They wanted to marry me as well. But I don’t know why, that did not work. There was ___ who had finished form six and she really loved me very much and she was very concerned with my problems. There was a time when thieves came into my house and took everything and she even bought clothes for me, bringing them to my parents because I wasn’t there. And my parents loved this girl very much. But I don’t know; it didn’t work for me. I even told my parents: “I don’t like to have these clothes! Please, please bring them back because I think that is the way to make me love her. But I’m not thinking of marriage now. I am thinking of having a friend now.” That was one. Another was a certain girl, who was sought by my sister, from a very rich family. And she was very much in love with me. She started showing me her love. But even that did not work. Those are three examples, but there are many who even came to my family asking my mother that they would like to marry me! That is very unusual in Africa...very unusual...very unusual. (Male Interview)
Another female pastor said that she met her husband when she was a student in secondary school and he was a teacher in a nearby primary school. She said that for four years, he became her boyfriend, actually her fiancé, without her parent’s knowledge. They did not live together; they were simply good friends as he waited for her complete secondary school. It was she who “told” him that she would like to marry him and then the official parental meetings began. She enjoyed relating to me the pleasant subterfuge underlying her relationship.

Then me, in my case, what I did was this: I had my fiancé for four years and then I told him that I’d like to get married to you! I didn’t tell my parents that I was having a fiancée. But they knew automatically because he used to come to my place and then he asked if he could introduce himself to my parents – through his parents. And I allowed him. Well, his parents did go to my home and introduce themselves and their son. Later my parents asked me: “Do you know this guy, called ____? I said: “Yes I know who is he is!” Then they said: He’s talking about marrying you! Do you know about this information?” I told them: “If you say so…but I don’t know!” (Female Interview)

The respondents spoke of waiting to have sexual relations until the time they were married. The female pastor, quoted above, reflected that they as a couple were sexually “patient” until the time of their wedding for “purity’s sake.” This was a particularly distinctive attribute of Makumira couples in comparison to a society described by many study participants as increasingly sexually unrestrained, where many lived in “trial” marriages or cohabitated before they were actually formally married. Many of the participants justified their sexual self-control on the grounds of church teaching. One newly married Masai pastor remarked:

We waited. One of the reasons, according to our background and the church teaching – a boy or girl shows and they are not allowed to meet each other in a sexual relationship until they are married to each other. And that doctrine has entered into our minds since school. And if we love each other, then, let’s pray for the day that we in front of the church and in front of God make a promise
to each other and we see that it is good – in comparison to rushing into a sexual relationship. (Couple #4)

Couples found and courted each other in diverse ways within, on, and a little beyond the boundaries of the Lutheran church and the surrounding culture. We now proceed on to a discussion of other customary traditions – family history examination and bridewealth – all of which have been incorporated into the respondents marriage practices and all of which involve a great diversity of opinion.

**Family History Investigation**

The respondents of this study were in general advocates and supporters of the family history investigation, where prospective families look into the character and reputations of the other family. Nearly all of the couples (except couples 4 and 10) said that either they themselves, a family member or a go-between looked into their fiance’s family background. One woman claimed: “You can’t exclude yourself from this” (couple #5). Similar to the pastors interviewed in the pilot study, these Makumira participants perceived this custom as a valuable practice that should be retained within the Christian practice of marriage. A “traditional” couple from the Bena tribe described what happened in their particular life and cultural tradition:

That is why according to our tradition if a girl is asked by a boy to be married to him and she says that I will consider it and this consideration takes two or three months just for this. This period is the time to ask her parents and if she is very interested in that boy – not only to ask – but also to convince especially her mother – to say that, “I am very interested in that boy. So I ask you to accept him.” During this time, if the parents think to that now we can allow our daughter to be married to that young man. During this time, it is also the time for the parents to go through...to find the story, the background of this young man and his parents. And also at the same time, the parents of the young man have the same also to do....they say: “let us also have time to think.” They inquire
into the same situation: to know the background of that young girl and also her parents – all of these things. And important matters. Hard work was also important...that the young girl is a hard worker and how it is with her parents. Are they good people? Kind people? So even, they want to observe if there are any special diseases. For example, if they find there are some special threatening disorders. They can say, “No.” For example, in our area people are afraid of a history of madness. (Couple #2, Male)

His wife continued:

Before things are settled, everything must be known first. So that when the discussion to pay the brideprice begins, before you begin discussing marriage, everything is settled – everything is known. So that if there are problems, they are to be settled first; then the marriage can take place. Yes, so almost those areas of the clan – the two clans are involved – they make the investigation. Is everything all right? And then we can start speaking of marriage. (Couple #2, female)

For the above couple, this mutual family background search was a decisive step in the courtship process which determined whether to continue going on with the marital negotiations. In this case, the couple freely chose each other, but the parents and extended kin were very much invested in the process.

Other participants, who valued the custom of family background research, also reasoned that such investigations were essential in order to determine if there were any inheritable diseases (epilepsy, sickle cell anemia), skin diseases (leprosy), arthritis, bronchitis or AIDS present in the family. Additional characteristics that were investigated were: the family’s work ethic, their “kindliness” and generosity to family and neighbors and if there were any curses and witchcraft in the family’s history. There was a belief that such traits would be passed onto or transferred to their sons and daughters.

Those couples (4,10) who did not look into each other’s backgrounds remarked that it wasn’t really an important issue. At the same time, when I asked the wife (couple #4) if she
would have still married her husband if she discovered that there was a history of inheritable
diseases in his family, she said no she wouldn’t have married him! She argued:

It’s true, because you must really think first to see if you want to overcome this
problem, because you know that even if you love someone – you must think
twice. If you are capable of overcoming the problems with him or her and if
you are not. It’s better that you don’t marry him or her. It’s something that
depends on how you think and that you can be able to overcome the problem.
(Couple #4, Female)

The men and women of the focus groups also promoted the custom of family
investigations. A man from the Sukuma ethnic background described how he was in the
process of being married, but then discovered through a personal investigation, that his
fiancée had already been married and failed to inform him. He related that this discovery
was an accident. Someone came to him and simply told him. He said that when he found
another woman, he made up his mind to be more disciplined about the process:

Male: When I heard that that girl had been married, I changed my intention. When I
went to prove, the time I saw my [later actual] wife, I thought maybe it’s good
if I ask those people living near her to tell me the story of that girl. Of course,
the story I heard was impressive: that the girl was nice, her family is good and
according to the situation of [my] mind. It could be good if I married that girl.
I decided to ask her if she would agree to be married by me. Of course she
said I would like to marry with you. Then I met with her parents and they told
me the price I was to pay.

Researcher: Did you communicate with your parents before hand?
Male: My parents were not around.
Researcher: So you did all of this on your own?
Male: I did this personally because I was not living with my parents. My father
died in 1974 and my mother was not allowed where I was living. So I
did things personally and with my neighbors who were old enough to
help me. And when we agreed to pay those prices and then of course
they told me to go home and prepare those things and when I was ready
then I would go to them and pay. At that time I was not a Christian. (Male
Focus Group #2)

In another situation, a pastor was intent upon marrying a widow who had already two
children, but his family intervened and advised him to discontinue the relationship. He had
shared with me that they had already had sexual relations which he admitted was not a good thing to do: “She had offered herself to me, so that in a way maybe I could love her and we can be in love. And this lady was well known by many that she is going to get married to me.” He continues

And I was feeling pity for her and I even wanted to marry her. But my family was not happy... they said it was not good, because she was the wife of another man and when you marry her she will start comparing between the two of you... the dead husband and you. So you may have some problems. So we advise you not to take her. Yeah, I decided not to take her. (Male Interview)

Of all the participants, this was only case where the family asked their son not to continue with his plans for marriage. A “family history investigation” was not mentioned per se, but the parents knew enough of the background of this woman to warn their son. I could see in the interview that this man could still feel the plight of this widow he was once engaged to. He was a man of great empathy. Still he bowed to a prevalent cultural antipathy, expressed by his parents, which casts a skeptical eye on widows.

An older pastor and professor in Dar es Salaam commented that this was a very important custom to be retained though he and his wife weren’t interested in it at the time of their own engagement because “we said we loved each other.”. He was living with his grandmother “who could tell that the mother of and the father of my wife was born by so and so and so we know that the heredity was good.” His wife’s parents did the same, while a brother was cross-checking the results of both sides! Though being “in love” was an essential part of their relationship, there was this hard familial reality that needed to be looked at. He remarked:

On the role of the parents in looking at the mate, especially when looking into the history. I look at it as a positive thing, supposedly. You know that there are inherited diseases, like sickle cell, for example. Normally we want to know if
a girl or boy has sickle cell disease and you want to look into the relations and the parents can help. This is no longer true in the urban areas. Boys and girls meet somewhere...say a church choir or youth meeting or disco and they love each other and that’s it. They may question each other about their history. Normally they don’t tell the whole history, especially, when it comes to inherited diseases and so forth. For example, in Tanzania we have a medical map of sickle cell areas. So if you get married to someone from a particular area, the probability of having a sickle cell partner is higher. But young people don’t care about this. They say that they love each other and that’s it. So that’s why I count on the role of the parents. (Male Individual Interview #2)

Several of the women in the focus groups did voice their opposition toward such a family research on various grounds. A professor’s wife, who has had several children marry in her family, argued that the investigation was impossible to do in their case because the partners they had chosen came from distant places. She lamented: “Yes, now it is now their [the sons and daughter’s] judgment. We can say we don’t have power anymore. Power is ceasing now” (Female Focus Group #3).

Other younger single women were divided on this issue. In a fascinating debate in one of the focus groups, a pastor asserted that in her Pare culture it was absolutely necessary to perform such research to examine if there was a family curse upon one of the partners. This pastor said:

Because we have this curse, as you say. And this is very, very, very strong in our culture. If there ever was one or the other parent who gave a curse, as the people believed, it would really get you. So where there is other clans where they had a curse not to marry into that family. You don’t have to do so. Though they say that Christ came and abolished all curses, but we still had these things. (Female Focus Group #1)

Her colleague argued, to the contrary, that being a Christian and “in love” surmounted all kinds of traditional and modern fears. In fact,

I say a Christian is really different from all of this, because I think this background [investigation], to check to see if there is something wrong is completely different from what love is. Love, as I understand it, is something
where you love a person completely. Content with what bad things he has. Or bad things that she has. Then you bear all as yours. Then that is love. But if you love somebody, because he or she doesn’t have certain diseases or curses, then that is love with a barrier…based on fear I can say. (Female focus group #1)

This woman poignantly expressed the complex tension between older customs of examining a fiancé’s history and background and the encroaching modern (Christian) practice of marrying for love’s sake and then bearing each other’s mutual burdens. The large majority of Makumira participants believed that the familial investigation remains an important custom to be retained. A female pastor referred to it as her “secret research,” where she employed all means possible (interviewing neighbors, friends, relatives and acquaintances) to make sure she would have an educated and kindly future husband who would allow her to develop her gifts. Indeed, she seems to have chosen wisely, as she married a husband who encouraged her to work for an advanced degree in theology. They live apart, while she studies, sharing child care responsibilities – having half of the children with him and half of the children with her.

The family history examination is part of Africa’s cultural wisdom and the experience of marriage in the Makumira community. It assists in the discernment process, after a couple has chosen what they believe to be a suitable partner. It helps, sometimes, to keep the wider family involved in the marital process, though in a solemn perfunctory way – the parents (and sometimes relatives) are given the right to indirectly advise and approve, but not necessarily object to their child’s choice. Like any customary practice it is not foolproof, but itself must be critiqued especially in relation to the Christian understanding of love. Does a family history of illness, disease, irresponsibility, curses or even witchcraft necessarily signify the endless continuity of such behaviors through successive generations? It may, but
it may not. It may not, because of the “new life” that the Makumira respondents so often referred to. I think the wisdom of this cultural tradition is that it seeks to know the facts or the truth of each other’s family. Knowledge of such facts are of inestimable worth in the deliberation of both the burdens and joys one is to shoulder in the course of one’s married life.

**Bridewealth Issues**

The system of bridewealth or brideprice is a tradition in which the family of the groom gives the family of the bride a number of gifts in the form of animals or money, according to the Makumira respondents. This tradition has a number of well-recognized functions: to obtain a wife for a son, to consolidate the relationship between two families, to ratify a marriage, to legitimize the children born as belonging to the groom’s family, to protect the marital status of the wife, and to stabilize the marriage itself. It is part and parcel of the traditional customary way of being married in Tanzania. Presently, according to the Tanzanian Law of Marriage Act of 1971, payment of bridewealth is no longer a precondition to establish the validity of a marriage. This law doesn’t prohibit marriage gifts or payments, but leaves it to individuals and families to agree upon privately. Within the Makumira community, the custom of bridewealth is practiced alongside Christian rites, sometimes as a complement and sometimes as a rival to the Christian understanding of marriage. Bridewealth is a practice that is still considered to be part of Tanzanian ethnic identity and the experience of being married, but differences and discord exist concerning its utility and function as a foundation for marriage.
An astonishing wide range of perspectives and views were held by the participants of this study. In the couple’s interviews seven of ten women were very much for the giving of bridewealth, whereas two wives were against and one uncertain. Only one husband, on the other hand, was in favor of the tradition; five were against it and the other four expressed their reservations describing careful distinctions that need to be made. In the female focus groups and individual interviews, seven women were adamantly against this tradition and five valued it because it protected, confirmed and sanctioned their role as wives. In the male focus groups, whereas three of the thirteen males objected to the giving of bridewealth, ten of the others argued that the custom needed to be retained if the costs were limited and defined and practiced within certain boundaries.

Discussions on bridewealth evoked passionate feelings. It was a challenge to get a sense of the actual content of the bridewealth discussions between families. When I asked what kind of gifts did you give to your wife’s family, men quickly glossed over the subject. One of the couples, who my co-researchers described to me as having more of a traditional relationship, did expand on the subject with more specificity:

Pastor (Male): Well, the deep discussion or argument which involved the parents was in the end of 1979 and the beginning of 1980, when things got a little dirty. My parents sent a person to send a special application to her parents that there is someone who needed to marry your daughter and this special man [an emissary or go-between] who is the one after receiving the reply from her parents brings back an answer to my parents and then they arrange a day of meeting and also myself was present. After the day was fixed and we were there for a special discussion, her parents prepared food because the meeting involved a lot of people from my parents and also from her parents, so special food was prepared that is found in our area. It is what is called ugali plus meat.

Researcher: Corn and meat?
Pastor: Yes. And then the discussion went on while they arranged on her side... How many things we were going to pay from my side. They arranged to pay a few things, like two hand hoes. Things to give as a dowry.
Researcher: Two hoes, like tools, hand hoes.

Pastor: Yes (laughter!) and then two new clothes, new ones. A goat, four cows, two bulls and two cows. There was also some money, a little sum. But now I forget the sum. After that, these things were not paid on one day. That some of them were important to be paid on the same day, so the parents gave permission that the marriage day is to be registered [in the church]...So things were paid later; there were two cows that were paid later.

Researcher: Ok. This is a question from me, an un-knowing American. Is it ok or rude to ask what was given for a brideprice?

Wife: No [it is not rude].

Pastor: Because this is very common...very common in our tribe. It is really our tradition according to our Bena custom or tradition. That when you marry, this fiance has to pay it from himself or his parents, he has to pay certain things. And this they call, it’s not like buying, because they say that no one can be buy a human being. But this is to keep our tradition as considered as our identity, that now a daughter has been married to someone else. And also this relationship is a connecting relationship between , a clan relationship of the husband and wife. These two families are now being united because their children have been married so their relationship becomes close. So if on my side, if the parents think they are paying too many things, they can also ask: “Please you are asking too many things. Can you consider [lowering the amount]? So it’s somehow negotiations...

Researcher: If there were no brideprice given, would there be problems?

Wife: Because it is part of the tradition and if it was not paid, problems would arise. The man would not have filled the requirements of society. So he would be responsible for the tradition that he did not fulfill all of what society asked of him. (Couple #2)

Though many respondents were reluctant to speak about the actual goods that were given, a Makumiran bachelor’s thesis by Pastor Obed (1994), “Marriage Customs and Rites among the Meru Christians of the ELCT in Tanzania,” is very informative about such practices which continue to exist. Several study participants coming from the Meru ethnic group confirmed that the list cited by Obed is accurate, although there is variation from family to family. I include Obed’s list of gifts so that the reader may obtain a glimpse of the exchange involved. The following is what the groom’s family gives to the bride:

1) First cow to be paid to the bride’s family must be female.
2) Second cow must be female.
3) First male calf must be normal size.
4) Second male calf (of normal size) is for creating a friendship between two families.
5) First mature male goat.
6) Second mature male goat.
7) First male sheep for "blood."
8) Second sheep, a fat one.
9) Third male sheep (given to the grandmother).
10) Male sheep is given to mother of the girl.
11) Six female sheep are given to the bride’s family.
12) One roasted ribside of a cow.
13) Last payment, a female calf.

Mungure (2000), another Tanzanian pastor researcher, estimated that the cost of those animals was 1,040,000 Tanzanian Shillings (roughly $1,400 today). This is a considerable amount when the gross domestic product (GDP) per head is $526 (Meena, 2003). In addition, Mungure points out that an integral part of the bridewealth exchange include a series of four visits where all family members and the larger clan are gradually introduced to each other. These visits begin with groom’s mother meeting the bride’s parents and end with a large two clan meal and covenant making. Many gifts are also given to the bride’s parents and family during this time including: regimes of bananas, liters of milk, fifty crates of soft drinks (traditionally local beer), kilos of roasted meat, and a new blanket for the father of the bride. All of these additional gifts can increase the costs associated with bridewealth by about 363,000 Tsh. ($490) for a total of 1,403,000 (or $1,900). These gifts, according to one of Mungure’s Meru informants are given to respective family members “for the purpose of asking the permission for them to get married and to receive their blessings for a happy and successful marriage and future life” (Mungure, p.38).

Few women of Makumira thought of bridewealth in terms of asking permission from their families to be married. They wanted their parent’s blessing but would get married even if
their parents disapproved. At the same time, some were determinedly resolute on bridewealth as a defining marker for the authenticity and legitimacy of their marriages.

Several of the women (couple #8, female focus groups #3 & #4) claimed that there could be no marriage if there was no brideprice, because the woman would be considered valueless.

The following sample from a conversation highlights one woman’s resolve for continuing this tradition, her husband’s ambivalence, and the church’s role in the tradition.

Wife: The brideprice and the negotiations are supposed to stay. It is a good thing, because without paying the brideprice, the marriage cannot be called a marriage...Because there are some people who are supposed to get paid something. It may be the uncle or the grandfather or the uncles. It can bring misfortune if the brideprice is not paid.

Researcher: So if you were married within the church, then that would not be official if the traditional parts are ignored. So you are saying that the traditional parts, the brideprice are very, very important to be married.

Wife: Yes, it’s according to the way my church does it at home...concerning the the brideprice and the negotiations. Once you are to marry and you haven’t paid the brideprice and you want to have a Christian marriage, the church calls both parents from both sides, so that they may agree upon the brideprice. If you are paying now, you have to pay. If you haven’t paid you have to commit yourself to pay later. That’s how we do it.

Researcher: What do you think about that as a pastor?

Husband: Now a days, it isn’t very important as a pastor. What’s important in a marriage is a good relationship between the couple. They can pay the brideprice, but still be in a bad relationship, so the brideprice will have no meaning even if it is paid. What I think is important is the two, the couple, to agree with each other to be married, because I think that is more important than paying the brideprice. (Couple #5)

When I probed a little bit further asking the above woman why “misfortune” might come upon her if a brideprice was not given to her uncles and grandfathers, she answered that she would not be respected by the members of her own family. They expect to receive gifts; this is what the tradition dictates. If this part of the bridewealth custom is not kept and she had a bad relationship with her husband or if he should die, her own biological family might not agree to help her and the children in those difficult circumstances. They might not intervene
in a marital conflict. So it was necessary to fulfill the expectations that her own family had of her. The “misfortune” would be for her to be abandoned by her own family during her time of suffering. In this case, bridewealth seemed to function as a marriage insurance plan guaranteeing the welfare of the wife if the marriage should end because of death or conflict.

In a third female focus group, women in favor of bridewealth argued that a “marriage was incomplete without it.” This group conceived such marital incompleteness in terms of personal value. One newly married wife said, “Yes, it is very important for our tradition, because if they [her husband’s family] didn’t pay anything it seems like you are without cost; you are cheap.” When I later asked her, why she would feel “cheap” without bridewealth being given she said that “there would be no way for her parents to remember her...they would remember me by the cows and animals given.” Here, possibly, to be of value as a woman and wife was to still be in relationship with parents even if it be only in memory.

Other men and women who spoke favorably of the bridewealth tradition described it in a variety of ways: an appreciation, a gift, a remembrance, a reminder of their good daughter, a gratefulness for the parents of the daughter, a giving thanks. It was understood as a unique African expression of showing appreciation to the bride’s family for having raised an exemplary daughter. One can see the theme of honoring parents, particularly in the conversation of male focus group #2:

Researcher: What’s a good word for it [brideprice]? If it’s not a price, that you are buying another human being. Can you think of a Swahili word and we can translate it?

Male #1: It’s to appreciate...it’s an appreciation.

Researcher: An appreciation, for the girl’s parents?

Male #1: Yes. That I am really taking the girl. I’ll really love her and they approve. Some of my friends say that a person cannot be bought and we cannot compare it to an exchange of material things. So it’s an appreciation.

Researcher: Would your wives say the same thing? That this money or gifts that you
gave was an appreciation of your love? A proof of your love?
Both: Yes of course.
Researcher: What if you didn’t give it? [bridewealth]
Male #2: Then you would not be recognized by the parents of the daughter. Here, you cannot be respected.
Male #1: Yes, there is one proverb in my tribe (Turu) that says: “To marry a certain girl without appreciating the family through giving something is to despise the parents.” That’s one of the proverbs in my tribe.
Male #2: It’s just like saying thank you for keeping this girl now since she has grown up, now that I am taking her as my wife. Also in my tribe (Sukuma) if you marry a girl without giving something to appreciate, she dies. The parents of the girl will not agree to allow her to marry until you pay an appreciation. (Male Focus Group #2)

Interestingly, for many of the “traditionally oriented” couples and individuals described above, Christian rhetoric was not included as part of their discourse of bridewealth. The church’s role, according to them, was to see if the essential traditional obligations had been performed, encourage an agreement (or payment plan) and then commence with the Christian wedding. From other respondents, who incorporated Christian beliefs into their descriptions of bridewealth, a criticism of the tradition began to emerge. For example, couple #3 differed in their perspectives of this custom. The husband believed that its value could be found primarily for non-Christian Africans in helping to preserve the marriage bond during a crisis, but critiqued the concept of a bride being sold. His wife, on the other hand, argued that in addition to unifying her side of the family, the brideprice actually helped to restrain her husband’s behavior (he “becomes so obedient”) through the knowledge that her clan was still “concerned” about her. Thus for her the brideprice seemed to function as a check on the groom’s behavior, as much as the bride’s.

Husband: I think there are some negative and some positive also. Let us start with the positive first and what is understood by our tradition. After paying the brideprice the family expects this to hold the bond, to keep the bond of marriage. So that he wife would be tolerant of the marriage; so the wife has no way of leaving her husband if brideprice was there. So let’s
say [there has been a marital conflict] if she goes home and blames her husband, her parents will try to solve the problem – not through the breaking of marriage. They try to solve it and do whatever they can do to solve the problem. But if the wife says “I am no longer interested in living with such a man,” they say “How can we pay back the brideprice? This would be difficult for us. So this is kind of interpreted as saving the bond. So this is not as a Christian, but as an African; the way it used to be. It helps for some people, especially those who are not Christian.

The negative aspect? This is sometime made as if people are sold. This is a difficulty in human rights especially among women. There comes a problem if women try to show their rights, especially if they are married. They [their husbands] say, “Don’t you know I paid a brideprice for you? So do this! Hear me! And obey everything I tell you!”

Researcher: Mrs. what do you think about this?
Wife: The brideprice keeps the traditions. It helps to sustain the unity of my parent’s clan because different gifts will be given to my uncles and the offspring will be given to my brothers and sisters. And I will feel that they are very concerned about my marriage. They will make sure that to the husband she is married becomes so obedient so that no problems are going to happen there. Then through the brideprice, it is like a conversation that she has been having with her parents for a long time...she has been taken to another family and they are crying, but the brideprice comforts them. It can never become a means for becoming wealthy. If its given with an open heart than it will make the two families become united and help this new couple in giving advice and in solving their problems as they arise. (Couple #3)

Men and women who were more ambivalent about the tradition thought that it should be redefined in a Christian way. The wife in the Maasai couple (#5) said that she was against the tradition because she didn’t want to be sold. Her husband argued that bridewealth could be “good if taken in a Christian way, because we don’t pay because we are buying [a wife], but as a thanks and appreciation” (p. 3,4). Another man from the Maasai tradition said that he was for a component of the bridewealth process which brings the families together.

Nevertheless, for traditional non-Christian Maasai (like his parents and extended family) it is a burden because of the large economic debt traditionally incurred.

I think that the important part of the process is to get together these two families. That is a very important part. But following the parts of paying the brideprice, things are changing now days in our society, especially in Christian families. In
my society, I must say it is an unfinished work, because my father is still paying a brideprice for my mother. And my brother married a Masai girl and he is still paying a brideprice. And in the meeting, I was present there, we said, “Please we cannot afford to pay the money. But please let this boy and girl get married. we’ll pay it slowly.” So we are still paying. So they will be paying even if they get children and grand-children, as my father is doing now. My opinion is that this process of paying brideprice must stop... It is too expensive. (Male Focus Group #3)

The above Maasai man said later that he himself was providing a bridewealth for his wife’s family, but because they were Christians they had asked for much less. Nevertheless, he was still assisting his brothers in their brideprice payments which was a source of tension in his own marriage.

Other men and women had additional reservations about the custom. The husband and wife of couple #1 sharply differed in their opinions. The husband described it as “a sign of a new relationship” beginning; it should not be understood as something you have to pay. He acknowledged that in his culture (Bena) the giving of bridewealth often led a man to feel “more superior that his wife. What he says is final and the wife has no chance to counter him. Sometimes because of this concept of brideprice, because they paid a lot of money or cattle or things, they feel justified in thinking that they own the wife.” His wife, meanwhile, saw nothing positive in the tradition and said that she believed that there should be “no such thing.” What often happens, from her perspective, is once the bridewealth is paid, the woman goes to her husband’s house and becomes the family’s servant or slave, having “no say in her life” (p. 2). When I asked them about how their family celebrated this custom of bridewealth, the pastor replied:

Yes, I thank my wife’s parents, because they considered that. We are Christians of course and we are coming from a different area, so we are different ethnic backgrounds. So they decided to reduce some of the many things that might be required from that tribe. So it was somehow much less out of Christian kindness.
And it’s not necessary to pay all of that bridefare all at one time. You can pay after 5 or 10 years. It’s not a problem. It’s not necessary. (Couple #1)

Women who had misgivings or outright opposed the tradition of bridewealth related some fascinating stories. They said that the custom was acceptable if it helped in bonding two families in a spirit of celebration rather than a business transaction. A couple of the women pastors/theologians participated in the bridewealth negotiations and objected to it on these grounds – it was simply a transaction. In fact, in an ironic way, one rejected the agreed upon price, to everyone’s dismay, arguing that she was not worth such a little price! She relates the following story:

Female: Myself, I don’t like this kind of price paid by the bridegroom. Because sometimes it’s considered to be that a woman is like one of the cattle at home. That’s why we are disregarded sometimes in important matters. Maybe I would like it if can be part of making some kind of bond together. These two families together. It can be some kind of covenant or something like that. It can be done in some kind of celebration rather than paying something which makes men to look superior to women.... But myself, in my case, what I did was this. My parents and spouse’s parents sat together for our...the word, what do you call it in English?

Researcher: Bridewealth.
Female: They said we need four cows before she leaves here.
Researcher: That’s your parents?
Female: Yes. My brothers. Then I said, “OK. That’s really good. Thank you.” This is my first response. They said [to me] that everyone is doing this brideprice. We cannot just offer you freely. I said: “If not freely, then with an uncomfortable price?”

Researcher: Uncomfortable price?
Female: Yes I said. Because I don’t think that four cows is my price (laughing)! I don’t think then that I’m worth just 4 cows! I’m worth much more than that!” They [my husband’s family] then said that I’m no good! “Your head is heavy! That’s ok [the 4 cows]...that’s good. Don’t talk about it anymore!” (Female interview #1)

Later at the wedding ceremony, her father complained that he had not received the agreed upon number of cows. When they were finally provided, the audacious woman told him and her brothers that these cows were not brideprices for her; they were to be understood as gifts
from her husband’s family to her own family. She later said that they just don’t understand that the people most in need of such gifts and assistance are the couple who are beginning a new life in a new house – not the extended family who have all these things already!

A female pastor from the Pare area described how the church in her area had specifically taught members about Christian marriage and discouraged the exchange of bridewealth. In her own pre-marital negotiations, she described a very surprising conclusion to those bridewealth discussions.

I was one of those who tried to say, who tried to talk with my parents about that and my parents they understood it and they said “Ok. We don’t want to.” But of course they had these discussions in the church, in the 1970’s and 1980’s, were these programs to teach about Christian marriage and dowry [bridewealth] was one of those topics and my parents understood that taking a dowry is like selling your child, but because of this strong tradition - You know what they did was they sat down, because when they sit and talk, I mean, when the children introduce that they want to get married, these two families have to sit and talk – some things which they sit and talk is like the dowry, but also about many other things. I mean this is like the unity, knowing each other and things like that. So when they talk about my dowry and things like that and it was planned and it was clear and we want this and that and that. And the other family, you know, they talk like this is too much and things like that. And finally they [my fiance’s parents] said: “Yes, we are able to pay all this.” But then my family said: “Well, we are coming from a Christian belief, but we don’t want you to pay us because it would be like selling our daughter to you.” And so the parents (my fiance’s) said: “We want to give honor and thanks to you, that we appreciate that you have agreed that our son is to get married to your daughter, so we will not give you a dowry, but with whatever gift we come and bring – please accept it!” (Female interview #2).

Similar understandings of bridewealth as “selling your daughter” appeared in conversations with the younger women seminary students. All of the five women in focus groups #2 and #4 were very much against the tradition. They argued either for its removal or continuation in an altered form where a simple exchange of gifts by both families took place. This was expressed most articulately and passionately by a woman in focus group #4:
Some people say that brideprice is like a sign or gift or appreciation from one family to the other for raising a good woman.

But I think if that be the case, my family, they have to give the other family because they have taken care of that boy. You see that family has taken care of him up to the age he is going to marry. Where am I getting that man? And they didn’t take care of that man? So it’s my chance to also give those parents a gift – if it’s a matter of gifts. They give to me and I give to them. Yes, like an exchange.

I’ve never heard of that before here. It’s true, then let’s give each other gifts.

As if it’s a matter of gifts, but really it’s not a gift. If it is [truly] a gift then give each other gifts or a little money. There are other traditions, like Sukuma, if she [the bride] is white [an African with a more white complexion] her family gets 50 or 60 cows. Then is that a gift or selling the daughter? I cannot ask a gift from you. You just give without asking me... But if you are asking for a gift, it’s not a gift, it’s an arrangement!

In their view, the more “educated” people are adopting these newer type of practices. In fact, three of the women said that they are trying to convince their parents not to ask a brideprice but to simply bless them and encourage a truly mutual exchange of gifts from both families. Such an exchange would help reorient the custom and help check its evolution or degeneration into a source of wealth for the bride’s family – which many of the participants believed was a real and present danger. Both men and women articulated again and again that the temptation for families during economic difficulties is to demand so much that it has become an economic burden. None of the respondents reported experiencing this personally. They, however, said that such “greed” is prevalent among the members of the congregations they serve. When the meanings or subtext for bridewealth is confined to economic terms or payment or profit, then they can see the toxic ripple effect through the various members of the family. One can see this in the following story:

Yesterday a visitor came from my home. She is telling me the incidents of my older sister. She was telling me that Maria is really having a hard time. I said, “Why?” She said that you know when she got married, before she got married,
Maria’s father demanded too much from this boy. He demanded: cattle, money, goats and he asked labor from this boy. He had to harvest his farm. He had to build a house. He had to dig his latrine. All those things just to get that girl. and she said that when everything that was demanded was over, then she got married and now she said as soon as she got married her husband told her: “You are going to pay for your husband.” I mean and then I said I’m afraid that brideprice is not as good a thing as John Mbiti and other African scholars have really tried to romanticize it. Then why is it for not having paid the brideprice that they are always claiming. They are always coming and demanding. Why is it a demand if it is a gift? (Female Interview))

The female pastor who related this incident, said that her own father did not insist on claiming a bridewealth for her, which resulted in a threat by her extended family members to not attend the wedding (I believe they did eventually come).

The tradition of bridewealth is a complex social force from my perspective as a therapist and pastor. On the one hand, it authenticates and stabilizes the marriage for many of the men and women of this study – ensuring that women have support and recourse from their own families (through the rules of the return of bridewealth) if the marriage experiences a crisis. Indeed, for these women and men, it would be perilous to marry without the existence of such a custom. Bridewealth is instrumental in the “uniting” of families – a token of friendship, an appreciation – the quality of the extended family relationship being so very important according to these respondents. There is, on the other hand, evidence of a shift among the participants of the Makumira community. Some of these respondents are arguing for its elimination or its transformation. An older professor said: “Oh well, if it’s a gift then it should not be demanded. That’s my thought. It should not be the basis of marriage. If it is not there, it is a gift...But many parents now, especially among the elite discourage brideprice. I think education will be the key factor, in eliminating brideprice. It’s my thought” (Male interview #5)
The experience of study participants in their marriage negotiations suggest that the individual dioceses of the ELCT have held differing views and policies on the tradition of bridewealth. For example, according to the participants, the Pare Diocese in the 1970's and 1980's discouraged its practice. Other dioceses (such as the Central Diocese) concentrated on curbing high prices. Still others (like the Karagwe Diocese) simply waited for the bridewealth negotiations to be settled by the families before allowing the Christian wedding to proceed. Practices may not have been universal in each diocese; they may simply represent the unique experiences of select participants in their particular church.

Does bridewealth still serve as a “basis” for today’s African Christian marriage? It may be that a different answer is required for the different types of marriages in Tanzanian society ranging from traditional to modern. For the traditional couple, a bridewealth custom rightly practiced (uniting families with real, significant but not unbearably expensive gift exchanges) may be a considerable marital asset that quells marital anxieties and truly secures a marriage. On the other side of the spectrum, for the “modern” educated couple, a simple exchange of quite modest gifts, largely symbolic, may be an emerging practice of the future. In Christian practice, it seems there is an endeavor to transform bridewealth’s perjorative meanings (linked with payments, “selling your daughter,” and the increasing of a bride’s family’s wealth at the expense of the groom’s family, or the young couple’s own economic future) while reclaiming more positive meanings for bridewealth, including the insistence that an African woman brings clear and tangible assets into a marriage, despite what has been perceived as a strongly male dominated society. There may be multiple emerging answers to the dilemmas and blessings of the African bridewealth tradition which ultimately seeks to unite and value both families in a marriage.
CHAPTER SIX – FINDINGS - PART II

The Meaning of Marriage and People’s Hopes

When describing the meaning of their marriage, participants spoke the of this study in terms of their relationship as a couple. In contrast to the Tanzanian pastors of the pilot study, who applied John Mbiti’s well-known community or clan oriented understanding of African life to marriage, “I am because we are and since we are, therefore I am;” the great majority of Makumira participants seemed to subordinate the unity and concord of their extended families to their primary understanding of their relationship as a couple. I would argue that the Makumira participants’ experience does not necessarily contradict that of the pastors of the pilot study. Rather, it represents a deeper parsing of the meaning of marriage. When I asked couples and focus groups the question: “What is the meaning of marriage for you?”, they described it in the following ways: an agreement between a man and woman to live together under God, a voluntary union between a male and female to become one flesh, an institution where two individuals come together for a life-long undertaking, a contract between two individuals, a unity between me and my spouse. Again, the preeminent focus in their discourse was their relationship as a couple under God’s jurisdiction. What follows are some examples from the couples’ and focus groups:

Couple #2

Husband: It’s between two people. We have decided to come together and in the marriage there are requirements, when they come together, when they try to unite within their differences. The two of them understands those things that the other pleases him or her or the things that others does not like. So this difference, through the act of forgiving each other every day and through the act of cooperating on issues that pertain to the family – the nuclear family and they can live together as God planned.

Wife: It’s a union between two individuals or two personalities to be one unit according to our code...and children are later fruits of the marriage.
Couple #4
Wife: It’s just to stay together, to love each other, to build our own life, our own house and our own family. If God gives us children, good. And to help our own parents
Husband: I myself, marriage is a union of two different people, a male and female and that union is a free union, bonding. As Christians, that bonding or union starts in the name of God, to start a relation as a woman and as a wife, as a man and husband in God’s hands, to beg for blessings for a good life and good things to come. So it’s mutual; it’s a freely binding relationship of male and female in God’s hands, yes.

Couple #6:
Husband: It’s good to be married because to stay with my wife, you practice your love, peace and unity. You work hard to satisfy her. You know that is your responsibility. If you marry you keep yourself in the responsibility of leading a good life.
Wife: Marriage is socially sanctioned for a man and wife to live together and to be confirmed by the church forever.

Nevertheless, not far behind a “conjugal” understanding of marriage was the importance of the extended family. For example, when I later asked the above couple (#6) whether the extended family interfered in their relationship, the wife intimated that a marriage by definition includes the clan:

No, in Africa marriage is something due to society. It comprises many members of the family. You can’t stay alone and say it is the wife and wife says this and say that we too are alone. You can’t say this with the extended family. My husband should be supported by my parents, my sister, my brothers. They say this is our sister in law, our brother in law, so everyone is supported so that this person can fit into our family. So they can interfere according to our African tradition and culture. So when you marry you can’t possibly say this is my husband and me and we are going to stay alone, as opposed to being with members of the clan. (Couple #6, female)

Of all of the respondents interviewed only one couple specifically and directly answered the question concerning the meaning of marriage in terms of including other family members, especially parents. The male pastor of couple #8 alluded to how the parents are
involved after the church wedding and his wife affirmed her partner’s authority and direction over the marriage.

Pastor (male): In our tradition marriage is more than husband and wife; it includes the parents. We are not allowed to marry unless the parents agree. On the wedding day, they go home after the wedding ceremonies and the parents of the husband give him...there is a tradition, tools to show that our son from this day on is a real man. So they give things like spears and bush knives, just to show that you are now a real able man. And from now on you share their greetings. Our name is not changed, but the greeting is changed.

Researcher: What is the meaning of marriage for you?
Wife: The husband has say of what happens in the marriage.

The above statements were the most exceptional explications of the meaning of marriage representing, in my co-researchers' and my mind, the “traditional” marriage. In an attempt to clarify further their roles as husband and wife, I asked: “Do men and women share responsibilities as far as providing for the family – food, clothing, school fees? Or does one person take responsibility for that?” They responded:

Pastor (Male): The husband is responsible for taking care of the family. The wife is responsible for only cooking, taking care of the children and doing small duties, but the man [is] the one who is responsible [for the] food, the children going to school and whatever

Researcher: Do you consider yourself the head of the family or is there a mutual relationship...how would you describe your relationship?
Wife: The husband is the head of the house.
Researcher: What does that mean?
Pastor: The husband is the head of the house. The husband is making the decisions, but the way is, if the wife wants to decide something, she has to consult her husband first; if the husband refuses her decision, it remains that way. And if she wants to go home to see her parents, when the husband says no, it must remain no.

Co-researcher: (Explaining to me and translating what the couple said) I reversed the question: How about are there times when he as a husband must consult his wife? He said: When I have to consult her, if she agrees it’s fine, if she likes my decision; the matter is left in her hands, whether to act or to leave, but I have offered to act.

Researcher: Is that common for most marriages in your region?
Pastor: Yes. Most of them [the men] are not asking their wives. They are just
doing things blind on the side of their wives.

Researcher: So, would you say yours is different in that you consult each other? Is that right? I'm trying to understand.

Pastor: When I ask my wife something and she disagrees, I weigh the outcome of it. If I say maybe ok, it can bring two cows, I leave it. If I see it is very advantageous to me, even if maybe my wife doesn't understand what I am intending to do, I do it, but first of all by reasoning with her.

Again, this was the most exceptional case where the meaning of marriage was explained principally in the male taking responsibility and authority over the household. This pastor also related that during the first four years of their marriage, his wife had to live with his family while he studied at Makumira. These years were particularly difficult for her because she was “mocked” and “disturbed” by the pastor’s younger sisters. He related that he asked his parents to watch over her, but she survived those years by “remaining silent and did not respond to them.”

The women and men, in focus groups, couples and individual interviews, portrayed a very different understanding of marriage’s meaning than the above couple. Women spoke movingly and consistently of a desire for mutuality and sharing. It was often their faith life that navigated their marriage life

My marriage? Well, of course I define it as a Christian marriage: a unity between me and my husband, a blessing from God that we can live together helping each other. What do I hope for? I don’t know what I mean. When I say I don’t know what I mean...I mean, I’m happy in my marriage and I think that that was my hope that I don’t live alone and that I can live with someone that I can live together happily and obviously it’s a difficult question...You know when we first got married my hope was just to live together happily and understand each other and help each other. This hope for children came later after we had – God gave us children. Then really when I see them now, I really ask God and we pray that we can get time to raise them up and see them growing up and achieve anything if it’s education or whatever. Now life is difficult. We really have to work hard to get into our hopes and we can’t just sit down and hope. You have to work alright. (Female pastor interview #2)
I was surprised to hear that this female pastor was “happy” in her marriage – when much of the academic literature seems to describe many of the elite (highly educated) couple’s relationships as at least contentious. In this case, much of her and her husband’s time was occupied with their work and their two school age children. They, as a family were having budget difficulties, with irregular incomes, but were still working hard together “to get into our hopes.” In another individual interview another female pastor circuitously described her relationship in terms of a good friendship. In this interview, after I had asked her the meaning of her marriage I asked her the question: What is a good marriage?

**Pastor:** For me? According to society...a good marriage is where a wife agrees to everything a man says. According to me, a good marriage is a marriage in which both spouses listen to each other and loves the other, loves one another and honors each other.

**Researcher:** And loving – what is it to be loving? Can you pinpoint some of those things?

**Pastor:** yeah, in loving I mean that, if you love one, if you love a friend, that means that you will help her or him in anything. If she is having problems or whatever you can help her – like it ‘s lightening her path. It means supporting in problems, sharing things – like work and wealth...

**Researcher:** What do you hope for in your marriage? And if your husband were here, what would he say?

**Pastor:** My hope? Oh we are having a good marriage until now. And I hope it is good in many places. First in this dialogue and then in loving each other and we are helping each other a little bit. Because it is not easy to help each other in our society, especially with our work. And my husband, I hope he loves me. We just had our 11th, what is it [in English]?

**Researcher:** Anniversary

**Pastor:** And he made this for our house [shows me an artwork] and especially for me as his wife. He said, I asked him: If he didn’t marry me, what was his wish. And he dared to say that even tomorrow I think I would like to marry you even if you didn’t want to be married to me! I liked that!

**Researcher:** That’s beautiful!

**Researcher:** And I remember the words that he used. He quoted those words from Ruth [Old Testament book] and her mother in law is asking her [Ruth] to go to her people and she says...I don’t remember the first words... “Your people are my people. Your God is my God. I can’t go back to my people. I will be with you forever.” Something like this. He repeated those words. Yes, we are hoping to live those words, our whole life.
(Female Pastor Interview #1)

I was moved by the tenderness with which this woman pastor spoke of her relationship with her husband, linking her religious and marital life, portraying a strong husband willing to be vulnerable to his wife. Both of the above female pastors, as they described their marriages, represented another type of marriage – conceived of as a cooperative undertaking where men and women shared the struggles of life. These two women’s marriages described a “modern” Christian marriage characterized by a flexible relationship where decisions were arrived at by mutual discussion. But at the same time, there was, what seemed to me, a sad acknowledgment that it wasn’t easy “to help each other” in their society.

Eight of the thirteen women (in the women only groups) mentioned the word “share” in their relating the meaning of marriage: “an agreement of two to live together, to share everything, to live in harmony and respect,” “love is sharing the burden,” “marriage is sharing the decisions equally.” I found that such terms seemed to depict the present status of their marital relationship (in varying degrees) but also exemplified the Tanzanian Christian women’s hope of striving for respect and mutuality, if not equality, in a non-threatening manner. Female respondents related that their Christian marriage was very different from the general culture, in that there was a mutual consultation between husband and wife. The women of third focus group echoed the previously mentioned female pastor’s judgment when she commented that that, “According to society a “good” marriage is where a wife agrees to everything a man says.” This seems to be the cultural reality that all the women face. A woman in the third focus group, who wanted to and did “share decisions equally” with her pastor husband said:

Wife: In the Meru life, one person wants to have the power of making decisions
and the woman is just suppose to obey, to hear and obey. Women are not allowed to advise her husband. It is better for even his younger brothers to advise him than to have a wife advise him.

Researcher: I’m wondering if, when women are educated, go to secondary school …if there tends to be more conflicts [between husband and wife]?

Wife: I don’t think so because the problem is really big, especially for those couples who are not Christians and those who are educated women. It’s a problem that is all around. Even Christian families have the same problems. This problem is for educated and non-educated women because you have to obey him, even if you are educated, because he will be angry.

Researcher: Why do women have to obey their husbands? I’m an American. I live in a different culture and I’m trying to understand this, because I believe that my wife and I are equal and we make mutual decisions. Why is it here that women have to obey?

Wife: It’s a system that we’ve inherited from the past, these relationships, because our parents live in the same way. We have to live in the same way…to agree with our husbands…If you want peace, you must obey. you have to obey even if it’s good or not good. (Focus Group #3)

Amazingly, when I asked these women (wives of pastors) if they shared the decision making with their husbands (for example with money), they all said emphatically that “they all talk to each other and make those money decisions together.”

The men in the focus groups repeated the theme of marriage being a union between a male and female where a couple becomes “one flesh” (a reference to Genesis 2:24). Three men emphasized the traditional importance of being married in that single individuals will not be listened to or accepted if they remain in that unmarried state. Of these three, one pastor stressed the importance of having children to make a “valid” marriage within his Chagga ethnic group.

I said our marriage is evaluated to be – our marriage is considered valid if we have a child. It happens if not officially, but indirectly. If you happen to marry and you don’t have a child, whether you have a problem or your wife has a problem, you’ll be persuaded or convinced to remarry because to have a child, for we Chagga is very, very significant. And when you are addressing someone: “Hello, I would like to say to Babba so and so, but who? Oh you’re childless. Oh, poli, poli [sorry]. It’s a misfortune, misfortune. (Male Focus Group #3)
Of all the respondents, his description of the meaning of marriage was most directly linked to having his three children. He describes this in no uncertain terms:

I find myself so significant because I have fulfilled the question of marriage. I have the children. The family knows that I am fit, not only morally but also physically I find myself complete. And when they consider me in the family they consider me as a perfect nuclear family. (Male Focus Group #3, p.8)

The directness of the above perspective was rare among all respondents including the men, in the context of explaining the meaning of their marriages. Over and over again, from the other respondents, I heard how Christianity has intervened and taught a new meaning of marriage where the relationship is more important and children are products of and not determinants of a valid marriage. This “new” position contradicts the traditional African understanding that a marriage has no meaning without children. Nevertheless, this new Christian worldview is not held easily among childless Christian couples. I quote extensively the following conversation in the first male focus group, which vividly highlights the issues at hand:

Pastor #1: Traditionally people have hopes in marriage like having many children. They hope to love each other, but actually from cultural or traditional grounds, Christianity has come up with another thing that I like most. Our hope in marriage is that we should love each other, help each other, we should pray together and encourage each other when difficulties occur.

Pastor #2: We Africans don’t differ much especially around the issue of having children, yes we hope that. A marriage should have children and we expect that the life of that marriage should be good in the family, both the couple and the relatives live in a good manner in a good relationship. Here, there comes a problem, if the marriage is childless. This is a problem, where even traditionally it is a problem, the tradition is there… The husband is allowed to marry another wife. But in a Christian way, it’s a problem. Sometimes this childlessness has led to a divorce or other difficulties within the marriage. So we hope to have children within the marriage. Of course, I am having 2 children and before having 2 children we stay 2 years before having one. It brought some questions, especially from our parents. You know that my parents are not Christians,
so when they found this, they were questioning and sometimes they can bring problems and misunderstandings upon the married couple, because they put questions: What is happening with your family? Sometime they can say: let us try this way so that you can get children and if you are a Christian and faithful to your Lord, then you can be tempted to go and seek other help from somewhere. You know that we are Africans and in the African way of life, some people are believe to have, I can say that they are believed to have supernatural power to do something, for the childless marriage. So if you are faithful to your Lord that is to Jesus Christ, you will be tempted to follow this traditional way of finding children in the family. But as Christians we teach that it doesn’t, it is not necessary to have children in a Christian way, though children are a gift of God and if the family doesn’t have children, ok, we should live as it is as a Christian point of view. (Male Focus Group #1)

One sees the religious cultural battle most clearly in the above statement. The church says emphatically that a “marriage is a marriage even without children” (a quote from a local church leader – individual interview #1). Nevertheless, there is great pressure, both internally within the marriage and externally from parents, to give birth. In the above case, pressure was exerted to go to a soothsayer or witch-doctor to remedy their dilemma. I was told that such a person is not a herbalist, who uses medicinal herbs to heal people (the church is not against this), but a diviner who summons the spirits through various means to discern which parties (living or dead) have been offended and are responsible for the couple’s infertility. The ELCT would judge the visiting of such a soothsayer as an act of idolatry.

Clearly, fertility was a major concern for newly married couples. One could sense a deep sigh of relief for most of these Christian couples upon giving birth to a child, because they had fulfilled an ancient duty of the African “imaginative universe” of becoming a “complete” or part the extended clan. They would not have to struggle with the tradition and their respective families. One newly married childless Masai couple (#4) reasoned: “If we are not going to have children, we don’t blame each other. But because children are a gift from God
after our loving each other, it's something we expect from God...So in African societies, a
family is not a good family with no children – it is not a good family. Maybe other people
insult them, but according to us, we can see that it depends upon how God wants or wills.”

An indication of an emerging conjugal model of marriage was seen in a couple’s
inclination to negotiate with each other about major decisions within the household. For
example couple #5 answered my question:

Researcher: There are some people who say that the man is the head of the family and
makes all the decisions and some couples say that we have an equal or mutual
relationship and share the decisions. How would you describe your
relationship?
Wife: There is need to have negotiations between us, not for one person to
decide.
Pastor: Myself, I agree with my wife and that how we are doing it in our family.
For example, having two children. It’s not my decision. It’s our decision.
We sit down and discuss about this after seeing the expensive tuition, then
we decided to do so.
Researcher: Do you consider yourself unusual in comparison to other couples in your
culture? Or is that the way things are done? That’s normal?
Wife: Our kind of relationship, something like that is missing in many
marriages. (Couple #5)

I then asked this couple how did they decide to have this kind of marital relationship where
they consulted each other. The husband replied that a professor and another pastor was very
influential in his life as a student. The professor, in particular, claimed that many marriages
in Africa have difficulties because men are used to holding on to the funds and giving their
wives only one or two shillings for their home needs. Here we see how representatives of
Christian institutions have exposed students to fresh conceptions of gender roles. The pastor
continues:

Then when I was married I met a certain pastor who was talking something like
that and when I asked myself as a pastor that I am suppose to live such a [life]? I
refused to live such a life, to hold the funds of my family. Instead my wife is
supposed to participate in this, even if she stays home doing activities there at
home. So we decided both of us to decide about our income. So she knows my income and everything about this she knows. And she is the one who keeps our salary every month, even the funds we are getting here at Makumira, it is kept by her. (Couple #5)

Other couples (#6,7,9,10), described functioning in a comparable manner, but still with the traditional understanding that the husband is the "head" of the household. According to these couples, men shared home tasks (from washing dishes and cleaning the house) and accounting responsibilities (where women managed the household income) with their wives, but saw themselves as benevolent leaders. A local ELCT leader that I interviewed made the following careful distinctions:

Here of course, it's not equality. It's what I would rather say is mutuality. Equality is a word spoken only recently after the Beijing [women's conference] kind of thing and so on. But this is not something that has gotten in the forefront of marriage here. See, it's not that we all aren't equal. We are equal before God. But here we have a philosophy that, well in our family, a husband is taking a leading role. And I think in your community [USA] you are thinking of equality. All are bosses! Here it's a little bit different and the husband is the head of the house, family, yes of course and the mother is also there. But if you ask: who does this house belong to? For instance, they would not say it belongs to the wife. They would say that it belongs to Peter, Thomas, Matthew. They would never say that it belongs to Elizabeth. They would never say that. (Individual Interview # 1, p.4)

This is the "estuary" referred to in the previous chapter, those murky yet fertile edges, where gender roles are being reformulated into something new as yet unknown. The husband (of couple #5) cooks and even washes clothes, but his wife doesn’t like a man in her kitchen. The wife (of couple #10) manages the income (from savings accounts, to major and minor purchases), but she still considers her husband the head. The husband of couple #6 explains:

Pastor: The husband is the head of the house. He is someone who can think and judge the way of life, but due to Christianity we’re suppose to share each other the type of life we want to live. No one to command the other. I try to share the opinions on how to live. Christianity has enlightened us that
we are to share our burdens of living.

Researcher: How is it with you? Do you share the decisions?
Pastor: Yes.
Researcher: Or does the final decision rest with you?
Pastor: One can decide, but he...she depends upon what he decides most. But I myself think if she likes something and I agree with her, we can then decide to do it with her or myself. But she likes to see what I like...that's the way I see it. (Couple #6)

This is the "new movement of being together and agreeing together" which is how a Meru participant described it. It's a hybrid movement and its intricacies elude crystal clear delineations. The new movement, indeed, challenges the traditional gender roles and males are not spared the taunting and contemptuousness of the surrounding family and culture.

Several men said that they were laughed at for consulting their wife and performing traditionally female held household duties. An excellent example is provided by a Masai pastor in focus group #3.

In my society [Masai], usually, men make the decisions in the family. But personally, in my family we have to discuss, we have to share. What I am practicing is something new. Some types, some people may laugh at me. Because they ask you to do something and if you say: "Wait a moment, I am going to discuss this with my wife." They laugh at me and say. "Why are you going to discuss this? And you are a leader?" And women like this, according to my experience. They like to discuss with their husband if they have that golden chance of discussion. Because it's not so common in our society. (Male Focus Group #3)

A Chagga pastor responding to the above Masai pastor's words remarked how he could never really behave in this manner. He is considered the "leader" and "organizer" and though he and his wife discuss matters, she will always ask him: "What is your final decision?" He goes on to say:

Pastor: I am the one who is to decide. It is respected in our family that it is the man who marries the wife and not the wife who marries the man. So you are the judge in the house...The final say should be for men. And sometimes if you lose or give your wife a chance to decide and one of the members of the clan
hears that – they will laugh. They will laugh at you very much. Even the clan also. And when they are in a session or ceremony or in a party, they will say: “Oh you know, Pastor [his name] can never decide unless his wife says. [he then says a Chagga proverb] “If you want to borrow a bush knife or an axe for chopping wood, he can do it only if his wife agrees” And this is shameful in the Chagga tradition.

Researcher: What does this mean?
Pastor: A wife cannot defeat a man in decision making. (Male Focus Group #3)

For the great majority of the Makumira respondents, the “meaning” of their marriage was explained in terms of their relationship as a couple, in their becoming one flesh, a unity of a man and woman under God. The traditional ties with the parents and extended family with accompanying expectations to have children were still substantial, but were challenged by new Christian meanings which placed greater significance on the couple’s union and the growth of their “love, peace, and unity” as one participant said. I was affected by many of the individuals’ contented descriptions of their relationships: “Yes, our marriage is filled with comfort, in walking this life together” (Couple #7); “I’m happy in my marriage” (female, individual interview #2).

Other times, I wondered if I was hearing or seeing the complete picture. Some of the single female respondents were highly critical that wives of pastors still remained silent in their husband’s presence and addressed their husband with the same word (“Shikamuu”) that children address elders. Another foreign couple from a neighboring country observed that many of the husbands at Makumira do not give their wives the freedom to make decisions with regard to money. They described a large educational gap between the spouses and alluded to a theology which justifies women’s sense of inadequacy and subordination. They differed, however, on its cause.

Pastor (male): For example, you can find a pastor who completed a BD (bachelor’s degree] course, but he goes to the village and marries a girl who
completed primary school, so when it occurs, you keep on finding that she cannot give a good idea or good discussion and she feels down and that way continues that she keeps on feeling inferior – seeing that her aan is very educated, but what he is saying is the only correct saying – That is what I experience.

Wife: That’s what I have said they [the wives] believe that they are inferior and that God justified it.

Pastor: The problem is because they are not educated. They are primary school educated and there is a big gap. (Couple #7)

Similar observations, concerning the use of Scripture to encumber women, were shared by women pastors in the focus groups and will be dealt with more completely below.

Marriage is certainly undergoing change. On a formal level, contrary to the graduate couples of my pilot study who saw marriage as involving a series of steps and could not identify a specific point of time that they were married, Makumira respondents agreed that their Christian marriage commenced at the wedding at the church and is a life-time committment. I was told that such an understanding was taught and unyieldingly held by all of the ELCT dioceses – where “the church does not regard marriages contracted in non-Christian form as legal unions because they are performed without the church’s regulations. It is stated in the North Eastern Diocese Constitution that: “Those marrying by themselves without the order of the church have by such act put themselves under church discipline. If they later repent, their marriage will be blessed by the church” (Mkilindi, 1992). Although respondents were well aware of the constitutional definitions, they still stressed the importance of various over-lapping customary marital processes.

An array of meanings of marriage were presented. Though great variety exist, I see a Christian model of marriage present and emerging, where couples are striving to “walk this life together.” Such a model, expressed by Tanzanian Christian leaders, is both challenging the surrounding culture and exhibiting a “new way” for couples to relate. “All are not the
"bosses" in this African Christian model and husbands have not been dethroned, but there are emerging expectations for mutuality and sharing and a vision toward an equal regard by many women in this seminary community. Perhaps it is telling, in this time of change where couples are negotiating how to reach a common mind, that a great many of the respondents, men and women alike, hoped for peace and harmony (with no quarrels) in their relationship.

I conclude this section with the following quote from a Masai pastor:

I hope my marriage to be a happy marriage, a peaceful marriage. I don’t mean that there won’t be any quarrels, but I hope we will solve our problems, we two. I’m very interested in solving our problems – we two – without involving another person in our marriage. And this is possible through the discussion through I myself and my wife. It needs some courage because you have to cool down your motives and your strong decisions. You have to listen to your wife. My hope in our family is to help our children for their future, give them better education as we can. So we have to use our resources in a very proper way. This is our hope not to misuse our small things we earn in our family. And my hope is to have a good relationship with God, our whole family – to have a good relation with God.

(Male Focus Group #3)

**Significant Marital Issues – Personal and Cultural**

The participants shared surprisingly similar responses to the question: What do you see are some of the issues that couples in your churches are wrestling with? All groups (couples, males and females) chronicled two broad themes in varying degrees: 1) the assistance and interference of the extended family especially in fertility issues and the distribution of wealth, workload and kinship support; 2) the stressful multiple tensions in marital roles provoked by: a) women’s increasing workloads and childcare responsibilities while subservient to her husband’s “headship” and authority – as well as the desperate state of many widows; and b) male disengagement or absence from family responsibilities (through infidelity, alcoholism, family violence, squandering of household income, employment in
distant cities, and AIDS). "Unfaithfulness" was a term that continually emerged, describing not only sexual infidelity, but a couple's tendency to hide, deceive or circumvent each other in matters concerning their income and decision-making.

Many of the participants were reticent in responding to the personal question, "What issues or problems have you faced as a couple and how have you overcome them?" It was here, where I faced the most resistance in focus and couples' groups. The bulk of respondents spoke abstractly about marital problems, tending to focus on the significant issues and situations they faced in their ministries (the broad themes mentioned in the preceding paragraph). The great majority, who did speak of personal issues, described problematic relations with the extended family. A number of people (two couples, and two of the focus groups) said that they never had any problems in their marriages. Others told me that this sort of questioning was very foreign for their culture: "In the African context it is difficult for men and women to talk together" (Couple #1); "Women are trained to have respect, to speak confidently before a man would be to have no respect" (Couple #2).

The barriers to sharing problematic experiences seemed immense. Nevertheless, there were respondents who described some of those issues (principally involving the couple's relationship with the extended family) that they have faced personally and overcome. This deeper level of sharing tended to take place in individual interviews or in the same gender focus groups.

The remaining sections of this chapter elucidate the two main issues: 1) the assistance and the interference of the extended family; and 2) the stressful multiple tensions in marital roles. Lastly, I've included a brief section, quoting several of the respondents' unique personal issues which I believe need to be heard.
The Assistance and Interference of Extended Family

The respondents at Makumira held comparable perspectives of the extended family as had the graduate students at Iowa State University in the pilot study. On the one hand, members of the family were available to assist in domestic responsibilities, childcare, or the housing of a wife during the course of seminary studies for her husband. Several students described how their families enabled them to study at Makumira by taking care of their wives. A pastor from the first male focus group remarks:

...For example I am here studying for 4 years. My family is there [at my home]. So they have no problem there because my family is there and the society is there. They take care of them, whether they are suffering or getting into trouble. I am here for 4 years, so I don’t doubt. (Male Focus Group #1)

In Tanzania and many African countries, where primary schools and opportunities for higher education are available only at far distances from villages, the kin network provides essential room and board not only for students but in this case for wives and children. This was a “blessing” for many married students in that they could rest assured that their family would be well taken care of in their absence.

At the same time, it was noted that women can be easily taken advantage of by the husband’s family. This was acknowledged by couple #8, who described the wife’s being “mocked and disturbed” by her husband’s sisters, during his course of study at Makumira. This pastor tried to mediate by urging his parents to intervene, but that did not happen as well as he liked. His wife later said that she was given much additional work to do (farm work, cooking and washing of clothes) not only by her husband’s sisters but also by his brothers. Again, she survived this experience by keeping silent. This pastor said that he wishes now that his wife could have lived with him at Makumira as she is doing now, “but the brideprice
had been paid and my family felt that she owed them her work.” Here, evidently, the presumption was clear that it was his wife’s duty to reciprocate or payback the groom’s family for the bridewealth. We were unable to pierce her silence – her great reluctance to speak – to see how this had affected their marital relationship.

In another similar situation, a source of marital tension involved the husband’s family inclination to “command” his wife to work for them! In this case, the husband had completed his studies and he and his wife lived too conveniently close to his family. His wife, however, had expressed great reservations concerning the claims of his family. He remarks:

In my family I am experiencing one of the major problems because in our tribe the wife is married to the family. She is accepted totally as member of the clan, but she is not responsible to only me. She can be commanded or assigned some instructions or some other social things to do, for example, by my brother or younger brother. And this, my wife does not like that. She says: “I am married to only Pastor [name]. He is my husband. Now I have to receive orders from other members of the clan?” Unless, myself, I convince her...my wife does not want to be directed or assigned work to do by my mother or by my father because everyone has their own plantation to farm...Although, when my father or my mother is ill, she normally cooks for them, but she will not take instructions by my brother to work for them or my younger brothers. It’s hard, although now we are not living near my parents or my brothers. The problem is solved because we live far away from our family area! (Male Focus Group #3)

He said later that he had to respect his wife’s objections despite the pressure he was receiving from his brothers. His allegiance, given his traditional understanding of marriage, was to the extended family, however he would not consider divorcing his wife because he loved her and Christians don’t divorce! This pastor said that asking to be transferred to a more distant church helped him to avoid a confrontation with his brothers and his wife and reduced the tension within his marriage. I asked him if other women are rebelling to similar
demands placed by the husband’s family and he replied that it is becoming more and more frequent.

Other difficult issues involved relatives who came to live with the respondents while studying at a local primary or secondary school. For example, a couple (#1) heard from their parents at their home village that there were reports that they (couple #1) didn’t like the young man (a relative, a younger brother) who was staying with them. In this case, the pastor’s father took the initiative to visit the couple to rectify the problem and also ameliorate relations back in the village. The pastor explains:

And my father took initiative to ask me: “Why did these things happen?” And I told my father, “No, this is not true! The only reason for my younger brother to say this is that we are very strict sometimes in handling him.” To live with us you have to go this way and do this. So the boy only wanted to have more time in playing. He didn’t want to work or to do hard things. He wanted his freedom. And we are the ones who are taking care of him and wanted him to behave in our household. So it was a little like that. And so we said, if he is not interested in staying with us, he is better to stay there at Morogoro. (Couple #1)

We asked the couple how did this young relative affect their marital relationship? They said that it created a great deal of tension, particularly because it was the wife who had the most contact with the student. Fortunately they both agreed together, in a series of conversations, that the “boy” had to have some work responsibilities at home and live under their household rules. In this case, the extended family, particularly the father, was content with the situation once he knew this couple’s clear expectations.

Other respondents related experiences where the extended family of the wife not only made excessive demands for bridewealth but continually harassed the young couple (rather than the husband’s extended family) to complete payment. For example, the husband of couple #9 said: “...this issue of brideprice, now and then when the in-laws are demanding so
much: ‘You still owe us. You still owe us.’ Which also disturbs the marriage situation of the
couple because they can’t afford it. The in-laws tend to forget that this couple is trying to
build their future together.”

One of the foreign African couples said that in comparison to their own neighboring
country, they perceived that parents in Tanzania exercised too great of control in the lives of
young couples. They argued that there is need for more of a conjugal understanding of
marriage where the husband, rather than the parents and kin, is solely responsible for the
payment of bridewealth. Such an arrangement will provide the extended family with little
justification for interfering in the couple’s life. I think their comments as outside observers
are worthy of consideration by the Makumira community.

The problem in this culture [Tanzanian] is that parents have a strong say on the
couple, on the boy and on the girl. Because the ones who are supporting the
marriage from the wedding to the dowry [brideprice], all those are supported by
the parents. So you find in most cases, they have a big say on the marriage. If
the parents say that this wife has a bad habit toward them, they can cause damage
on the couple, because the reliance of the society is on the parents for everything.
It is different for ours because I am the one who paid the dowry and my house. If
I send away my wife, it is my loss. I am the one who can say if I send away the
support of my wife, where shall I get another one? It’s not my parents. They are
the ones [here in Tanzania] who tell you if you are to send away your wife.
[They say:] “We will not give you any money.” If they are the ones who pay the
dowry, everything, they are able to tell you that this wife is disturbing our
household. We are ready to give you another dowry. So this is a problem [here].
(Couple Interview)

It was clear from many of the respondents that the family’s influence was both a
blessing and a burden. The words of a female participant, who had studied a number of years
in a variety of institutions, mirrored the ambivalent feelings of the graduate students in my
pilot study. She was, like them, highly educated and bore the weight of familial
expectations. She describes, at first, the great support that she receives from her niece:
...You know to run with the family and to respect them and help them and know that they are a blessing to us. I can always go and talk with them. One time, one of my children was sick and I had to go to town and get my niece and asked her to come and help me and then she did. And because of this family values, because she respects me, she will come. She will not say, “No, I’m tired,” because she respects me, so I get that. And when she needs me too, I will do the same thing for her. You know if it works, if it benefits us both ways. But if it is just like using, you know, one person, then it’s bad. (Female Individual Interview)

However, she then launched into a critique of the so-called African community life and extended family system which, she believed, places entirely too much pressure on certain individuals and discourages a personal accountability.

The African community – the idea of the African community in the west, is so good. Well, don’t make it so good, because sometimes people take advantage of that. These days with so much poverty here. And this is also the aftermath of colonialism, everything, politics and everything is messed up in our society life. When I am educated, people expect that I have a salary, which I do. It may not be a real salary that lasts me a week or so, but it would be that I have a salary and a better life than many Tanzanians here. So in my family because they know that I am educated, and because they really do struggle a whole lot, life is a struggle...they chose a different path. Then they all come here. It’s a community. It’s a family. We thought this is our value. So they become your burden. That’s what you carry. You carry your father, you carry your brother, you carry nieces, everybody. So is this community thing a good thing to you? I don’t know. I don’t think. And this is because all of these shifts and transitions that have taken place. Because I think in the African setting, in the past, it was not expected that one person would be, would be carrying the burden. But now it is the ones who are privileged...they will pay the price for everybody, for even a corrupt society, irresponsibility, alcoholism, all that in their lives. I really care about everyone and I don’t like it and it’s no good and my family knows it and they won’t stop coming. It’s tough for me, it’s tough for me to carry everyone’s burden, because of this blood relationship or extended family relationship. It’s a burden; everyone comes, everyone comes, you know, my in-laws, my husband’s relatives, my own relatives, the village people, who has known you as a child of the village. (Female Individual Interview)

At the time of the interview, she was clearly exhausted by the many demands (professional responsibilities, child-care, cooking, and many visitors from her village area) placed upon her. Her husband was at their home town at the time and could offer little
support which contributed to her distress. At the same time, her niece's domestic help greatly assisted her in the continued maintenance of her household.

Another woman, a pastor, was grappling with many of the same difficulties as the individual described above. She also was very candid about the incessant requests and appeals for money and assistance. She, however, had come to more of a resolution to the problem with her husband. She remarks:

A big problem in my marriage came the very first day. It is because my husband comes from a big family. They have 10 children, so they have a family of 12. Well, I can say, we are small, because we are 5 children. They are 10 and we are 5! And he is the second one. He and his brother, they are the only ones here [in Moshi], but they have a big problem of helping his younger sisters and brothers. We really are responsible for them. They can't pay their school fees, particularly...Yes! that is our tradition and we would not say no, but we discuss and find it's better that we help now so that they can stand on their own and leave us alone [later]! (laughing). If you come to our house now, you will find his young brother now at home. We are together with him, because he's a resident student...You know, it's a question of love, loving each other, but I don’t know if you can agree with me. You know, you [the USA] have come to this standard that the government can take care of you, you know, and so you can be taken care of in retirement. If you are a student, you can have some money from someplace for your studies. I mean you can do some part-time jobs to get things like that. But it's difficult here. So when you see your brother cannot have any pocket money it’s a questions of love. And it goes back to yourself, you were once helped. I remember my uncle paid my school fees because my father could not. So when I come to a case that here is my brother-in-law or sister-in-law who cannot go to father because of money, it’s easy for me to help because I was once helped! So it’s not only a question of tradition; it’s a question of lifestyle and loving each other and caring for each other because we have seen some families who have rebelled against it. They say, “No! We will not [help]! But then you really find the clashes there; the brother and money; the children they are poor; and you will not be happy. (Female Individual Interview)

This woman looked at the extended family primarily as a blessing. Yes they did try to “interfere” in her family life, particularly in the grandparents wanting to make decisions for their grandchildren. But she looked at these “interferences” as opportunities to teach the extended family the particular boundaries of her and her husband’s family. But still it was
difficult. She says: “What we did was just try to teach them! Uhm! That, here you can
interfere, like this relationship. Those blessing we kept open. We said yeah, here you can
interfere, but in some cases we couldn’t just let say openly no...from here you can interfere,
but here this is our life.”

The many expectations and obligations of the extended family are part of the fabric of
African marriage life. For many respondents, this “fabric” can feel like a web and to be
caught in this web can be a delicate and potentially hazardous situation. In a Christian
environment, where there is a definite and growing sense of partnership marriages, I think
that couples could gain a great deal of wisdom and knowledge from each other of how to
negotiate these particularly finespun, “sticky” issues involving the extended family.

Multiple Tensions in Marital Roles

The other broad themes which respondents described as problematic issues within
the church and larger Tanzanian society were women’s stressful multiple roles and men’s
controlling “headship,” as well as men’s increasing disengagement or absence from marriage
and family life. Their words concerning women’s status reiterated and supported the
descriptions and themes found in the African feminist literature reported in the literature
review concerning patriarchy and inequality. In addition to these themes echoed within the
literature, there also emerged specific viewpoints from the Makumira context including:
1) male “headship” in a Christian context; 2) family violence or “wife-beating”; 3) the
church’s stance on the indissolubility of marriage; 4) inadequate sexual education; 4)
“unfaithfulness” and absent husbands; and 5) the trauma of “widowhood.”
Surprisingly, men and women were vocal on this subject of the multiple stressors especially impacting women's lives. In addition, respondents noted that women are acting more independently of their husbands in gaining new sources of income as well as engaging in extra-marital affairs. Again, a corollary theme that emerged was men's increasing absence or irresponsibility (through infidelity, alcoholism and violence) and ensuing negligence of familial obligations (through little or no financial or emotional support). A variety of cases of marital conflict were described and concerns were voiced about increasing violence ("wife-beating"). Male "disengagement" or absence remains a fertile field for future research. At this time, I was only able to catch a glimpse of what many respondents referred to as a great social problem.

In this discussion, of multiple stressors, I've reiterated to a degree what is well known in the literature, but from the Makumira respondents' perspective. I believe that their distinctive experiences as a religious community provide important unique perspectives of the church and culture they work in.

**Male “Headship” in a Christian Context** - The first couple which I interviewed rapidly identified some of the major difficulties they have found in their ministry. I will use their words as a starting point.

**Pastor:** The first thing is the position of the wife in the family life. Some husbands think that they are the head of the house, so the wife has then no right to speak or to decide anything. This is a problem. Second to be honest, is the caring of children because there are husbands who think that this is the responsibility of women and not men... It is difficult for husbands to consider their own financial situation even if it is very bad and what they want is only to have children—even if their wives are not happy with that, but so long as the husband has said it, then it must take place. Another thing is caring for widows and orphans. For example, if the husbands die, these widows are facing many problems because the relatives of the husband does not consider that and sometimes they take everything from the wives when they die.
Even in Christian families?

Of course. Sometimes these children [orphans] if they do not have a good foundation they start getting into other things like stealing and crime. We see many of them on the streets, sometimes because of this and they have no one to take care of them.

Those children who are left empty from their relatives and have everything taken from them, the church has no say. The church only sees them and does not say anything. Even for the pastors who have died. Church does not do anything for them when the relatives come and take all the belongings. All the church says is *poli, poli, poli* [sorry] and then it's over. There is no compassion for widows. There is no plan for widows. (Couple #1)

Respondents were clear that women's inferior status and predicament is due to the tradition of men's "headship" of the family. Furthermore, the many problems that occur in widowhood (and also during women's marriage living in the village of her husband), are linked to the traditional understanding of marriage where a woman belongs to the husband's family. This understanding, combined with the expectations to give birth to many children, have a vise like grip on the definition of what it is to be a woman and a wife, man and husband.

The understanding of man as the "head" of the family, came up in a number of conversations, mostly in a pejorative sense. One pastor, for example, relates an experience in his congregation:

There was a man who had these sewing machines, he had sewing machines in his house. He took the sewing machines and sold it just for drinking. So I find, that our church members are having a serious case, if their husbands are drunkards and because they take for granted for putting most of our traditions back as [man] being the head of the house, as having authority in the house. They are misusing their authority and mistreating their wife and children. And they take properties and sell them outside for drinking and adultery (Couple #2)

One of the instructors at Makumira, an attorney and pastor, believed that this idea of headship is still very pervasive in Tanzanian society, even among the educated elite. Many
of the legal cases involving marital conflict are rooted in the man’s understanding that he is
the family leader and responsible for all the household decisions. He said:

Researcher: Do you think that where both husband and wife have attended school, there is a more equal relationship?
Instructor: In some cases yes and in some cases no. In some case, even with educated women they are tied to the traditional way of thinking about marriage. They think the husband is the head of the house, so I have to obey him and follow what he is saying. He must be respected because he is husband, with power and all of that...But most men, they still think in the traditional way that they are the head of the house, so they must be respected and obeyed, to control the household affairs, like that. When a woman asserts her right, “I am the same as you are! I am working! So you should treat me as an equal!” So the problems start. (Male Individual Interview #5)

From another vantage point, a women’s focus group (#10) argued that the church simply
uses certain Bible texts (Ephesians 5:22; I Corinthians 11:3-10; Titus 2:5) quoting
“headship” language (and women “be subject” to your husbands) to continue the tradition of
male authority and control over women. They related that men conveniently forget to look at
the context of these Bible texts, which stress mutuality and service to each other. These
women believed that this is and will be an ongoing battle within their marriages, dioceses and
the larger church body. One woman pastor replied when I asked her if women and men were
consulting each other with regard to financial matters:

That is a new phenomenon really. Because our tribes, our society says that the husband should decide and now the Bible says the husband is the head of the home. Then African society thinks: “Yes, even the Bible says that, in a Christian marriage.” And so we find that men decide in many things. But I’m happy that some of the young people now, they have found this difficult to decide. So you will find that most of the young marriages they decide together. (Female Individual Interview #2)

Family Violence and “Wife-Beating” - In many of the interviews male domination of
women was described as being part of the traditional African society. Christianity was
portrayed as providing a new way for husbands and wives to relate. Notwithstanding the
“new way” of the Christian life, the old ways of “wife-beating” continue to endure, according to my participants. The following words of a relatively newly married couple vividly narrate the sometimes violent encounters between genders, which take place in their home villages.

In this interview, the pastor candidly admits that such “elements” and scenes are still there in his mind, but are things he’s trying to overcome.

Wife: The things I don’t like are, the man goes somewhere with his friends and then he comes back very drunk and beats his wife and children; nothing to eat in the house. He knows maybe that his wife does not have any income, but still he goes and becomes drunker.

Researcher: And you see a lot of this taking place?

Wife: The water is the problem in many villages. So if the wife goes a far distance to fetch the water and then the brothers come before she arrives, the husband must beat her.

Pastor: The society is based on pastoralization, cattle and goats. In our place, there are times like the dry season, where water is difficult to get. The work of home is that of the women. The work of finding wood for cooking and building a house and fetching water. The only work that men do is going and watering the cattle, looking after them in the forest, and the other hard work. But the work of looking after the farm, fetching firewood, looking after the calves is that of the women and its difficult for them to do. But the men does not understand that its difficult. The women are supposed to do many things. To beat his wife is something traditional. There is no surprise. It’s nothing strange. The man who does not beat his wife, others will insult him and say that the female has power over him. So it is, every time a male exercises its power, it’s no good.

Researcher: I’m curious, how did that tradition come about, as far as beating?

Pastor: It’s something traditionally, when you get circumcised, traditionally the male gets circumcised when they are grown up. They are taught that they should live as males. They should be strong. They should stand on their own and they are always superior to women. Therefore that idea develops even before circumcision, that males are superior to females, develops since the boy is very young...They’ve been socialized to treat women as subservient.

Researcher: How did you arrive at your present position?

Pastor: I told you, though I experienced it differently of myself. My father didn’t teach me about doing so, treating women like this [using violence], it’s something I’ve seen from him exercising his power. It’s not something that I’ve been taught and this is because my parents became Christians in 1959. And when I was born in a Christian family that was trying to exercise good ways of living, through Christianity. Though we see them
from other people and even some elements in our parents when they did something that was taught or implemented on us. So I’ve seen. I’ve grown up seeing those traditions and those from different people. But it’s not something I’ve implemented in my own family, though those elements are there. It’s difficult for me to remove all of those elements, but it’s something we are trying to overcome, to suppress. (Couple Interview)

No other male respondents alluded to such violence on a personal level. The above man’s thoughtful self-reflection about such prospects or “elements” living within him was exceptional among the male participants. Both men and women, however, related a number of pastoral care cases which they had dealt with as pastors in the community. An example, of such violence was described by the pastor of couple #5:

For example, I met one couple, the husband had a concubine not far from their home. The wife tried her best where the husband has the concubine. She succeeded in finding out, but the husband refused [to stop seeing her]. Several times the wife asked him this, but he refused. Now the solution: what the husband decided to do was to beat his wife several times, then the wife comes to me telling me this. First it was the wife who came telling me this. No! No! No! It was the husband who rushed to me and informed me of the situation he was facing at home, but after the conversation with the man, then the wife and after talking with other people there, I found out it was the man who decided to have a concubine, though he was the first to come to me! The wife did not come to me! It was he who came to me! Then I did some research and found out that it was him who was the cause of the problem…We tried to do a reconciliation, talking with them that the husband stop trying to beat his wife. And at a certain time the wife came to me that the situation had grown worse. She was beaten severely. And then I asked the wife according to the situation that I had seen and told her: “You have to go home [to your parent’s home] secretly. Don’t tell anyone, that I have asked you to go home. Be there for a while and let him, maybe your husband will come for you, to your home to come back. (Couple #5)

In this case, the guilty husband went to a church “fellowship” committee who, in turn, traveled to his wife’s village and asked her to reconcile with her husband. His wife returned to their home and they are still living together. However, since the pastor’s last visit to his home, he has heard that “the concubine” has died of AIDS.
As a researcher, I was astounded by the candid and blunt accounts of such violence as a given in Tanzanian society. Respondents disagreed regarding the pervasiveness of “wife-beating,” but did not deny its actuality. Women in one focus group related how they had seen and experienced it in the church and in the families of some pastors. I include the following quote so that the Makumira community might weigh and discern its value and its veracity.

Pastor #1: I thought that maybe before coming here I would marry a pastor and then I came here in the early 1990’s and I saw that pastors are like other men! And I said I would never marry a pastor! And I always state the truth and I don’t like them.

Pastor #2: I hate one pastor [because] he used to beat his wife. He is a pastor. And when I heard that, I was discouraged to marry a pastor. Why? Because I am afraid to be beaten. It’s better to be beaten by a man different from a pastor, because we believe that a church leader who knows about God – how can he go and beat his wife and then he will go to the pulpit and say: love each other. How can that be possible for a church leader? But if I’m beaten by someone else apart from church leadership, I’ll be ok. Then people will know that that is not a church person. I’m a pastor, he can beat me, but I’m not worried about that, but if I’m beaten by a pastor, I’m afraid of that much.

Pastor #1: And they don’t like those things to be known. For example, one pastor, he beat his wife and wife said I’ll go to the bishop and he said ok. After coming from the bishop when she came she was beaten again and the church did not do anything...Someone can take a stick and beat his wife, yeah. And he can ask her to go outside and find a stick and come back to be beaten. He can find anything. Even others have beaten their wives and they have died. (Female Focus Group)

Church’s Stance on the Indissolubility of Marriage - Clergy, by constitutional mandate, are not allowed to divorce, nor recommend a divorce even in such violent marital situations. They would be disciplined by the church, in all likelihood, by being excommunicated. Respondents and leaders of the church that I interviewed were resolute that “marriage is a life-long practice” and divorce was not a possibility. Those who clung to the constitution still argued that “violence does not necessarily justify a divorce...[we are] opposed to the
western idea, that you can only stay [in marriage] as long as you want. This is something which we are quite against here” (Male Individual Interview #1). A few men did describe a growing undercurrent of dissent, arguing that the church is too rigid on the issue of divorce and should allow divorce on the grounds of adultery…not however on the grounds of family violence. Some women, on the other hand, were uncharacteristically plain-spoken, like the wife of couple #2, as she reflected on her own hopes for her marriage:

The first thing I hoped for was to not be beaten. If I found that my husband was beating me, than I would divorce him. I gave him a time of 10 years to see whether my hopes would go in a proper way or wrong direction. Since the 10 years, it has been almost positive and up to now it has been alright and I enjoy being married. (Couple #2, Female)

I find that the growing dissent among the respondents concerning the absolute prohibition of divorce to be a healthy sign. I believe that the toleration of family violence or wife-beating on the grounds of the “indissolubility” of Christian marriage to be absurd, theologically and ethically. In my mind the marital vows of a couple have already been broken in such circumstances and to counsel victims of violence to stay in their marriages without offering mechanisms of security or safety for women’s protection is a breach in the church’s responsibility. It must be said, that I heard of cases where courageous clergy intervened (such as in the aforementioned case) where the pastor advised the abused woman to return to her home village in hopes that her husband might reform and ask her to return. This seems to be the principle means of attending to acute marital conflicts: by counseling short or long periods of separation. Other times, however, women seem to be left to suffer alone. A female pastor related the following account concerning her friend’s dilemma:

...I mean once life is in danger. Actually if someone is trying to kill you all of the time, either physically or emotionally. You know that you can even die emotionally. I even talked to some of my friends, but what is the reason for
staying in marriage even with so much pain and pretending that all is well. There is anger and resentment and worries and anxieties and it continues and it continues. Just because the church leaders teach until death do us apart. I think it is good for families to put the children first. This woman from my own village, she was, her life was hell. It was a mess. And she dropped out of the Lutheran church so that she could divorce her husband...What do you do? Sometimes they are chaining you to something and then kill you. Then just get out of the denomination. Why are you waiting there? You can’t go anywhere. She says, “I’m going mad!” And too angry and too unhappy. So the way to get out of this denomination that chains me to this guy. And she is a happier women. She’s working at another place. She’s typing. So I don’t know. I think they’re [the church leaders] they’re trying to make our society, our children, more ideal and they see what’s taking place in Europe and America and they want to become the ideal society. (Female Pastor)

How does the African church hold up the Christian ideal of marriage as an intimate union of male and female and “as a life-long practice” when the relationship has been ruptured by on-going violence? At such times, does church law or discipline take precedence over the safety and preciousness of a woman’s life? Several of the participants I interviewed, communicated that the church has become much too preoccupied with its law and discipline, perhaps as a response to the Western world’s well-known high divorce rates. They and I agree that a more nuanced perspective is needed on the part of the ELCT: one that presumes high standards of marriage, but one which tolerates and forgives divorce in extreme circumstances and allows individuals to start over again when such brokeness has occurred.

**Inadequate Sexual Education** - A majority of men and women respondents (about 60%) related that one of the principle marital and familial problems that they witnessed in their parishes, villages, and towns involved many couple’s propensity to be “unfaithful.” The experiences which participants described involved either a blatant form of philandering typical of the bar scenes or one caused by lack of knowledge or embarrassment about sex. Below, I provide an example of the “lack of knowledge” that was shared with me:
My problem is with this integrity and honesty. For example, I married into a Christian marriage, but despite I married a Christian, I tend to find another woman outside my marriage. Faithfulness, that is what I mean, yes, that is a very big problem...It happened one day that a certain lady came into my office informing me about her husband that he was seeing another lady in the same area. And I took initiative to do something about this problem. So I got them together so that I could talk from both sides. The husband informed me that he decided to see another lady because his wife was not aware how to handle him during, especially, how do you say, sex. That why he decided to seek another lady. But the other side, the wife said, “Why if you feel that I am not satisfying you; Why don’t you tell me?” Well, he kept quiet. It's a long story. But as a pastor I decided to take my time and instruct them about the issue...I don’t know how they are going on now, because I am here. (Couple Interview #1)

On another occasion, a pastor described an intervention where a married man in her parish sought counsel concerning his wife’s aversion to have intercourse during the day. This, he said, was a growing problem in their marriage and he didn’t want to go “elsewhere.”

According to his wife, the total darkness of the night was the only possible time for sexual relations, because she believed it was “shameful” to see each other’s nakedness. This pastor invited his wife to talk with her about this difficulty. She relates:

She [the wife] said, “No I really do not see him physically and he does never see me too, because we always put off the light. I [the pastor] said, “Yes, that is what I wanted to know from you, because I talked with your husband and he was complaining and I thought I in talking with you, I could call him and we could talk together. He complained that he never saw you. Why? Why don’t you want your husband to see you?” She said, “No, it’s very shameful. I don’t want to see him.” Then I said to her that you have made a promise of a Christian marriage. You have promised to stay together. He has to know you. You have to know him. She said, “For me, I don’t think that is necessary.” I told her that for him you must see [understand] that it is necessary. Be careful, because this could break up your marriage. Because he will get someone to open to him. He will go to her. So be careful in these things. She started saying that she was not used to this, but I said that you have to get used to it. Because then your husband will go out of the marriage. (Female Focus Group #1)

Women’s role in making love, I was told by one informant, was to be “responders” to men and not to be starters. Sexual matters were part of “men’s desires” and women’s roles
were almost ancillary. Male participants, were very reluctant to talk about sexual relations.

One man, however, among one of the couple’s groups alluded to “lack of knowledge or expecting too much...yeah, maybe sexual relations” when he was first married. But he then quickly changed the subject as he looked at his wife and said, “this is maybe exaggerations and maybe exaggerations are my own.” I offer the following sample from a conversation with a female pastor to the Makumira community for their consideration

Pastor: And loving means even in life starters. If it is sexual intercourse. they have to regard each other’s need. Because this is another big problem in our society. Sexual matters are regarded as men’s desires. They are the boss, men’s desires. The one who loves his wife or husband must be one who considers the position of sex as being equal to both spouses.

Researcher: Are women ever the initiators of that...I call it God’s gift to marriage?

Pastor: A lot of the time men initiate and they [women] have to respond, not to start.

Researcher: They must respond.

Pastor: Yeah their position is to respond and not to start. In many matters. I think even in the case of love or sexual matters. We are not the one who is going to start it, even if we like it. That we have to, we can show that we like it, in other ways, not in telling you, but to wait and show interest. (Female Individual Interview).

There were a number of calls, among the participants, for explicit teaching on sexuality.

Such explicit teaching, from one respondent’s perspective, would assist in reducing extra-marital affairs. He argues:

Yeah, it [infidelity] happens that sometimes it is only the man or only the woman. You never know. But this is caused by lack of education. You know the traditional society was educating people very much, trying to tell them everything, everything and even the methods of doing sex. But the church, the pastors are afraid to talk about sex with the Christians. They say if we talk about sex and the methods and the styles and all of these, it’s like a bad thing. But you know if we don’t talk about sex. If we don’t teach our people. If we don’t discuss with them about such issues, then they do it underground or they pretend to live together and they are divorced. Yeah, this is the main problem. (Male Individual Interview #3)
Others echoed the above pastor’s opinion also criticizing the church not only for its aversion to teaching about such basic sexual issues, but its tendency to speak principally in the form of restrictions and interdictions. Couple #7 argued that the church should even teach about sexual technique for men and women, simply because nearly all of the instruction for young people presently comes from the public schools or peer group. I’ve chosen the following words of a church leader to summarize this subject and point to new frontiers for the future:

But they are afraid to talk about this. Why are they afraid? I don’t know. But what they know is that sex is a sin and sin is wrong. According to my understanding, it’s only wrong when it’s among unacceptable relationships. Sex according to many church elders and leaders has been “the sin” in which many couples are excommunicated, then it is elevated to a higher status, influencing our relationship with God...So you have this societal picture which painted on societal concept of sex, which the church should not avoid, but should try to bring a new concept, a new meaning, that sex with an acceptable partner is a blessing. and sex among the acceptable person is a creative act – especially now with HIV becoming a death warrant. So I think we have to explore the meaning of sex, among the institutional church and come up with more meaningful explanations on some of the teachings about sex before marriage, after marriage and with couples and so forth. (Male Individual Interview #2)

Faithfulness/Unfaithfulness/Absent Husbands - The words “faithfulness,” “faithlessness” or “unfaithful” were descriptive categories that applied not only to sexual trustworthiness, but also other matters such as honesty and integrity in the marital relationship. One female respondent argued that many wives and husbands that she counsels are “unfaithful” in the secrets they hold from their spouses, the money they hide and do not share, and the children they have outside of “wedlock” that their partner knows nothing about:

Weeks ago I was invited to a kind of women’s fellowship and they asked me to talk about marriage and I asked them before going there and talking with them that they write about some of the issues the women would like to discuss and there were a lot of questions which came like 50 something. Yes, when I analyzed them, I found that faithlessness is a big marriage problem now for
both men and women, because this was a group of women there was a lot of questions with: "My husband this...My husband that." But I know its both because if I was going to talk with some men, I know they would say the same. Yes. But here men are more free in our society. They go out working. I mean they count themselves the head of the family, so they will decide to be free. No one can ask me or tell me what to do; things like that. So now when there is no faithfulness in marriages, there is a problem. I know that some of these women are not so faithful. But with faithfulness, there are many other things. I mean like this other lovers in this marriage. But also when I say faithfully married, there is also the Christian matter of how they keep their properties together. Things they don't tell their husbands. The big product [salary] but the wife doesn't know anything; things like that. Some children outside of wedlock. I group them like that, that people are not faithful. (Female Individual Interview #2)

In general, men were perceived as the chief offenders. One pastor (in couple #1) even affirmed that 85% of the counseling he does has to do with this issue. Other respondents witnessed a growing number of extra-marital affairs taking place on the part of both men and women. Many times such affairs were seen as the result of men's having to work in distant cities and rarely taking the opportunity to come home. A pastor from the Pare Diocese described how this continues to be a very common situation.

The main trouble for couples is that he or she is not faithful to her husband or to his wife. That's the problem these days and this problem has led to, in especially the Pare mountains, the husband staying outside of their family area. They go to work in Dar es Salam or Arusha or and their wife will stay home guarding the house and the properties. And sometimes the husband is not faithful and the wives have suffered due to the unfaithfulness of their husbands. So this is the main problem. Most of the wives come to the pastors asking what we can do with our husbands. When they come with such a problem, we talk with the person and tell them that they are supposed to be faithful. We talk with them and decide that they should go to their doctor and check if they have been exposed to or acquired any diseases. (Couple #6, Male)

Such women, who stay at her husband's home village have great responsibilities. Their "Christmas husbands" return only once a year during the holidays as a Chagga woman from the Kilimanjaro region related:

...and he will make her pregnant again. He will go and a baby will be born and
the wife will take care of the kid, but the husband doesn’t know what she is doing. It’s the responsibility of the wife. So some other women have been even successful to take care of those children. They will take them to school and give them an education until they are grown up and help themselves! This is what I’ve been seeing in my culture... Yes [the husband goes] and he doesn’t send any money back home and it’s the responsibility of the wife of what to eat and to take care of the garden. I’m speaking of my culture. And she has to garden 3 acres of coffee and bananas. She goes to the garden outside of the [village] probably 5 miles away. She has a field of maize that she will cultivate. She will depend on that. But still, one thing she will be – faithful- She will never roam around!

(Female Focus Group #3)

Sometimes the absence of husbands and little or no financial support has been the impetus for business ventures by wives. Some of these women have “been even successful” as this respondent claims! These women are able to obtain supplemental income from small enterprises (like farming maize) and so provide for their families. Several participants observed that males often feel that they have the right to access and control that money.

Male focus group #3 observed not only marital conflict as a consequence of these differing expectations, but also many husbands and father’s abrogation of their responsibilities to the family.

Pastor #1: Another family problem is that wives do not want to mix their economics with their husbands. For instance, in my area, where I come from, some women are trying to make their own projects, to get their own money. And [they believe] that their money should not be monitored by men... Yes because of the men, it might happen that the women have got luck, that their project has matured, has progress so much that the woman can have much more money than the man. This normally creates tension, conflicts as far as the man [is concerned and he says] “You know you are my wife. I paid a brideprice. I took out your family. Now you want to oppress me. Everything you have on your body, your clothes, all your possessions are mine.” This creates problems for the family.

Researcher: Have you all had to deal with that difficulty?
Pastor #2: In my society, a woman will not possess anything. Everything, all cows, all goats, all sheep belong to the husband. Even if a woman bought it, the society knows that it belongs to the husband...

Researcher: Then that is really a problem in your society?
Pastor #2: A big problem. That’s why I said there is conflict because men are
misusing funds. They don’t send their children to school. They don’t buy clothes for their wives or their children. They misuse their funds. (Male Focus Group #3)

Since a wife is rarely told the exact salary of her husband, some women have decided to “hide” their incomes. One pastor described what a woman in his congregation did in order to keep her savings safe:

...There is a certain wife in Bukoba, her husband is working at an NGO [non governmental organization] and that wife is a tailor. Now the man knew his income and the wife knew her income, but this wife had an account at the national bank of Bukoba. She had a booklet at the bank. Now for being afraid of her husband, she had to keep that booklet with another woman there at Bukoba. So once she made money, she took that money to the bank and then she brought that booklet to that woman to keep there at her home. That’s how she decided to solve that problem...Some husbands, as far as I know, even if they do not like to tell their wives about their income, but they are very eager to know the income of their wives! (Couple #5)

Other respondents related stories where women challenged their husband’s orders to work in his fields for free and to reap no monetary benefits. One female pastor said these kind of incidents are occurring on more of a regular basis especially in the larger towns as opposed to the villages. She recounted marital conflicts over property issues and husband’s work expectations.

...Yes, because if the husband says, “It’s my property...It’s my property.” But the wife is the one to take care of it. Many of the young women say, “OK, it’s his property.” They will not take care of it. It has come as a problem now as they seek marriage counseling. The husband says: “Mine, mine, mine. My wife is not careful!” And then the wife will say, “Why should I take care for things that are not mine?” (Female Individual Interview #2)

In her opinion, there are considerable differences in women’s behavior between village and urban woman. Women, living in rural villages, tend to be the muted group and their power is limited because of the “traditions.” She says:
Pastor: It differs wherever you are. If it’s in the villages where the traditions are still kept, women don’t say – they are not given the chance to speak about their marriage. But in the town and in the urban areas, you will find much of what I’m saying. They [women] will not rebel, but they practice, when they are trying to practice their marriage, they find, they both [husband and wife] that it’s difficult not to share together.

Researcher: So women in urban areas speak up much more?
Pastor: Yes, and those who are educated speak up. It couldn’t happen without education. (Female Individual Interview #2)

Respondents cited variables such as men’s migration for work, women’s being left alone to manage households, and education, as factors which have propelled changes in family’s roles, increased marital tension and been instrumental in the dissolution of marriages. A particularly devastating phenomenon was the growth and spread of diseases (STD’s, HIV, AIDS) to wives in home villages from visiting husbands. Several participants spoke of such incidents occurring with increasing regularity. Men’s “unfaithfulness” or “infidelity” was perceived as the primary reason for the transmission of such diseases. Little seems to be known about men’s experiences, when they leave their families to find work in larger cities.

One pastor from Dar es Salam, however, relates the following account

The husband sees in urban areas a possibility...of another urban home. Now in KiSwahili is, I don’t know how your Swahili is, we call it ____ this is a “small house” in quotation marks. The concept here is of a man having a concubine; another woman taking care [of him] in the urban area. Now that costs a lot. In fact, I don’t have a statistic, we know that very often rural women become the victim of this. In the area of HIV, the man who is in the urban area, contacts another woman and gets HIV and transfers it to the woman at home which I think is very unfair. Here the woman has been very faithful at home and here the woman comes and says “Karibu!” or “Welcome home!” And he comes with that certificate of death; a gift of death as they call it. (Male Individual Interview #2)

Trauma of Widowhood - Widows and their children who survive such a “certificate” or “gift of death” often have another ordeal to face. A few respondents related accounts of how
relatives would descend upon their son-in-law's or brother-in-law's wife to "take back" the property which they believed belonged to the extended family.

...those women who are widowed or their husbands have died...but they don't know their rights. You know the family can come and take everything and tell the widow that she doesn't have any rights, because everything belongs to the son. So this is a problem that most women face. They [the extended family] forget that these things belong together; they got it together while they were together. (Female Focus Group #1)

A recent thesis by Mungure (2000), a pastor from the Meru Diocese, provides distressing personal testimonies of how some widows are treated by their extended family. I include two of these accounts from her investigations to simply inform the reader of such experiences.

After the death of my husband, since we were living in the city we had to travel with my two children to the home village. As we arrived to the homestead of my parents-in-law, the first question I was asked was to tell the cause of death of my husband. I was told to take an oath so that I will speak the whole truth. Also I was asked to give his bank account and to tell the properties which he had in town. I could not refuse, so I gave them whatever they wanted. After some time, all of my wealth was confiscated by my in-laws and I was left empty by my children. (Mungure, 2000, p.48)

After the death of my husband and burial, I was still indoors, since my parents told me that I had to be inside the house for forty days. While I was still mourning the death of my husband, one of my brother-in-laws went to court to claim my husband's property, saying he was the right owner/inheritor. I was called in the court to bring all of my certificates to prove that I was the married wife of the deceased. Finally the magistrate decided to give that right to me. But it took more than six months before the case could come to an end. I had to use a lot of extra money and time, for which I was not compensated. Later a big hatred grew between myself and the in-laws because I did not allow them to take wealth of their brother and son. (Mungure, 2000, p.48)

The experiences of such widows and extended families, argues Mungure, expose clashing meanings and definitions of marriage between Christian and traditional African worlds.

According to the Christian understanding, marriage and conjugal obligations end upon the death of a spouse and the woman, in this case, is free to marry. But according to the
traditional African perspective of marriage, the wife and her property still belong to the husband’s clan. In the past, it was the responsibility of the husband’s family to provide for his wife and children. Hence, levirate marriage was the African social security system, but this practice was forbidden by the missionaries and the present church. In my interviews, Makumiran respondents supported Mungure’s claims that many women, upon the death of their husbands, are often plundered and defrauded of their properties. Such families manipulate traditional definitions of marriage to their advantage and conveniently fail to remember their duties and obligations. Several of my respondents argued that the church, in addition to providing pastoral care to widows, can inform women of their legal rights, which according to the Marriage Act of 1971 entitles women to have jointly held property with their husbands if jointly registered (Male Individual Interview #5, attorney). He goes on to say, speaking of the status of many widows in Tanzania:

   Here it is very common. It is very common. So this is the bad things about African marriage. I mean traditional marriages, which, I think the church can intervene here to teach Christians, to give this knowledge that the property acquired by the husband and wife – it belongs to the husband and wife. If any of them dies, it belongs to the other who still is alive, to the husband or the wife. The relatives have no right to that property. (Male Individual Interview #5)

Several Respondents’ Distinct Personal Issues –

   Amidst the larger surrounding culture of my respondents’ lives and ministries are hosts of very significant matters profoundly effecting marital relations. I was deeply moved by many of the experiences that they described and must attend to on a regular basis. The Makumira respondents themselves, I was told, do not have to reckon, in their marital relationships, with
infidelity, family violence, alcoholism, HIV, or male disengagement. They, however, have witnessed such phenomena in their ministries.

They themselves, as noted before, spoke of personal issues having to do with their relationship to the extended family concerning financial assistance, infertility issues, or relationships with younger relatives who lived with them while attending school. Others spoke of the inability to find employment for their wives who were trained as nurses, in social work, teaching, or in a specific trade. A few men described the complexities of sharing decision making with their wives – the negotiating process, the increase in time, and the derision from the surrounding culture. In male focus group #2, two members commiserated with each other about the time it took to make decisions!

Ok, I can remember one problem that happened in my family... When we decided where we should build our house. I liked to build our house where or near my father lived. But my wife did not like that area very much. It’s not a problem of family, but she did not like that area... it took us about two years to come to a consensus. And I decided to follow her choice.

In my family... a big problem, I call it a problem here is decision-making. Somehow when we discuss something, we might not arrive at a particular conclusion at that time. And we may come late, in conclusion. Maybe we talk about a certain project or a certain work to do. If we decide in late hours, something may happen; it may become worse. Worse. Or sometimes we talk about sending a child to school. Maybe your wife does not like that school and she comes to realize later and then you if you go to apply then the position is finished. In decision making, it take time, because I don’t want to force my wife and I don’t want my wife to force me. So in this situation of democracy. We can call it democracy, we come to conclude things in late hours. (Male Focus Group #3)

Such stories provide us with glimpses, I believe, of the partnership marriage that is emerging. The traditional marital system was a one vote system. Presently, some marriages are transitioning to a “democracy” and wrestling with the complexities of more fluid and flexible roles as well as the art of negotiation.
One pastor spoke of the educational difference between he and his wife and the difficulties he had in trying to relate to her. I include his words and simply wonder if his personal experience is widespread or unique.

Pastor: I think it is a problem of many, many people here. Because those pastors get to school much more than the ladies. Many men marry these uneducated ladies. So life sometimes becomes difficult because of differences in education.

Researcher: How difficult?

Pastor: It can be very lonely... You have a lot to bear as a pastor and you need someone to talk with. You are away from your brothers and family by your home village. Who can you talk to? And sometimes the temptation is to feel superior to your wife, so that when you are not understood, when you try to say something... you become demeaning. I don’t mean to do that, but it happens and I have to repent of that. (Men’s Focus Group #1)

On the other side, is the unique experience of a woman pastor who has studied in a variety of locations and seen different gender relations at work. She, her husband and family have made many transitions together involving the sharing of household responsibilities. Is this the new African woman? The educated, articulate, self-assured woman, cutting a new path for other women and men in relationship? I conclude this chapter with her energetic and impassioned words:

Poor women, it’s always women working for the system. So when will it ever change. I mean [that] it has a lot, but the actual demands are just too much of the household. Some men are educated and have lived life in a different culture. Like my husband. I can do laundry. I can study. I can help the kids with their homework and you can do one or two of these things and sometimes none. Why? and they just wait upon the table for the food to be fixed. And sometimes I say, Saturday, Sunday, I just won’t cook! Really! I don’t!... That’s how I make my husband do things! And lot’s of women can’t do this. They are not educated and cannot support themselves. Some of my African friends are like, man, you are terrible and I say, “Yes, I am terrible!” ... And sometimes I say I want to be in the kitchen. There are times when my husband is so slow cooking and I do things faster... It’s not equal, equal, equal. No I do most of the cooking. I do most of the washing, you know. I really don’t mind because I can do it faster. But there are things I won’t do that I expect him to be doing as long as there is mutuality and love it’s fine with me. But if you expect that just because I am a woman. I have
to cook for you! Sorry! Really sorry! I won’t do it. I’ll sit here and cross my legs and wait (Female Interview).
CHAPTER SEVEN – RESOURCES – MARRIAGE ENRICHMENT - CONCLUSIONS

Strengths and Resources for Couples and the Role of the Church

In contrast to the I.S.U. graduate students of the pilot study, the Makumira respondents identified three different resources for couples when dealing with marital conflicts or crises. Christians, they said, primarily turn to the church for aid (the “witnesses” or “sponsors” at their wedding, church elders or pastors), whereas non-Christians look for help from the traditional structures of African society – the extended family. Friends were cited as a third primary source, especially for Christian couples living in larger towns and cities. The Iowa State University pilot study informants, for the most part, preferred to seek the advice and wise counsel of grandparents, uncles, aunts and mothers. It was close relatives that could be trusted with the intimate aspects of life, including marital difficulties. The church, from their perspective, was secondary as a resource as a resource for guidance and direction. Recalling one participant’s exclamation, “The pastor is not my grandmother!” clearly signaled where this particular woman received her counsel!

This alleged division between Christians and non-Christians was not, however, completely rigid and inflexible. Participants still recognized and spoke of the value and strength of the extended family system in providing support and relief after major crises like the death of a parent. One Makumira pastor, for example, provided the following example which took place a number of years ago:

…and by and large it [the extended family] is a blessing because of the support. They support you when you are young. My grandfather died when my father was still very young and he was taken care of by his step-father, a brother of his father – so this was the way. And he grew up like that, until he was able to. And when he went to marry, it was this family that paid the bridewealth, otherwise, he wouldn’t have married, so this family paid for it. (Male Individual Interview #5)
He, along with other participants, related how his wife and children were provided for by his family when he pursued higher graduate studies overseas. Thus in situations involving aid and sustenance in time of need, particularly during academic studies, illness or death, the extended family was described as being of immense help.

In an older female’s focus group, participants claimed that it was specifically the parents of the husband who still remained the first resource where men and women went to find assistance for marital problems. Parents still expected their own sons and daughter-in-laws to come to them, but when they lived in distant cities, parents were a second choice.

Female #1: When a problem occurs between a couple, the first people to share are the relatives of the husband, the parents of the husband. If the problem is not solved, both parents or both sides are informed and they sit together and solve the problem. And if it becomes very difficult...and it’s very rare to go beyond that.

Female #2: Also, you can go to the pastor and talk with him, if you are living far away from your family...

Female #1: if you are living in the cities, far from parents, then the pastors are the ones to discuss some of this.

Female #1: If it is a big problem, then they will go to the pastor. (Female Focus Group #3)

Traditionally, parents of the husband were the arbitrators in domestic squabbles. I was told many times that the wife, according to the accepted procedure, was to take her grievances concerning marital difficulties to her in-laws in order to seek justice. If that didn’t work, her own parents’ presence was then requested.

It depends on the background of the family. Someone goes to the place where he or she expects to get help. Then in our traditional life, marriage problems are to be solved by the parents. First the parent of the husband, the main parents, because it is the wife who leaves her parents. And if the problem is not solved, the family of the wife is brought in and if that is not overcome, the elders or the leaders of the society can intervene. And if that is not overcome, maybe they refer to the so-called government officials who are responsible. (Couple # 4)
Such government officials, several respondents said, were functioning remnants of the Nyerere’s Ujamaa’s organization for villages, still working in many parts of Tanzania. I do not know how widespread this governmental system is today. In any case, one female participant described it as follows. She, too, articulates a difference between Christians and non-Christians.

The government has put some leaders who are in charge of ten houses. So if there is a [marital] problem, those who are not Christians, they will automatically go to that person who is in charge of the 10 houses. And then if the matter is so serious, that person who is in charge of the 10 houses will take it to the chairperson, who is in charge of a large area. And if the matter still grows to be so difficult, then the little chairman will be informed of that issue. That is the process in which non-Christians solve their problems (Couple #3)

None of the respondents spoke of the traditional elders in the village as having current relevance in resolving marital difficulties. I recall one male participant of the pilot study referring to such a system and proceedings as a “kangaroo court” where elders “deliberate what actually happened. Why he or why she ran back [home] or was she beaten or something. Then they have to say all sorts of things going on within their marriage for the public to hear and then to decide.” The Makumira respondents were strangely silent on the issues of village elders’ role in marital discord. The traditional system still functioned, but for another cultural world; not their own as adherents to Christianity.

Christians, for their part, relied largely on church resources with their marital and familial difficulties. The quality and appropriateness of those available church-related assets, according to the respondents, varied greatly depending upon the training, level of education, gender, and wisdom of the people being sought for help. There were a great variety of opinions on where couples might go to first when problems surfaced! An apt example of such diversity is illustrated among the male members of focus group #3. The first pastor
comes from the Maasai tribal background – an ethnic group renowned for resisting the cultural influences of the West:

Pastor #1: The first step in my culture [Maasai] is that my wife must tell my parents. Then my parents will try to make some reconciliations. And if they fail, the problem will extend to her parents. And the second step is the best man and the best woman. And the third step is the church. The church office. So if in our congregation, you receive a case from the couple, you have to understand that he or she has passed all of those steps. So you receive a real complicated problem.

Researcher: I don’t envy you [group laughs]

Pastor #2: …there are different approaches. For instance, we don’t start with our parents [among Chaggas] because it is feared that my parents will be in favor of me…my wife worries that my mother and father would be on my side…my wife will tell the best woman that her husband is doing this and this. For instance, “this man does not have sex with me. I am not satisfied. I don’t know where to get satisfaction or where he gets his satisfaction…so please ask him.” It depends on the nature of the problem. And the best lady will tell the best man and this best man will come and tell me, the husband.

Pastor #3: What I can say is what pastor #1 and #2 have said is nearly the same. But what I can say is a bit different, is that in the parishes I’ve been working, there are families which start with the pastor. Others follow the traditional way of living so they start with their parents. Others follow Christianity, so they start with the pastor. (Male Focus Group #3)

Other respondents described the resources for couples within the church as including the best man and woman or sponsors, elders, district committee, and the diocesan committee.

Officially, “unsolved” marital problems proceed through a chain of committees whose objective is to reconcile the conflicted couple. Most respondents believed that this system had difficulties because the individuals composing those committees were rarely properly trained. When I asked the question of one pastor: “Does the system work?” He responded: “Not much, because the people don’t follow it. But the pastors are the marriage counselors…the pastors are the ones who have the big burden in solving marriage problems” (Couple #4).
Surprisingly, respondents were quite critical of the quality of counseling provided by both church elders and pastors in the wider church. This was disconcerting because I had heard described, what was in my mind, appropriate and courageous marital interventions made by respondents in the study. The majority of Makumira participants, however, were vocal and critical of many pastors of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Tanzania (ELCT) for breaking confidentiality and for using what they considered to be inappropriate “techniques” in counseling (such as misapplication of Scripture, coerced marital reconciliations, and a preoccupation with finding “fault” in a legalistic sense). They believed that this was an area where the resources of the church were simply inadequate. I was informed that this was not because of the education at Makumira University College, which was considered quite good. Most pastors of the ELCT are instructed in smaller schools throughout the country and are unable to receive specific instruction which the church would ideally like to provide. One of the leaders and teachers of the church made the following insightful comments:

These days couples do not go to their parents. If they really love one another and they want to stay familiar with their families, they seek the counsel from the person whom they think can help. And many families could work if they had more children, I could say. But children seem to hold these parents together even in tough times. They usually seek counsel from the people they trust and that is usually the pastor. They go to the pastor to discuss their problems. And they usually go to the best man and to the church. We don’t have like in America and Europe specialists who can help us. And sometimes we don’t help people because we are not professionals. We are not really qualified for that work. We may use methods which are not so good. For example, we may use the Bible and read Bible verses at the wrong time and to the wrong people. We may force people to pray together. We may force people to embrace one another, even though they are not reconciled. So we are not very much good in techniques. That is a problem I see... ...most of the pastors are not educated here at Makumira. They have a very short course in their own dioceses to combat the problem of the shortage of pastors. So we find they are not very qualified for the job. And the people we are pastoring are well-educated. They have degrees and degrees and degrees. And they can argue logically, very logically. And if a pastor is not able to understand what they argue they will be seen as a nothing and that’s why you have problems that are not solved
by pastors. We tend to run to the Bible, to use the Bible, as if it is something which can melt their hearts, yeah. But with not even knowing the techniques of even trying to use the Bible in any other way. And sometimes you find that people tend to preach the problems of the people. That’s why you find that some of them do not even like to bring such problems to the pastors, because they are afraid that they will take me as an example in his sermon. (Male Individual Interview)

Other participants also repeated the theme of broken confidentiality by leaders in positions of authority and people’s ensuing hesitancy to share their family dilemmas with such church leadership. Still other respondents echoed the above theme of using the Bible inappropriately in counseling sessions and the tendency to furnish rote or ready-made answers to couples in distress. For example, one church leader living in a large urban area saw a growing divide between clergy and the more educated couples of their congregation. With values of the urban world being somewhat less hierarchical and authoritarian then in the village, clergy need to make a dramatic shift in order to relate less autocratically and more collegially with city couples. He put forth the following observations:

They [the pastors and elders] come with the Bible and the minutes from the council but there are other ways of solving the issues that they need to be trained in. They don’t see the need to consult the couple, because the pastors have a ready made answer, because they don’t want to hear... For example, ok, let’s say that one of the problems which sometimes face couples in urban areas is alcoholism among the husbands. They will come and preach to them that they are alcoholic and that is a sin, blah, blah, blah and that’s it. So why don’t they repent? If you want to help your wife, living together, faithfully and so forth you have to get rid of this. But they have analyzed that this man goes to the pub and spend 2,3,4, hours before going home at night. Why? Frustration at home? Frustration at work? Others seek alcohol as a refuge. A scapegoat of what is going on. You must analyze what is going on... Another definite example: Oh, here comes a young couple saying. “Well, we’re tired of living together. We would like to ask for a divorce.” Well, in the case of the church, they will never tell you, because they know they would never be allowed to divorce anyone. So the next time we find the wife somewhere and the husband somewhere else and the fact is they are not coming to church again. (Male Individual Interview #2)
According to the above respondent, urban Christian couples tended to seek their friends first as resources ("who they could confide their secrets") and then their pastors. It was also said that couples seek help from the elders of congregation. Some respondents reported that such elected or appointed leaders could be very helpful. Pastors usually have a number of churches to minister to and such individuals provide enormous assistance to both families of the congregation and over-burdened pastors. The elders are officially called to teach, preach, provide care and counsel for families of the church and to visit members who are under church discipline (Schonge, 2000). Many Makumira respondents, however, claimed that many elders have responsibilities that are beyond their abilities. In addition, they are not trained to adequately provide assistance for families in distress. Female respondents were adamant that they would never go to the elders of a congregation for help. They too spoke of a tendency to break confidentiality. One female pastor articulated:

Marriage problems are very sensitive and confidential issues, so the church elders are not able usually to hold confidence and sometimes they have just simple answers to those who come in very hard situations. (Female Focus Group #4)

Other respondents spoke of church elder committees composed chiefly of men and providing instructions and guidance that place the onus on women’s acquiescence and submission to the husband’s authority.

Sometimes they are sustaining the problem. They are there just to sustain the problem. They say: “This is your husband. You are to love him, even if you are having a problem. No one is without problems. You must be polite. Receive it as it is.” So I don’t think this is valid [counseling]. And this is why most women are really in the weak condition that we are...I remember one day, in another counseling [session]. One woman, she says she’s going outside her marriage for her desire. Then they [the couple] talked together with the pastor and elders, listening to what her concern was, who is a man. And talking with the husband and wife, they said [to the husband], “You are supposed to be harsh with her. Just understand that is the way women are. Then to be harsh with her will help you. So she can obey you.” (Female Individual Interview #1)
This particular informant argued that “wise women” needed to be placed on these elder committees so that women could not only be better represented but couples could be offered more balanced and sound counsel.

Interestingly, despite citing church elders as a definite asset for African society, respondents related relatively few positive case stories of elder committees in action. One of the “traditionally oriented” male focus group related the following example:

I was in one assembly of the elders who were restoring marriages and after discussing the matter that was a woman who committed adultery and her husband brought the problem to the assembly of elders. After a long discussion, after the departure [of the husband], the elders started saying, “This man is stupid, is ignorant. And why has he brought his wife to us?” Most elders, the traditional ones, are the ones who are the most discouraging. After destroying the marriage, they simply do not know how to restore marriages. I think if someone wants to consult other people. I think it is better that they consult the experts and now the pastors are the experts on the issues. (Male Focus Group #2)

These pastors believed that there was a spirit of judgment and disapproval in many places of the church when it came to counseling marital difficulties. When I asked them how could the church better respond to marriages in crisis, they mentioned an African conceptual asset called “Upendo.” And they described this African ideal as:

*Upendo* is shown when somebody has quarreled and one of them excuses the other person and when the problem is settled [they say] “this and this I have done and I am sorry” and then you say: “I excuse you, my wife.” That’s for me what *upendo* is...Going back to *upendo*: that’s love [in action] as the church or the pastors when resolving the marriage problems. They [the church] have to show pain rather than judgments in dealing with problems. This is a difficult thing in our churches, because I am sorry to say this, because judgment is established rather than *upendo* in our churches. “Yes, you have done this!” And then there is judgment in most of the problems. (Male Focus Group #2)

Another respondent called for an approach called the way of “consolation” in counseling couples. He perceived a tendency within the church to be rule laden and legalistic and this
approach often filtered into its ways and manner of relating to individuals, couples and families dealing with immense personal problems.

As I try to help people... You see once you have all kinds of regulations and then it becomes very dictatorial, legalistic and where is the consolation? And what I call the way of the cross. Those could be a guideline for counseling people and following the A,B,C, and D [approach]. That should not be the basis for final decisions. You have to allow for the possibility of the two [husband and wife] coming together and consoling each other. It is very, very difficult to do this consolation especially among African men: “this is my wife!” And the wife can say: “This is my husband!” And so the consolation, I can say is the best approach. (Male Individual Interview #2).

It should be noted that the Makumira participants identified very few close intimate familial or extra-familial relationships to which they themselves could reach out for help. This may have been a function of the generality of the question I asked: “What would you say are some of the resources and strengths that couples have to deal with marital issues/conflicts/crises?” However, even when I personalized the question, participants tended to respond abstractly, echoing their previous, almost theoretical, answers.

I truly wonder what are the resources and who are the “wise” people that Tanzanian Lutheran pastors and their families can go to for help amidst what can be a very stressful and burdensome ministry? I conclude with the brief words of one female pastor.

...and also sometimes I maybe, one would like to go to the pastor, to the witness or to the church elder, but there is no other here. I would hope that the church or individuals would be open to this. But they really need this; the need is there. I don’t know if you can understand this?
Marriage Enrichment – A Possibility?

The marriage enrichment example that I described to the Makumira respondents was similar to David and Vera Mace’s (Mace, 1984) Quaker model. It would be a small group experience where four to eight couples with healthy marriages would gather with two lead couples (my wife and I and an African couple) to share personal stories, insights and gain new skills in order to strengthen their marriages. The specific purpose of such a program would be threefold, for couples: 1) to take an honest look or make an honest assessment of their own marriage (not other marriages!); 2) to decide on new goals and directions they would like their marriage to go; 3) to develop new communication and decision making skills to achieve those goals. Furthermore, there would be no confrontation allowed in the process. All activities and discussions would be optional depending upon their desire to participate. If no one wanted to volunteer to speak or participate in an activity, we simply wouldn’t do it!

I said that I would like to hear their opinion on whether such an enrichment program might be possible among couples at Makumira University. It would be experimental in nature and I wondered aloud if such a program might be culturally appropriate. I imagined the possibility that if this model were successful, couples might bring such a program into their parishes.

A great variety of opinions and suggestions were then offered by the respondents! Most people cautioned me that this was truly a novel approach which could be done with only a select group of couples. I begin with the words of one participant, who clearly articulated the most apparent distinctions between different types of marriages at Makumira. He also called attention to the fact that men would probably be threatened by the dialogue process.

I think some of the traditional couples would say no, because they say that marriage
life is a private life. It's between me and my wife and that is not to be shared by other people and they would say no. And there are some who would say: "Let me be exposed to other ways of leading a married life." Some would be more able and flexible and there are others more progressive who want to be equal with their wives, So they would be like that. But the majority of our people, I think they are not like that because of fear of losing authority or giving some new ideas to women and they will start demanding for some of their rights. (Male Individual Interview #5)

The majority of the respondents informed me that such a program would be a very difficult undertaking at Makumira and again, probably only a few couples would be ready to participate in such a new experiment. The first and foremost hurdle to be overcome would be the reigning cultural belief that couples should never share or speak with others about their marital relationship. Nevertheless, if such sharing should take place, a second and related hurdle was the matter of confidentiality.

No [marriage enrichment would not be appropriate] because some of the people don't like to tell other people their problems. So even if some of them would just sit there until the end of it and then say goodbye! It may be that in the class they can have such a discussion...but it must be anonymous; confidentiality must be respected. (Female Focus Group #3)

It is not possible here and to come together and say my husband is this and this and this. I think it is not possible. It's a great sin to do that...with the family she can say that she loves me or hates me; with her sisters she can share those things. (Male Focus Group #2)

It's impossible. The problem with that is when problems arise in the family, they will be seen and I'm sure that the problem will be known to your neighbors. So when you go there and maybe you'll be writing something [the issue or problem] down that's confidential as a secret thing. But it will be known that that problem specifically is from that house. It will be known. And you know that when you meet with more than three families, of course after the discussion, things will start to go out. So it will no longer be a secret; there is mistrust. But here [at Makumira] I don't think so. [His wife then said:] I think the same.

Other participants believed this small-group model of couples talking with each other and before others, while strange and new, could afford couples the possibility of learning
from a “considerate” couple who might show them how to live. One couple voiced their differing views, with the husband, surprisingly, being most open to this idea.

Pastor: I think it would be quite possible here at Makumira.
Female: I say no. I’ve never heard of such a program and it would be too difficult to share private things with other couples. That is not the tradition. We share things of the heart with only those people we know and love and not strangers.

Pastor: In the African context, it’s difficult for couples to talk together. There are some couples where this takes place. Sometimes there is a couple who is considerate and shows them how to live. We share things, many times, because my wife is very helpful in my ministry also. She gives me very good advice, sometimes of course in my studies here. She is very helpful and this is because I share with her what is taking place in my life. This is what I experience from her. So I can say that this [the feasibility of a marriage enrichment program] depends upon this kind of marriage where there is sharing, time spent on harmony and how people share together. (Couple #1)

Other respondents emphasized that such a program would be especially threatening to men who are not predisposed to relating on an equal level with their wives. In addition, the surrounding community would probably ridicule group participants.

It’s good, but in my opinion, maybe people will laugh at it. Some students or whatever will not prefer that, because they are still exercising their powers as the speakers and decision-makers in their family. And if we enter into dialogue, then they [will] fear their wives or whatever they think. They fear that they may be opened, that their minds may be opened and therefore they may reject their life system. And their lifestyles or even other [who] have many problems that they see are not good to be known by other people. It’s good to have such meetings, dialogues or discussions…But confidentiality is very important and there are issues that must not be exposed. (Couple #4)

Female respondents in focus groups spoke of women being more predisposed to such an experiment. According to this group, women were more free to speak of their family life issues among themselves. They perceived husbands as being the most hampered in such a setting because of their reluctance to share their problems.

For women, they always do this together. Women among themselves. The women are very open. You know if she has a problem, she must first ask her husband how
to overcome this, but men are far from this. They don’t want anyone to know or
hear of their problems. But if the couples will sit together and share what they have
in their life, good things and bad things, it would be very good because they are trying
to help each family. You see, you see problems from others and you have your
problems. So it is a good idea. (Female Focus Group #4)

All in all, respondents were either dead-set against or only cautiously in favor of such a
marriage enrichment program. Those who said that they would consider participating in such
an experiment offered suggestions on how best to promote or facilitate it in the Makumira
environment. One couple believed that marriage enrichment would best take place among
good friends whose relationship was already established and on good terms.

Wife: It is possible. It is possible to share for some couples. Some would be
reluctant. And some would be eager to share their life because some of them
think that sharing their life is like spreading personal treasures among
people!
Pastor: Yes. So long as, so many people are reluctant to share, but if it would be
certain families or certain couples who are on good terms, as far as living
together. Among friends it’s possible to share. (Couple #5)

Other female and male focus groups (in Meru, Chagga and Masai) ethnic background
recommended that participating couples be in the same age group. These cultures have the
tradition of “age-sets” where people are grouped for special functions and activities
according to their age. Female focus group # 2 related that teachers of marriage seminars in
their dioceses are usually of a similar age as their students. Men from focus group

#3 stated:

Pastor #1: Couples will be open especially if they are the same age. If they are the same
age. We are here [in this group] open because we are the same age.
Pastor #2: And status.
Pastor #1: And status, yes. But if one is older than the other. For example, 20 or 30
years older. For example, a couple 5 years old and you mix it with a couple
30 years old, they will not be very much open.
Researcher: Really!
Pastor #1: Yes, because the younger couples will realize that this is my father or elder
brother, so they will not be very much open.
In sum, the advice of those amenable to such a different and unique experiment was to go slowly, have patience and to above all emphasize the importance of keeping confidentiality.

I conclude with the words of couple #10 who offer on the husband's side, a cautious affirmation of a marital enrichment program, and for the wife's part an honest skepticism of the value of sharing their married life experience with other couples.

Pastor: I think that is a very good thing. To that I would say it is a matter of approach. You know I'm not an alcoholic, but it's kind of when you meet together [like Alcoholics' Anonymous] and for a cup of tea and entertainment: talking, talking, talking. Like it's like people get kind of drunk with each other - we are so close. Then slowly you begin to share the small problems, the small problems, then within the circle of five couples or four couples; then with time someone may share bigger problems gradually. But the thing is if someone is not trusted, something leaks. Then it will be a big problem...You know it's very difficult, unless it's done with much care. No one really trusts someone 100%. Even if you trust their husband and wives 100%, how are you going to get them to trust their neighbors at least 80%? But if it's gradual and people are taught the advantages, I think it is an excellent thing to do.

Researcher: What do you think [wife]?
Wife: It's best to talk with your best friend or sister, rather than a team of couples. It would always leak. (Couple #10)

Summary, Conclusions and Future Research Possibilities:

The primary goal of this phenomenological study was to gain a better understanding of Tanzanian Christian marriage and family life by obtaining verbal descriptions from respondents – seminary students, faculty, pastors and spouses – at Makumira University College. My aim was to go beyond the simple collecting of social facts assembled in surveys and gather the “personal treasures” (as one woman described earlier) from face to face interviews of couples’ varied marital experience. I also wanted to investigate and assess the possibility of carrying out an experimental marriage enrichment program at Makumira
University College. Such an exploration included identifying factors affecting the cultural relevancy, suitability and applicability of such a program. Finally, I wanted to make a contribution to the international family therapy field by enriching our understanding of the complexity and wider ecology of African Christian marriages and family life.

The Makumira participants saw themselves as members of a specific Christian culture (the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania) amidst numerous ethnic cultures, dependent upon a religious faith which served as a powerful mechanism for ordering much of their life: their self-understanding, gender relations, future directions and hopes and plans. Their discourse was often colored by religious words, metaphors and occasional quotes from the Bible. Christianity was a potent force in the lives of these participants. Thus their identity as Christians (as pastors, wives and leaders within the church) separated them, to a degree, from the surrounding traditional African culture. I often found them saying: “Formerly our parents... but in the new era of the Christian life...” Cultural practices ranging from parental choice of spouse, to domestic abuse of women (wife-beating, genital mutilation), to the necessity of giving birth to a child to legitimize a marriage were part of the old traditional way of life that was rejected or being transformed. According to the respondents, their own view of marriage was not so much a series of steps which continued even upon the death of the husband (as perceived by traditionalists) but was a joining in “one flesh” which had a beginning at the wedding at the church and was a life-long commitment which ended with death. Nevertheless, respondents in the same breath said: “You know we are Christians, but we still keep the traditions.” Such marriage traditions as bridewealth and the family history investigation were considered important parts of those customs to be kept. A few participants were of the opinion that “without paying the brideprice, the marriage cannot be
called a marriage.” There was not, however, total unanimity. Some traditions were contested by both men and women at Makumira on religious and ethical grounds. For example, with regard to bridewealth some objected to: 1) the excessive costs or high prices insisted upon by some families; 2) its being treated as the “basis” or foundation for marriage; and 3) and the confinement of meaning to economic terms (payment and profit). Among the Makumira participants, I witnessed a healthy conversation taking place which involved an assessment and discernment of the ongoing value of those traditions. A quest was clearly underway for the “spirit of past generations,” as the anthropologist Bruno Gutmann (1914) said, an ancient wisdom which would guide these men and women to be renewed and strengthened as both Christians and Africans, rather than as ill-constructed replicas of European and North American societies.

The implementation of a marriage enrichment program like the Mace’s (1984) Quaker model presumes a partnership, cooperative, conjugal or equal relationship. The model presupposes a marital relationship where: 1) decisions are made jointly by husband and wife; 2) the marriage is an equal or mutual partnership based on loving and creative interaction; 3) marital, familial and professional roles are somewhat fluid and flexible; and 4) sexual relationships are initiated by both husband and wife. Such a program also presumes a willingness of the husband and wife to honestly and openly “encounter” each other (and other couples) by engaging in personal and public conversations in a small group setting. I discovered in the course of my investigation, that such a model would be appropriate for a select group of couples – those who have or are working toward such a “partnership” relationship and would like to learn additional skills to strengthen their marriage. Nevertheless, even among such couples the cultural taboo or obstacle of sharing “personal
treasures" with others would have to be grappled with sensitively and patiently. Concerns of personal issues "being leaked" remained a ubiquitous fear that would also have to be dealt with. Trust would need to be built for the couples to be willing to become vulnerable to each other. I would argue that such a marriage enrichment program would be suitable for the highly educated couples, similar to those of the I.S.U. pilot study and befitting pastors and spouses (with a partnership or equal regard relationship) ministering in urban areas. In addition, if such a experimental program was implemented, a careful screening process would be in order to select participants.

At Makumira, there were a variety of marriage types ranging from traditional to "mutual" to equal relationships. Again I believe that Christianity, along with education and economic factors, played major roles in the past, present and ongoing transformation of gender roles. For me this was the unique discovery of this study: that the respondents' religious beliefs were prominent in advancing and shaping their understanding that marriage is a union between two people where "you practice your love, peace and unity." That is to say, the focus of marriage was primarily on the husband and wife and the growth (spiritual, economic, educational, professional) of their relationship. Yes, the expectations and obligations to the extended family were very important. But such duties and responsibilities were not as crucial as they once had been. Such beliefs concerning the centrality of the couple's relationship in marriage, the respondents indicated, separated them from the surrounding culture. Future research might compare couples from such religious groups as Makumira with more secular "modern" couples of comparable educational level to determine the veracity of this study's observations.
Young highly educated women (and some men) remained impatient and critical of
gender inequalities existing in traditional African culture as well as in the church. Indeed,
ethical issues associated with men’s understanding of “headship,” domestic violence, and
widowhood are heart-rending problems that both church and society need to keep before
their field of vision and work for justice.

Although this study suggests that husbands and wives’ relationships among the
respondents at Makumira are moving toward one of mutuality and reciprocity, this intimation
needs further scrutiny. I, as the researcher, am reminded that this study focused primarily on
the verbal discourse among participants. Further research would need to investigate the
actual practices and actions of respondents in their daily world where the rubber meets the
road. The circle of respondents would be widened to include not only the elite seminary
population, but also Christians in rural and urban areas. In my visits to people’s homes and to
surrounding localities I personally witnessed couples behaving in what appeared to be new
ways: men serving dinner and cleaning the table, husbands unmistakably including their
wives in the discussions, spouses consulting each other with regard to the next day’s
activities. In the Pare area in a round table discussion with German church representatives, I
witnessed women sitting in positions of honor (as their husbands stood behind them quietly)
describing the success of a church sponsored small business enterprise (a pond stocked with
fish). I would concur with what one respondent said: “But now things are changing. But not
much, but a little bit changing.”

The respondents of this study witnessed and chronicled male disengagement from family
responsibilities as a growing phenomenon. Indeed, the significant increase in the proportion
of households headed by women (from 18% in 1991/92 to 23% in 2000/01) suggest
substantive transformations taking place not only in households and women’s roles, but also in the male role as husband and father. Respondents of this study described men’s increasing tendency to evade family responsibilities (through alcoholism, infidelity, squandering of household income, family violence, employment in distant cities and AIDS). It was also related that similar behaviors are accelerating on the part of women. Future research, I believe, needs to go beyond the alleged moral reasons (male irresponsibility or male negligence) and explore the yet unmapped terrain of men’s experience as husbands and fathers as well as their apparent disengagement. In previous years, until just a few years ago, women were often considered the sole objects of investigation in family and fertility studies. This has been changing. Future research in the Tanzanian marriage and family life needs to explore this important male realm and in doing so, I believe, will assist in strengthening men’s and women’s relationship.

Finally, as indicated above, the marriage enrichment program I proposed seemed most appropriate for couples who had more of a partnership or equal marriage relationship. A fair majority of the married couples of Makumira would be uncomfortable participating in such a program. Future research should investigate the already existing “marriage seminars” which a few respondents referred to taking place in various dioceses. I unfortunately was unable to attend any of these events. Participants described the quality of these seminars as dependent upon the leader’s education and ability. The seminar format was largely in a lecture mode, but some leaders received anonymous “cases” from the audience which they in turn addressed. Respondents remarked that such a case study method seemed to be the most valuable means of instruction. Again, future research by the students and faculty of Makumira, could assess these seminars, assist in the collaboration between dioceses, collect
and collate the various instructions and techniques taking place and work toward the betterment of these already existing marriage enrichment programs.

It is my hope that this study has widened the reader’s vision of African marriage and family life. I believe that the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania and its leaders are a major positive social force in Tanzania. I also believe that great possibilities exist for the church in influencing a civil society, both by exposing discord, suffering and injustice and even more in the healing and strengthening of marital and familial relationships using traditional African assets as well as Christian teaching and practice. I hope that this study has assisted the church, providing one small step in that direction.
APPENDIX A – BACKGROUND INFORMATION
Marriage and Family Study at Makumira University College

Name: ___________________________  Spouse’s Name: ___________________________
Address in Tanzania: (rural area? Small City? Large City?)

Diocese: __________________________
Age: __________________________
How long have you been married? __________________________
How long did you know your spouse before you were married? __________________________

Children: (Name, Age, and Gender):

Education (Schools attended and degree):

Church Membership: __________________________
What important information about your church (or diocese) that a researcher / pastor like me, interested in marriage and family issues, should know about?

Ethnic Background or Tribal Membership: __________________________
What important information about your tribe that a researcher / pastor like me, interested in marriage and family issues, should know about?

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•

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What are some of your hopes and dreams for in your marriage and family life?
APPENDIX B – INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR COUPLES

We, ___________________________ and ___________________________ have been asked to participate in a study entitled, “The Dynamics and Ecology of African Christian Marriages and Familial Relationships – A Qualitative Study at Makumira University College.” This study is conducted by Rev. Wayne Nieminen, a doctoral student at Iowa State University’s Marriage and Family Therapy Program. We/I have been informed the following.

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to discover more about African Christian marriages and familial relationships. I am interested in talking with you about your marriage and family relationship as well as about others in your community. What are the ingredients which support and strengthen your marriage? What do you see are some of the things taking place in your society and in relationships that are contributing to the breakdown of marriages? How could our church help to enhance marital and familial relationships? What issues should be talked about in a marriage enrichment course?

Procedure: Each couple will be interviewed (for approximately 45-90 minutes) and the conversation will be recorded. I may want to talk to you again soon after the initial interview to ensure I have understood what you have shared with me.

Risks: Being asked a variety of questions and reflecting upon one’s life can be enlightening and affirming; it can also be unsettling, disturbing or encourage one to make changes in their life. You have the right to not answer questions, to ask that the tape recording be stopped and to end the interview. Your participation is voluntary. If you see a need to continue the conversation after this interview, I or Rev. Andrew Kyomo (my co-researcher) will be available.

Benefits: Several possible benefits include: 1) having your point of view heard and understood not only be the researcher, but by your spouse; 2) growing in respect for each other’s contributions in the household and community; 3) knowing that the sharing of your experiences may lead to the development of marriage enrichment program at Makumira University College.

Confidentiality: All information from this study will be treated with strict confidentiality. Information gathered will be coded and the study will use pseudonyms for all who participate.

I agree to participate in this study and understand that my participation is completely voluntary and that I may stop this interview at any time.

Respondent’s participation approval is indicated by his/her signature.

____________________________  ___________________________
Signature                                                     Signature

____________________________
Date:
APPENDIX C: INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR FOCUS GROUP AND INDIVIDUALS

Rev. Wayne Nieminen
Makumira University
Guesthouse

College of Family and Consumer Sciences
Marriage and Family Therapy Doctoral Program
Department of Human Development and Family Studies
Iowa State University

I, ___________________________ have been asked to participate in a study entitled, “The Dynamics and Ecology of African Christian Marriages and Familial Relationships - A Qualitative Study at Makumira University College.” This study is conducted by Rev. Wayne Nieminen, a doctoral student at Iowa State University’s Marriage and Family Therapy Program. We/ I have been informed the following.

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to discover more about African Christian marriages and familial relationships. I am interested in talking with you about your marriage and family relationship as well as about others in your community. What are the ingredients which support and strengthen your marriage? What do you see are some of the things taking place in your society and in relationships that are contributing to the breakdown of marriages? How could our church help to enhance marital and familial relationships? What issues should be talked about in a marriage enrichment course?

Procedure: Each group (compose of 3-5 individuals) will be interviewed (for approximately 45-90 minutes) and the conversation will be recorded. I may want to talk to you again soon after the initial interview to ensure I have understood what you have shared with me. I ask you to hold what is said by your fellow participants as confidential.

Risks: Being asked a variety of questions and reflecting upon one’s life can be enlightening and affirming; it can also be unsettling, disturbing or encourage one to make changes in their life. You have the right to not answer questions, to ask that the tape recording be stopped and to end the interview. There is also the risk that others in the group may share what you have said with others and break confidentiality – though we have asked them not to. Your participation is voluntary. If you see a need to continue the conversation after this interview, I or Rev. Andrew Kyomo (my co-researcher) will be available.

Benefits: Several possible benefits include: 1) having your point of view heard and understood; 2) growing in respect and understanding of others’ marriage and family life; 3) knowing that the sharing of your experiences may lead to the development of marriage enrichment program at Makumira University College.

Confidentiality: All information from this study will be treated with strict confidentiality. Information gathered will be coded and the study will use pseudonyms for all who participate.

I agree to participate in this study and understand that my participation is completely voluntary and that I may stop this interview at any time. Respondent’s participation approval is indicated by his/her signature.

Signature                                Signature
Date: ______________________________    Date: ______________________________
APPENDIX D - HUMAN SUBJECTS APPROVAL

Information for Review of Research Involving Human Subjects

Iowa State University

(Please type and use the attached instructions for completing this form)

AUG 14 2000

1. Title of Project
   The Dynamics and Ecology of African Christian Marriages and Familial Relationships - A Phenomenological Study taking place at Makamira University College - Tanzania

2. I agree to provide the proper surveillance of this project to insure that the rights and welfare of the human subjects are protected. I will report any adverse reactions to the committee. Additions to or changes in research procedures after the project has been approved will be submitted to the committee for review. I agree to request renewal of approval for any project continuing more than one year.

Wayne Nieminen
Typed name of principal investigator
HDFS - Marriage and Family Therapy
Department
232-2414 (home) ; 232-6256 (office)
Phone number to report results

3. Signatures of other investigators

Date
Relationship to principal investigator

4. Principal investigator(s) (check all that apply)
   [ ] Faculty [ ] Staff [ ] Graduate student [ ] Undergraduate student

5. Project (check all that apply)
   [ ] Research [ ] Thesis or dissertation [ ] Class project [ ] Independent Study (490, 590, Honors project)

6. Number of subjects (complete all that apply)

   # adults, non-students: 15-20
   # minors under 14: couples; 6 focus groups of 3-4 males and females
   # ISU students: other (explain):

7. Brief description of proposed research involving human subjects: (See instructions, item 7. Use an additional page if needed.)

   The purpose of this study is research Tanzanian Christian marriage and familial relationships at Makumira University College by obtaining verbal descriptions from informants - seminary students, church leaders and their spouses - concerning their perception of their own marriages and those of the surrounding cultural milieux. The wider focus of the study is interventive in nature and is interested in the question: What marital dynamics and other pertinent variables, from African couples' perspective, should be considered in the development of a "marital enrichment" program?

   This dissertation research project follows a pilot study completed at ISU (March 1999), involving African graduate students and their spouses, approved by the Human Subjects Committee.

   This research project is qualitative in scope, an open-ended, semi-structured interview will be used (a sample of questions are enclosed). A combination of purposeful sampling strategies will be used: criterion, snowball or chain, and opportunistic. Interviews will take place at the university (which is a seminary). Couples and individuals will be paid a fee ranging from $5.00 to $10. (advice will be sought from the provost of the university). Permission will be asked to contact informants again to make clarifications and better understand their descriptions.

http://www.grad-college.iastate.edu/forms/HumanSubjects.doc
8. Informed Consent:  
- Signed informed consent will be obtained. (Attach a copy of your form.)  
- Modified informed consent will be obtained. (See instructions, item 8.)  
- Not applicable to this project.
9. Confidentiality of Data: Describe below the methods you will use to ensure the confidentiality of data obtained. (See instructions, item 9.)

1) Information gathered on informants will be coded by the investigator. 2) The study will use pseudonyms for all participating subjects. 3) Tapes and transcripts will be locked in a file. 4) The researcher will inform his African co-researcher/s concerning the importance of maintaining confidentiality.

10. What risks or discomfort will be part of the study? Will subjects in the research be placed at risk or incur discomfort? Describe any risks to the subjects and precautions that will be taken to minimize them. (The concept of risk goes beyond physical risk and includes risks to subjects' dignity and self-respect as well as psychological or emotional risk. See instructions, item 10.)

Qualitative inquiry may be more intrusive and involve greater reactivity than surveys, tests or other methods of investigation. Being asked a variety of questions and reflection upon one's life, marriage and family may be unsettling, disturbing, enlightening or change inducing. Couples will be told that they have the right to not answer questions, end the interview and the tape recording will be stopped. It will also be stated that the participants could, if need be, continue the discussion in a therapeutic setting with the researcher (a therapist) or with one of the faculty in the pastoral care department of Makumira University.

11. CHECK ALL of the following that apply to your research:

- A. Medical clearance necessary before subjects can participate
- B. Administration of substances (foods, drugs, etc.) to subjects
- C. Physical exercise or conditioning for subjects
- D. Samples (blood, tissue, etc.) from subjects
- E. Administration of infectious agents or recombinant DNA
- F. Deception of subjects
- G. Subjects under 14 years of age and/or Subjects 14 - 17 years of age
- H. Subjects in institutions (nursing homes, prisons, etc.)
- I. Research must be approved by another institution or agency (Attach letters of approval)

If you checked any of the items in 11, please complete the following in the space below (include any attachments):

Items A–E Describe the procedures and note the proposed safety precautions.

Items D–E The principal investigator should send a copy of this form to Environmental Health and Safety, 118 Agronomy Lab for review.

Item F Describe how subjects will be deceived; justify the deception; indicate the debriefing procedure, including the timing and information to be presented to subjects.

Item G For subjects under the age of 14, indicate how informed consent will be obtained from parents or legally authorized representatives as well as from subjects.

Items H–I Specify the agency or institution that must approve the project. If subjects in any outside agency or institution are involved, approval must be obtained prior to beginning the research, and the letter of approval should be filed.

A letter of invitation and approval from the provost (Dr. Gwakiss Mwakagoli) of Makumira University is enclosed.

http://www.grad-college.iastate.edu/forms/HumanSubjects.doc
Checlist for Attachments and Time Schedule

The following are attached (please check):

12. ☑ Letter or written statement to subjects indicating clearly:
   a) the purpose of the research
   b) the use of any identifier codes (names, #'s), how they will be used, and when they will be removed (see item 17)
   c) an estimate of time needed for participation in the research
   d) if applicable, the location of the research activity
   e) how you will ensure confidentiality
   f) in a longitudinal study, when and how you will contact subjects later
   g) that participation is voluntary; nonparticipation will not affect evaluations of the subject

13. ☑ Signed consent form (if applicable)

14. ☑ Letter of approval for research from cooperating organizations or institutions (if applicable)

15. ☐ Data-gathering instruments

16. Anticipated dates for contact with subjects:
   First contact
   September 22, 2000
   Month/Day/Year
   Last contact
   November 23, 2000
   Month/Day/Year

17. If applicable: anticipated date that identifiers will be removed from completed survey instruments and/or audio or visual tapes will be erased:
   November 2004
   Month/Day/Year

18. Signature of Departmental Executive Officer Date
   Signature of Committee Chair
   Department or Administrative Unit
   Patricia M. Keith
   8-18-00

19. Decision of the University Human Subjects Review Committee:
   ☑ Project approved
   ☐ Project not approved
   ☐ No action required

http://www.grad-college.iastate.edu/forms/HumanSubjects.doc
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