On Marital Risk and Religion in Ghana: A Mixed-Methods Study of Divorce, Long Distance Partnerships, and Charismatic Church Discourse[1]

Nicolette D. Manglos
The University of Texas at Austin
Draft Manuscript, April 29, 2010
Please do not circulate or cite without author's permission.

Running Head: Marital Risk and Religion in Ghana

Word Count: 8,780

# of Tables: 3

On Marital Risk and Religion in Ghana: A Mixed-Methods Study of Marital Stability and Charismatic Church Discourse

Abstract

Although research suggests that marital patterns in West Africa have changed dramatically in the past 100 years, and that these changes have implications for demographic shifts and for women's empowerment, there is little agreement on the nature of these changes. Divergent narratives infer both declines and increases in the stability of marriage, and disagree on which trend is better for women's economic wellbeing and autonomy. At the same time, the Charismatic church in Ghana has been especially popular among those groups for whom the concerns surrounding marital risk are most relevant; and has proscribed a strong moral program for navigating marriage, partnerships, and divorce. In this study, I argue from Demographic Health Survey data that marital stability has in fact increased in the past 20 years; that the association between Charismatic affiliation and marital stability is ambivalent; and that in one Charismatic church three principles for managing marital risk are emphasized: heavy church involvement, individualism, and marriage within the church. I use these findings to propose a new narrative of marital risk that attributes the growth in formal, contractual, church-officiated marriage to the historical extension of bureaucratic control over marriage by both the church and the emerging state.

Introduction

In Ghana, marriage is almost universal, and the average age at first marriage for women is just under 20 years of age (Tabutin and Schoumaker 2004). Yet recent studies have suggested that there are significant risks involved in entering into marriage, especially for women. In the late 80s it was estimated that between 45 and 53 percent of marriages across West Africa end in dissolution (Lesthaeghe et al. 1989), and more recent data from Ghana show that 35 percent of women's first marriages end in divorce (Tabutin and Schoumaker 2004). Married women may also be at higher risk for HIV/AIDS and other STDs than unmarried women, given substantial rates of polygamy, high rates of marital dissolution, and lower rates of condom use within marriages than within non-marital partnerships (Smith 2007; Clark et al 2006). Increasing urbanization, internal and external migration, and livelihood instability make the formation of a stable household all the more important for Ghanaians, and yet also that much more difficult to achieve (Whitehead 2002; Caldwell 1968). Such stressors on marriage, as one of the proximate determinants of fertility, have significant implications for Ghana's demographic transition in turn (Bongaarts et al 1984).

Concurrent with these transitions, Ghana has been home to one of the largest Charismatic movements on the continent. Those groups for whom the risks of marital life are most relevant—poor, married women and young, unmarried, and educated men and women—are disproportionately attracted to the wave of Charismatic churches which first took off in the late 70s (Soothill 2007; Gifford 2004; Meyer 1998). These new, youth-oriented churches play an important role in defining and re-defining marriage for

adherents, controlling the sexual behavior of men, and providing structures and models through which trustworthy marriage partners can be found (Trinitapoli and Regnerus 2006; Smith 2004; Garner 2000). Since their theology carries strong moral injunctions against divorce, churches also have a natural motivation to prevent divorce and promote stable unions. Yet there is a persistent paradox between the established morality of the church and its emphasis on voluntarism and individualism, which places ultimate decision-making power in the individual (Marshall 2009). Further, there is a gap between this moral code and the life-worlds of adherents, which are shaped by material constraints and pre-Christian marriage norms (van Dijk 2004). Marriage, divorce, separation, and the risks involved are of imminent importance, and yet the tensions involved have been only minimally explored by social-demographic research.

This paper is a mixed-methods study of the risks surrounding partner selection and union formation in Ghana, and how these risks are discursively managed in the context of the Charismatic Church. It has three aims. The first is to assess whether indicators of marital stability have increased or decreased significantly over five years of Demographic Health Survey data going back to 1988. The second is to assess whether there is an association between Charismatic affiliation and marital instability. The third is to explore, using original interview data and content analysis, perceptions of risk surrounding marriage and strategies for minimizing it within a particular Charismatic church, with a particular focus on young women.

Literature Review

There have been several narratives within the literature on the stability of marital unions in West Africa. The most common argues that globalization, urbanization, and the influence of Western norms have had the paradoxical result of both prioritizing the conjugal unit and putting more external and economic pressure on marriage, resulting in high rates of both marriage and divorce (Smith 2007; Tabutin and Schoumaker 2004). For example, the pressure to migrate for work can end up forcing spouses to live in separate cities or even on separate continents for extended periods of time, putting them at risk for both infidelity and disconnection. The assessment of these trends' effects on women's empowerment is usually mixed. While women in Ghana enjoy more education than their earlier counterparts, are more likely to live in urban areas, and seem to be getting married at somewhat higher ages (Dodoo 1993), the new priority placed on the conjugal unit as an independent entity and the increase in neolocal living arrangements may loosen women's access to extended families ties, giving them less leverage within marriage (Smith 2007). Marriage thus becomes an even more important means to achieving economic stability for mothers and their children, particularly in volatile local markets (Whitehead 2002; Harwood-Lejeune 2001). The stability of marriage itself and the minimization of risk upon entering a marital union are therefore crucial concerns, and any rise in divorce—indicating a loosening of marital stability—exacerbates women's powerlessness.

Another school of thought comes chiefly from the fields of anthropology and cultural history. It argues that in fact, marriage in West Africa has always been fluid in character, and that modern research suggesting a "shift" towards higher rates of divorce

5

and patriarchal forms of marriage is based more on conjecture than actual history (Jones 2005; Boni 2001). Further, both this fluidity and the persistence of strong extended family ties are in fact advantageous for women. Male spouses have rarely enjoyed total control in the marriage when their wives' extended kin are able to dissolve the marriage if necessary (Boni 2001). Marriages have also existed along a continuum ranging from more stable to more fluid unions, indicated chiefly by the amount of money exchanged at the commencement of the union. One historical study of marriage in Senegal argues that the type of contractual marriage that is common today was adopted only under the influence of the Catholic Church and colonial law (Jones 2005). This thesis would potentially lead us to expect a more widespread increase in marital stability across the region, given the far-reaching impact of both Christianity and colonial legal codes. Yet conversely, although norms surrounding dowry payments, procedures, and matrilocal vs. patrilocal living arrangements may be changing in modern life, divorce or union dissolution may also persist as a key strategy for the minimization of risk. This coheres with recent literature on HIV/AIDS, which argues that women within marriages are at a higher risk of infection through their partners and that access to divorce is key to women's protection and empowerment (Trinitapoli 2009; Smith 2007; Clark et al 2006).

The new Charismatic Churches of Ghana may at first seem an unlikely setting in which to investigate the question of marital risk management. Although religion and the institution of marriage have been historically intertwined in most societies, in those places where this relationship has been studied in the most depth the ultimate authority in marital decision-making resides in the individual, not in religious institutions. For example, while

churches in the U.S. are still the primary institution for officially recognizing marital unions, they are very rarely involved in the process of partner selection. They sometimes require an obligatory course of premarital counseling, or baptism into the church if one of the couple is not already a member, but in terms of assessing the trustworthiness vs. riskiness of either partner, they play very little role. In Ghana's Pentecostal-Charismatic churches, by contrast, marriage counseling is a much more involved and often mandatory process through which pastors are able to inquire into the partners' past relationships, moral standing, and family history in order to reach a judgment about the marriage (van Dijk 2004: 445). This type of moral oversight is an outgrowth of the overall program of moral self-transformation at the heart of Ghanaian Charismaticism, which treats marriage, sexuality, and divorce as central moral issues (Marshall 2009; Gifford 2004; Smith 2004; Meyer 1998). The theological traditions within Protestantism, of which Charismatic Christianity is a more recent expression, support an understanding of marriage as a *sacred* union over which the church exercises jurisdiction. While this is true elsewhere, evidence suggests that there is a difference in the degree to which Charismatic churches exercise jurisdiction and control over the moral bodies of their participants (Trinitapoli and Regnerus 2006; Smith, 2004; Garner, 2000).

Additionally, in contrast to the U.S. and Europe where modern marriage arose out of the Judeo-Christian religious tradition, in Ghana traditional patterns of marriage likely pre-dated its large-scale arrival in the pre-colonial period. The fact that today the recognition and performance of marriages widely occurs in churches and mosques is thus the result of a particular colonial history in which imported institutions gradually come to

shape social knowledge and behavior in a process of mutual exchange (see Jones 2005). The Ghanaian Church has established itself as the primary site for the performance of its members' marriages and treated pre-existing customs as subject to a Christian model of moral living, which is an important act of re-definition with far-reaching implications (van Dijk 2004). Questions of autonomy, control, and institutional legitimacy are at the heart of the matter. The Foucauldian concept of "subjectivation", as a process in which struggles over knowledge and power are expressed through altered self-understandings and the management of the self, is particularly applicable to the Charismatic program (Marshall 2009). Indeed, the necessity of self-management is, as suggested above, quite explicit in Charismatic discourse. Subjectivation always involves a tension between individuals taking responsibility for their selves and adhering to the dictates of powerful others. As it becomes an authority over moral and family life in particular, Charismatic groups therefore enter into a dialectical relationship with the very ethos of moral responsibility and individualism that is their hallmark.

Charismatic Christianity also has a distinctly ambiguous approach to women's empowerment. Several pioneering studies in Latin America have described both the heavy involvement of women in Pentecostal-Charismatic groups as well as its persistently hierarchical and patriarchal structure (Chesnut 2003; Brusco 1995). Pentecostal leaders are "family men", whose wives have a major presence in the ministry and who preach a reformed and moral version of masculinity, but who also reassert gender essentialism and traditional roles for women in the family (Martin 2002). Thus, while the Pentecostal-Charismatic movement and other similar evangelical groups provide new avenues for

8

women to establish identity and purpose and subvert old models of patriarchy, they also reaffirm a reformed patriarchal model on the basis of masculine spirituality (see also Chen 2005). They strongly promote marriage as an institution and demonize extramarital sexuality, while at the same time attempting to better the situation of women within this institution by providing other social outlets and encouraging men to be better husbands and fathers. They also provide a new place to meet presumably more trustworthy and reliable marriage partners (Marshall 2009; Gifford 2004).

The sense of possibility and optimism at the core of Charismatic Christianity in this project of self-improvement and moral transformation can hardly be overstated. David Martin (2002) in his seminal work on Pentecostalism has stated they are "full of holy boldness" (116), and that "Pentecostals belong to groups which liberals cast in the role of victim, and in every way they refuse to play that role (10)." Therefore, in discussing both the draw of women to this new movement and its effects on their life-worlds we should be careful to recognize its empowering force for those lacking power, even if its dictums appear in the end to restrict women's freedoms.

Research Questions

RQ #1: Are indicators of marital instability either increasing or decreasing in Ghana over time?

In order to measure marital instability, the study looks at two different aspects: divorce, and spouses living apart for long periods of time. Given that this topic is not well-studied, this question lays the groundwork for the qualitative data analysis that follows. It

allows us to get a sense of whether marriage is actually getting more unstable in Ghana, in order to speak to the debates in the literature and to contextualize interpretations of the discourse surrounding marriage in the Charismatic Church.

RQ#2: Is affiliation with a Charismatic Church in Ghana associated with distinct patterns of marital instability?

This second question begins to zero in on the Charismatic church in particular, to again give a context to the following qualitative analysis. It asks whether there are distinctive patterns of marital instability evidenced across religious groups that the qualitative analysis of Charismatic church discourse can help to explain.

RQ#3: How does the formal and informal discourse within the church portray the risks surrounding marriage and offer solutions for avoiding these risks?

This question takes the Charismatic Church as one public arena in which marriage and partner selection are both openly discussed, and thus a promising avenue for bringing to light the conceptual issues surrounding marital risk in Ghana more widely. Because it is a vast and important subject, which has been under-researched by demographers and sociologists alike, these research questions offer a first step into the overall issue of marital risk as it is discussed and played out in various social institutions.

Data and Methods

This study uses five waves of Demographic Health Survey (DHS) data from Ghana, collected in 1988, 1993, 1998, 2003, and 2008. These data were combined into one overall dataset of ever-married women, with an analytic sample size of 10,325. For the second

stage of analysis, I look more closely at patterns in just the 2008 data, for which my analytic sample size was 2,205.

Secondly, the study reports on several types of qualitative data collected in the summer of 2009 in the central headquarters of Beacon Ministries International[2] in Accra, Ghana. Since its establishment in the late 80s, it has become one of Accra's "mega-churches" (a term it uses for itself), hosting about 5,000 members in five different services on Sunday mornings. From the beginning it has had a focus on planting new churches around the globe, and as of 2009 had branches in 54 countries on every continent. It started as a small fellowship of men and women founded by the young medical student George Amankwah. This study combines analysis of field observations and interview data, along with content analysis of two of the nearly 70 books written by Amankwah on practical, self-help-related topics.

Seven interviews were conducted by myself in English with three male and four female church attendees, all unmarried but above 21 years of age. All of these were recruited by approaching them informally after church services. Three out of four were conducted along with Enoch Hanokh, a graduate student at the University of Ghana, who acted as a consultant and collaborator on this research during my time there. I also conducted one interview with an assistant pastor of the church, who reports directly to the church's founder and has been in leadership in the congregation for about 15 years. Finally, I attended and took detailed field notes on five religious services, four on Sunday mornings and one in the midweek, as well as on informal conversations with two personal contacts,

---

[2] All names of organizations, books, and individuals have been changed to protect privacy.

one a member of the church and one my research collaborator at RIPS who had long been involved in the Charismatic movement.

Any study in which research is conducted in the context of vast cultural differences and imbalances of power must deal with issues of positionality. This study was no different. During my time in Accra, I was affiliated with the Regional Institute of Population Studies (RIPS) at the University of Ghana and thus was able to associate my work with a known Ghanaian research institution. Being fairly young, foreign, and female inevitably shaped interview responses, such that I found young women much more willing to discuss issue of partnerships with me than their male counterparts. My similarity in age to my respondents, however, and the fact that I myself was still a student at the time, reduced any biases that an extreme age or professional differential could have created. Almost all of my respondents had been to college or had already obtained a college degree, and were familiar with the process of social scientific interviewing. Most of them had full-time jobs, and so most of the interviews were conducted on Sundays after or before services because it was difficult for them to make appointments during the week. This difficulty in scheduling appointments also contributed to the small number of formal interviews I was able to collect. Further, conducting interviews in the actual physical location of the church also inevitably biases my interviews toward the more formal messages of the church as its members understand it, over against the more real-to-life challenges associated with marriage and the inevitable incongruities in how such messages are played out.

After collecting interviews, I accessed written content published by Amankwah and sold in the church bookstore. Amankwah has written over 70 books, and most of them are not theological discussions but rather practical applications of narratives from the Bible to the challenges of daily life. These books thus allow for a focus on how he prescribes certain models of marriage, certain ideas of risk, and certain solutions for minimizing risk. The two books used in this analysis, entitled *A Lovely Spirit* and *For Young Women,* focus on practical issues of life and relationships, both within and outside of marriage. The first is specifically about finding a marriage partner, and is targeted to both men and women. The second is targeted specifically to women, and has a more general focus on issues particular to women. The advantage of using these books is that it allows for a more comprehensive summary of the church leadership's views and advice on marriage as directed to church members, which could only be gathered otherwise through a much longer period of attending the congregation. It also provides a source of data not influenced by reactivity to interview protocols.

I then coded all three of these qualitative data sources—the printed material, the field notes, and the interview transcripts—by hand, looking for mentions of marriage and risks surrounding marriage, as well as prescriptions for how to avoid these risks. The use of combined methods in this paper follows a "two-phase design" model (Creswell 1994), in which connected quantitative and qualitative analyses are performed and presented separately. This is particularly necessary because they use separate data sets that are not linked in any direct fashion. Given the underexplored nature of the topic, the strategy is to

first identify population-level patterns and trends and then to gain qualitative insight into the processes underlying these trends, and triangulate data on the question of marital risk.

DHS Measures

Marital Instability

I use two indicators to measure marital instability in the DHS data, divorce and marriages in which the respondent and their partner do not live in the same household. In all five years of data respondents reported their number of unions as well as their current marital status, though they were not asked directly if they had *ever* been divorced. Those who reported having more than one union and were not identified as "widowed" are coded as 1 on this variable for divorce. Those who reported their current marital status as "divorced" are also coded as 1. Unfortunately with this data it is not possible to identify those women whose earlier unions had ended in widowhood rather than divorce, but given the relatively young mean age of the sample it is assumed that this group is relatively small by comparison. [3]The resulting potential bias is an overestimation of the frequency of marital dissolution for reasons other than mortality, and therefore results should be interpreted with this in mind. This limitation also makes it preferable to use more than one measure of marital instability.

---

[3] In a small-sample study of divorce among the Abutia in southern Ghana, Verdon (1982) estimates that for women 76 percent of marriages that end do so because of divorce or dissolution, rather than mortality. He also projects that in the future, due to increases in divorce among younger cohorts and increases in life expectancy, nearly all marriages will end in dissolution rather than mortality. While not necessarily adopting this extreme picture of the rise of divorce in Ghana overall, I make the assumption that given 20 years of declining mortality in Ghana since this study, it is likely that the ratio is now significantly larger than 76 percent.

Respondents were asked if their spouse stays in the same house with them, and those who responded no are coded as 1 on the "spouse stays elsewhere" variable. Also, if they reported a current relationship status as "not living together" rather than "never married" they are coded as 1 on this variable. Any who reported their current status as "never married", "divorced", "living together", or "widowed" are coded as 0.

Independent variables

The goal of the quantitative analyses is to test the significance of changes in marital stability over time, and therefore the key independent variable of interest is year of survey. I use an indicator of year of survey that ranges from 1-5, where 1 is the earliest and 5 is the most recent survey.

I also include control variables for age, years of education in whole numbers, and age at first marriage. The mean values for years of education and age at marriage are both set to 0, in order to adjust for their skewed distribution. An age-squared vector is also included to adjust for the curvilinear relationship between age and marital outcomes. Finally, I use a dummy variable indicating whether the respondent lived in a rural or urban area.

To answer the second research question regarding the association between religious affiliation and indicators of marital stability, I use just the 2008 data since this was the first year of the survey to distinguish Charismatics from other types of Protestant Christian groups. The religious affiliation variable is coded into five categories, including Charismatic, non-Charismatic Protestant, Catholic, Muslim, Traditionalist, and None/other.

In this data set, I am also able to use an index of wealth quintiles, provided by the DHS. This index has an even distribution within my analytic sample and so is treated as an ordered discrete variable in the analyses.[4]

Results

Descriptive statistics for both the combined 5-wave sample and the limited 2008 sample are shown in Table 1.

--Table 1 about here--

Among ever-married women in the larger sample, 35 percent of them have ever been divorced. Just below 30 percent of those married currently live apart from their partners. In the 2008 sample, these numbers are lower; only 29 percent of ever-married women have been divorced and only 23 percent of them live apart from their partners. Average age at first marriage for the overall sample is just under 19, while for the 2008 sample it is just under 20. The mean age of the 2008 sample is also slightly higher, while the mean years of education is slightly lower. There is also a slightly lower percentage of women living in rural areas in the limited sample.

---Table 2 about here---

Table 2 reports on binary logistic regression models predicting marital stability across the five waves of the survey, controlling for age, age-squared, years of education, age at first marriage, and living in a rural area. All coefficients are within-cluster differences by enumeration area, probability-weighting using the DHS-provided sample

---

[4] For more information on the wealth index and its construction, see the DHS website: www.measuredhs.com.

weight. It shows that there is a steady and strongly significant *decrease* in the likelihood of having been divorced moving from the earlier to the more recent years of the survey. For distant partnerships, the pattern is not as steady across the five years of the survey but in all waves after year 1 respondents are less likely to be in such a partnership and the biggest difference is between year 1 and year 5.

As we would expect, age at survey shows a strong positive correlation and age at first marriage a strong negative correlation with divorce. One's years of education is not significantly correlated with divorce, but those in rural areas are significantly more likely to have been divorced. Those with more education are, on the other hand, more likely to be in a distant partnership, while age at first marriage is not significantly correlated with this outcome. Age also shows a weak negative relationship with being in such a partnership.

---Table 3 about here--

Table 3 shows results from binary logistic regression models for just year 2008 of the survey, which assess the association between religious affiliation and measures of marital stability. These models include the same controls as the previous models, in addition to the five-category wealth index.

The correlation patterns across the controls that were used in the prior set of models look very similar in the 2008 as in the full combined dataset. The wealth index shows a strong negative relationship with divorce, indicating that those who are higher on this index are less likely to have been divorced. There are some interesting patterns by religious affiliation. Although there is no difference between Charismatics and non-Charismatic Protestants, both Catholics and Muslims, who make up the other major groups on Ghana's

17

religious landscape, were less likely than Charismatics to have been divorced. Although the coefficient for Catholics is quite small, that for Muslims is large and significant at the .001 level.

Looking at distant partnerships, wealth is again negatively correlated but the association is much weaker. The significant associations for age and years of education that showed in the combined model are no longer present in the 2008 data, though this is probably at least partly due to the inclusion of a measure of wealth in this model. The significant difference here is between Charismatic and non-Charismatic Protestants, where non-Charismatics are significantly more likely to be in a distant partnership. By contrast, there is no significant difference between Charismatics and any of the other religious groups.

Further, there is a large difference in the r-squared values between these two models, where the independent variables do a better job of predicting divorce than they do distant partnerships.

With this background in mind, how are the risks of marital dissolution for women talked about in the context of the Charismatic Church? Three major focal points come through: a model of heavy church involvement, which provides purpose and identity apart from traditional marriage roles; an elevation of individual responsibility in choosing a good marriage partner; and a dedication to supporting marriages within the church.

The model of heavy church involvement links back to the founding mission of Beacon Ministries and the views of Amankwah, about which the assistant pastor talked at length:

I asked him what he thought was unique about Beacon Ministries, that set it apart from the other Charismatic churches in the movement. He said it was primarily its emphasis on reaching out, and that they don't just say it but they are doing it all the time. He said that they emphasize that 'all of us are called,' that the 'outreach drive has been foundational.' He also said that the church stands out because of the preaching style of the Amankwah, that he has a 'simple approach to preaching' and that he addresses practicalities in a simple and straightforward style.

The idea that every member has the opportunity and responsibility to get involved in church activities is encapsulated in his phrase 'all of us are called.' In the following transcript, a young man describes his surprise at how readily and easily he was given an important role in church life:

R: The first day I attended I spoke to the pastor of the church, he spoke to me, asked my name, asked where I live. And then offered to come and visit me, which he did. And then, he asked me to join a ministry in the church…and I was surprised that at that young age I was being offered the opportunity to do something in church.
I: You were eleven.
R: Yah, I was eleven, saying, join this minstry, I was surprised, ok, so it is a good opportunity to work.
I: So did you join a ministry shortly after?
R: Yah, I joined Akwaaba [the group that welcomes visitors]. I mean, the next time I went back to the church, it was the next week, so, I joined Akwaaba.

This high degree of involvement by the church's young adult members was apparent at almost every level, from the formal stated mission of the church to the actual habits of the young adults I interviewed. Several of those I talked to were in training to be "lay pastors", which is a volunteer leadership role contrasted to a "full-time pastor", who is paid. This was as true for the women as for the men. Every night of the week, some sort of meeting or activity took place at the main headquarters. This high degree of commitment and opportunity at Lighthouse has become an understood norm, even if not universally followed, and this norm impacts how marriage is talked about.

As the pastor quoted above also indicates, Amankwah takes a very practical tone in his writing and preaching. Most of his books are on practical life topics, not theology. This reflects a point of view that all of life—including marriage and partner selection—is subject to spiritual principle, as the opening to *A Lovely Spirit* shows:

> God is very concerned about whom you marry. And I'm not only referring to your marital happiness, but also to how your partner will influence you in the future…Many things are going to happen and much 'water is going to pass under the bridge.' Will your marriage make you or break you? That is what God is concerned about. (*Lovely,* 1)

These points about God's concern with practical decisions and the heavy involvement of youth in the life of the church are closely connected. As their social worlds become increasingly integrated into the congregation, and as the leadership encourages this process, all other areas of life must respond to this transition. The implication for marriage, then, is that not only is it subject to certain moral rules, but it is subordinated to involvement in spiritual and religious life:

> I want you to see and understand what marriage can and cannot do for you. You will have a blind desire for a husband when you don't understand what God is trying to do for you. You can be single and very happy. All women whether married or unmarried need to get this right…A woman must ask herself, 'What is my purpose in life? (*For Young Women,* 91)

The practical implications of women getting involved in the church vision are discussed by one woman currently in lay pastoral training:

> You will be encouraged to marry someone who is also as ministry-minded as you are, so that there won't be conflicts in the marriage. Because if you look at our schedule, it's a bit tight. We do a lot of things, we have a lot of activities, camps… So if you are married to someone who does not approve of camps, why are you going away for three days…[I: there will be tension?] Yah, it will be a problem for you.

The "tight" schedule of this young woman's involvement in church activities makes it impractical—not just morally suspect—to marry someone who is not as involved in the church as she is. Thus, the conception of a new "risk" surrounding marriage, other than marital dissolution or being in a negative partnership, is found in these accounts. That "risk" is spiritual conflict. In Amankwah's writing, marriage can be dangerous not only because the partner could be unkind or unfaithful, but because the partner could fail to support your spiritual life, which must take precedence.

Amankwah does discuss the more obvious risks surrounding marriage in detail as well. Three other major risks are portrayed throughout his writing: the risk of a bad marriage, the risk of a marriage ending, and the risk of never getting married. He considers women's natural condition as being trapped by their own weaknesses, particularly their strong desire for husbands and children coupled with their vulnerability to exploitation. He in fact describes this in terms of a "curse" in Ch. 20 of *For Young Women,* which is entitled "Understanding the Curse Associated with Marriage":

> Marriage presents many frustrations to women across the globe. It is an open secret that many married women are not happy. We can all see the troubles that married people go through. In Europe, people simply don't marry anymore, they just live together…Nobody wants to be ruled and dominated by another…Yet, women do not fight for independence from men but rather fight to come under the domination of a husband! There are many women who know that they would be more fulfilled if they remained single. Yet, there is an invisible force that makes them desire husbands. There must be a curse somewhere! (*Young Women,* 87-88)

This framing of women's position in terms of a spiritual problem lends itself naturally to providing *spiritual* solutions to the dilemma women are in. Yet these spiritual solutions, as described by Amankwah, also involve a significant amount of individual

responsibility. Over and over again, he counsels women and men to be smart and make

their own decisions about marriage:

> You must marry somebody whom you want to marry! Do not marry somebody just because she was recommended to you. You must be satisfied and happy with what you see. (*Lovely,* 6-7)

> Many women cannot make decisions. They are ruled by their emotions and their feelings…Daughter, God did not give you only feelings. He gave you a mind..Seek good counsel. Use your mind and be a woman with direction. Daughter, make a decision and God will bless you. (*Young Women,* 33)

> This message to be smart and to make decisions for yourself, comes out in an

interview with one young woman as well:

> Of course, if you say that this is the person I want to marry, we can't decide that you're not allowed, we will not let you marry, no. It's your decision; it's your choice, that's what we would advise.

> Regarding any one of these four major risks, then, formal advice seems to

encourage more individualistic decision-making, as well as a prioritization of spiritual life

over all other spheres. Nowhere does Amankwah openly support divorce as a viable option

under normal circumstances, nor do the members I interviewed talk about it in this way. In

a number of places, he counsels women to keep their marriage together to the best of their

ability, even if their partner is unfaithful, violent, or immoral. As argued elsewhere (van

Dijk 2004) the Charismatic Church has developed a number of strategies for supporting

marriage, and in his writing Amankwah counsels women to stick with their marriages and

"revive" them even in the worst of marital situations. He also promotes marriage heavily,

promising women later on in the book that he can "see you getting married before many

others…You are going to get married because God is holding a door open for you" (*Young*

Women, 98). Clearly, lifelong singleness is not painted as desirable, but in fact a potential

risk to be avoided, as he tells women:

> Daughter, there are not always many suitors available. When God brings a blessing
> to you, do not discard it with flimsy reasons. It may be your one and only chance to
> be married. (*Young Women,* 33)

In general, the "ideal" resolution of these competing risks is found by marrying

someone within the congregation, who is also heavily involved in church activity and

theoretically, more likely to be trustworthy. In informal conversations, I was told that

Amankwah has told young men and women that if they agree to do things the church's

way, he will guarantee them a suitable marriage partner. In order to encourage this, the

church mandates that all young adults that want to get married at Beacon Ministries must

first take a six-month premarital course. Details regarding this course were announced

during every service I attended, and in one Sunday morning service a young couple that

had just been married the day before were applauded and seated near the front of the

church, in their white gown and tuxedo and accompanied by their bridal party. One young

woman, who attends both Beacon Ministries and her childhood Anglican Church, describes

the atmosphere of partner selection at Beacon in this way:

> I know this one thing: they encourage marriage at Beacon, they have a marriage
> school and everything.
> I: Yeah, I know they do. They have a lot of programs…And you think it's good?
> R: Oh yeah, I believe it's good, depending on the individual; because sometimes
> you realize that people go to the wrong places for the wrong reasons. And some
> people have good intent, and they go there, and then it's like it becomes pressure
> for them. Because, if you are going and always thinking about, "Oh, grab a beloved
> [boyfriend], get somebody," it's like finally you get to the point where it's like, ok,
> you want to do it, but the motive behind it may be wrong.

Marrying early—if done within the church's parameters—is also encouraged, as another quote shows:

> We don't encourage being in a relationship for a long time, because we believe that you may not be able to handle it and you'll go against the word of God. So we encourage early marriage. And then you'll be encouraged that you'll marry early, like, what I mean is you'll not be in the relationship for more than two years.

Ultimately, though, an interesting paradox emerges from this data. While marriage—and in particular, spiritually-homogenous marriage—is upheld and preserved, the fact that pre- and post-marital life is also painted in a tone of possibility and promise could theoretically have the effect of decreasing woman's reliance on marriage. Thus, it may increase the likelihood of singleness, increase the possibility of divorce for *some* women in the church, or increase the propensity of women who have already been divorced to get involved in the Charismatic movement. In the practical tone of Amankwah's advice is a call for women to be practical themselves. To deal with the situations they are in, and make the best choice they can. In the end, the message that comes through about marital risk places the responsibility for managing risk on the individual, but also subjects the individuals' personal decisions to the jurisdiction of a spiritually-centered lifestyle.

Discussion

What the survey data show, first and foremost, is that notions of marriage as increasingly unstable in Ghana are unfounded. At least by two measures, partnerships are more stable now than they were twenty years ago. Divorce is more common in the rural areas than in the urban areas, which sheds doubt on the conjecture that "urbanization" leads to an increased risk of marital dissolution. In 2008, divorce is also strongly associated with

poverty, and Charismatics are more likely than both Muslims and Catholics (though the coefficient for Catholics is not statistically significant once controls are included) to have been divorced. Living apart from one's partner is associated with higher levels of education and living in urban areas in the overall sample. Finally, Charismatics are less likely than non-Charismatic Protestants to live apart from their partners, but not any less likely than Muslims, Catholics, Traditionalists, or those with another affiliation.

To the degree, then, that moving into cities, attaining higher levels of schooling, moving out of agricultural and into professional occupations, and widespread economic growth are linked processes in Ghana, they have an elective affinity with more stable marriages that are paradoxically also more likely to be navigated at a distance (though overall, this phenomenon is less common than it was twenty years ago). This evidence in more in line with a narrative that portrays "modern marriage" as a major contribution of missionization and colonial legal codes, and expects contractual, concrete, and church-officiated marriages to increase due to the far-reaching effects of these historical forces. Indeed, historical accounts suggest that it was only in the colonial era that bureaucratic players outside of the kinship structure came to exercise jurisdiction over marriage, and this type of bureaucratization and the influence of the church have only increased in the state-building era (Jones 2005; Isichei 1995).

Religious affiliation enters this narrative in ambivalent ways, but there may be a positive connection between certain Protestant groups—which have historically been more closely connected to urban areas in Ghana—and marital dissolution once other factors are controlled for. If so, either those women who have been divorced are more likely to enter

into these growing churches or women already in them are more likely to get divorced. Given the insights of other literature on Charismatic Christianity (Marshall 2009; Gifford 2004; Meyer 1998), the more likely explanation seems to be that marital dissolution often precedes conversion, and that divorced women find in the church a refuge and support after this significant change in social status.

From the printed material, observations, and interviews, three overarching aspects of Lighthouse Chapel's message emerge: the norm of heavy church involvement, the message of practical individualism, and the support of marriage within the church. These aspects are related to the description of a "new" risk surrounding marriage, the potential of marriage to get in the way of one's spiritual life, which is discussed alongside risks of singleness, marital dissolution, and negative partnerships. While the church appears to have several specific models and guidelines for managing these risks, including early marriage and marriage within the congregation, ultimately it places the responsibility for managing risk on the shoulders of the individual. The result is, potentially, a climate in which women are provided with roles outside of marriage and in which they are freer to make their own decisions about their marital lives.

Both the non-effects and the ambivalent associations between being Charismatic and the two measures of marital instability support caution in equating the unique discourse of Charismaticism with clear differences in practice, especially between Charismatics and their mainline Protestant cousins. Unfortunately, due to the limitations of the available data, this study has not been able to effectively bridge this gap between discourse and practice, and this remains a central challenge for studies of African Pentecostal-

Charismatic Christianity. This study's aims have been more modest: to give a fuller picture

of the discourse from multiple qualitative sources, and to see whether certain assertions

about marital stability in Ghana and the distinctiveness of Ghanaian Charismaticism are

evidenced in large-scale survey data.

The specific limitations of this data include, first of all, the small number of

interviews. I would argue, however, that in answering questions about public discourse and

official messages, collecting data from multiple sources not influenced by interviewer

reactivity is more ideal than relying solely on interview accounts. Secondly, using survey

data on individual histories as I do here can only indirectly get at the frequency at which

actual unions are dissolved. In order to improve on this, however, the study would need to

use longitudinal couples' data, which to my knowledge is not available from Ghana.

Finally, a major question in assessing the validity of these results is whether Beacon

Ministries should be taken as representative of the larger Charismatic movement in Ghana.

Prior research on Ghanaian Charismaticism has been in view throughout most of the

qualitative analyses, and in this analyses the characteristics of Beacon Ministries seem to fit

well with what earlier authors have found (Marshall 2009; Gifford 2004; Meyer 1998).

This supports their use as explanatory concepts and the assumption that Beacon Ministries

is illustrative of the larger community. However, this study also departs somewhat from

these earlier works in that it shows that Charismatics are not quite as statistically distinct in

their behaviors as this literature would lead us to believe. Usually, these elements are

described as "unique" attributes of Charismaticism, which the movement itself is

interpreted as a major "rupture" from pre-existing religious traditions. Yet the DHS data on

divorce and long-distance partnerships suggest that the effects of Charismatic Christianity on behavior are likely much more complex, and not necessarily that different from non-Charismatic Protestants. This calls for further investigation into where specifically discourse meets practice, and whether the relevant discourse and categories for marriage patterns is "Charismatic" or more generally "Protestant."

Conclusion

To summarize, in this study I have argued that marriages have gotten more stable in Ghana over the past 20 years, and that marital stability is potentially linked to processes of urbanization, expansion of the educational system, more opportunities for women, and the historical role of the church and colonial legal codes in framing marriage as a contractual, bureaucratically-controlled relationship. This narrative is in contrast to one that sees marriage as an institution widely threatened by economic changes and increases in labor migration.

Secondly, I have argued that the association between religious affiliation and marital stability is ambivalent and dependent on which measure is used. As a case of a modern, locally-originated church, Beacon Ministries emphasizes three major points in order to assist its members in conceptualizing and managing competing risks surrounding marriage: the norm of heavy church involvement, the message of practical individualism, and the support of marriage within the church. A potential result for women in emphasizing these three points together is a positive association between Charismatic and non-

Charismatic Protestantism and the likelihood of having been divorced, which is probably driven by women being motivated to convert after a union dissolves.

This study is a cautionary tale against any assumptions we might want to make about dramatic, sweeping changes occurring in either religious life or family formation in Ghana. Clearly, Charismaticism in Ghana has seen phenomenal growth over the past twenty years. During the same time, indicators of marital instability have appeared to be on the decline. Charismatic churches are also an important social arena in which behaviors to understand and manage marital risk are played out. Yet the rise of Charismaticism should not be directly linked to a decline or an increase in divorce, nor should the decline in divorce be understood apart from the relatively high incidence of divorce that remains in 2008. Marriages are not getting more fluid and unstable, but nor is marriage a risk-free endeavor in Ghana. Charismatics are not as dramatically more successful in their management of these risks as their discourse would initially lead us to expect. The constraints on Ghanaian livelihoods and partnerships are real; the gap between discourse and practice should always be central to our understanding of human behavior; and when we look at hard evidence, we usually see *both* change and continuity, rather than one or the other.

References

Bongaarts, John Odile Frank and Ron Lesthaeghe. 1984. The Proximate Determinants of Fertility in Sub-Saharan Africa. *Population and Development Review* 10, no. 3: 511-37.

Boni, Stefano . 2001. Twentieth-Century Transformations in Notions of Gender, Parenthood, and Marriage in Southern Ghana: A Critique of the Hypothesis of 'Retrograde Steps' for Akan Women. *History in Africa* 28: 15-41.

Brusco, Elizabeth. 1995. *The Reformation of Machismo: Evangelical Conversion and Gender in Colombia*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.

Caldwell, J. C. 1968. Determinants of Rural-Urban Migration in Ghana. *Population Studies* 22, no. 3: 361-77.

Chen, Carolyn . 2005. "A Self of One's Own: Taiwanese Immigrant Women and Religious Conversion.". *Gender and Society* 19: 336-57.

Chesnut, Andrew. 2003. "Pragmatic Consumers and Practical Products: The Success of Pneumacentric Religion among Women in Latin America's New Religious Economy". *Review of Religious Research* 45, no. 1: 20-31.

Clark, Shelley Judith Bruce and Annie Dude. 2006. Protecting Young Women from AIDS: The Case Against Child and Adolescent Marriage. *International Family Planning Perspectives* 32, no. 2: 79-88.

Dodoo, F. Nii-Amoo. 1993. Education and Changing Reproductive Behavior in Ghana. *Sociological Perspectives* 36, no. 3: 241-56.

Gifford, Paul . 2004. *Ghana's New Christianity*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.

Harwood-Lejeune, Audrey. 2001. Rising Age at Marriage and Fertility in Southern and Eastern Africa. *European Journal of Population* 17, no. 3: 261-80.

Isichei, Elizabeth. 1995. *A History of Christianity in Africa*. London, UK: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge.

Jones, Hillary. 2005. From Marriage a la Mode to Weddings at Town Hall: Marriage, Colonialism, and Mixed-Race Society in Nineteenth-Century Senegal. *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 38, no. 1: 27-48.

Lesthaeghe, Ron G. Kaufmann D. Meekers. 1989. The Nuptuality Regimes in Sub-Saharan Africa. *Reproduction and Social Organization in Sub-Saharan Africa.* ed. R. Lesthaeghe, 556.

Marshall, Ruth. 2009. *Political Spiritualities: The Pentecostal Revolution in Nigeria*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Martin, David. 2002. *Pentecostalism: The World Their Parish*. Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers.

Meyer, Birgit. 1998. "Make a Complete Break with the Past': Memory and Post-Colonial Modernity in Ghanaian Pentecostalist Discourse. *Journal of Religion in Africa* 28, no. 3: 316-49.

Smith, Daniel Jordan. 2007. Modern Marriage, Men's Extramarital Sex, and HIV Risk in Nigeria. *American Journal of Public Health* 97, no. 6: 997-1005.

———. 2004. "Youth, Sin and Sex in Nigeria: Christianity and HIV/AIDS-related beliefsand behavior among rural-urban migrants". *Culture, Health, and Sexuality* 6, no. 5: 425-37.

Soothill, Jane E. 2007. *"Gender, Social Change, and Spiritual Power: Charismatic Christianity in Ghana"*. Amsterdam, NE: Brill.

Tabutin, Dominique and Bruno Schoumaker. 2004. The Demography of Sub-Saharan Africa from the 1950s to the 2000s: A Survey of Changes and a Statistical Assessment. *Population* 59: 457-555.

Trinitapoli, Jenny. 2009. Religious Teachings and Influences on the ABCs of HIV Prevention in Malawi. *Social Science & Medicine* 69, no. 2: 199-209.

Trinitapoli, Jenny and Mark Regnerus. 2006. "Religion and HIV Risk Behaviors Among Married Men: Initial Results from a Study in Rural Sub-Saharan Africa". *The Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 45, no. 4: p. 505.

van Dijk, Rijk. 2004. Negotiating Marriage: Questions of Legitimacy and Morality in the Ghanaian Pentecostal Diaspora. *Journal of Religion in Africa* 34: 438-67.

Whitehead, Ann. 2002. Tracking Livelihood Change: Theoretical, Methodological and Empirical Perspectives from North-East Ghana. *Journal of Southern African Studies* 28, no. 3: 575-98.

Table 1: Summary statistics, Ghana Demographic Surveys '88, '93, '98, '03, and '08, Ever-married Women

Variable	**Obs**	**Mean**	**S.D.**	**Min**	**Max**
Combined sample					
Ever married					
Ever divorced	10,325	0.3450	0.4754	0	1
Married, spouse lives elsewhere	10,325	0.2972	0.4570	0	1
Age	10,325	31.2531	8.1522	15	49
Age at first marriage	10,325	18.8116	3.8145	8	43
Years of education	10,325	5.0362	2.7979	0	11
Lives in rural area	10,325	0.5607	0.4963	0	1
2008 sample					
Ever divorced	2,205	0.2880	0.4529	0	1
Married, spouse lives elsewhere	2,205	0.2259	0.4182	0	1
Wealth index	2,205	3.3098	1.3181	1	5
Age	2,205	32.6236	1.6108	16	49
Age at first marriage	2,205	19.4500	4.2997	10	43
Years of education	2,205	3.6361	1.6108	0	10
Lives in rural area	2,205	0.5129	0.4999	0	1

Table 2: Within-cluster Coefficients and Standard Errors from Logistic Regression Models Predicting Marital Stability among Ever-Married Women, Full DHS Sample

	Spouse stays elsewhere	Been Divorced
Year (ref. 1988):		
1993	-.4020*** (.0873)	-.0381 (.0777)
1998	-.3072** (.0974)	-.2611** (.08910)
2003	-.2685** (.0969)	-.4573*** (.0880)
2008	-.6726*** (.0935)	-.5982*** (.0989)
Age	-.0486* (.0216)	.2827*** (.0226)
Age-squared	-.0006 (.0003)	-.0031*** (.0003)
Years of Education (mean==0)	.0333*** (.0093)	-.0072 (.0010)
Age at First Marriage (mean==0)	-.0021 (.0059)	-.1063*** (.0064)
Rural	-.0963 (.0552)	.1760** (.0537)
_cons	.4245 (.3589)	-6.2299*** (.3846)
N	10,325	10,325
Pseudo R^2	.0128	.0823

Two-tailed test, ***= p < .05 **= p< .01 ***= p < .001**

***Table 3: Within-cluster Coefficients and Standard Errors from Logistic Regression
Models Predicting Marital Stability among Ever-Married Women, DHS 2008***

	Spouse stays elsewhere	Been Divorced
Religious Affiliation (ref. Pentecostal-Charismatic):		
Mission Protestant	.3166* (.1333)	.0218 (.1325)
Catholic	-.0107 (.1730)	-.2152 (.1760)
Muslim	-.0765 (.1837)	-.7158*** (.1993)
Traditionalist	-.5011 (.3526)	-.0399 (.3200)
None/Other	-.1345 (.3522)	-.3953 (.3631)
Age	.0570 (.0545)	.2341*** (.0530)
Age-squared	-.0007 (.0009)	-.0025* (.0008)
Years of Education (mean==0)	.0436 (.0341)	.0052 (.0344)
Age at First Marriage (mean==0)	-.0172 (.0136)	-.1110*** (.0158)
Wealth Index	-.1245* (.0626)	-.3492*** (.0576)
Rural	-.3277 (.1692)	-.2633 (.1646)
_cons	-1.5238 (1.0797)	-4.0877*** (1.0285)
N	2,205	2,205
Pseudo R^2	.0105	.0987

Two-tailed test, ***= p < .05 **= p< .01 ***= p < .001**