

The Impact of a Community Marital Enrichment Program: *Today's Marriage*

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By

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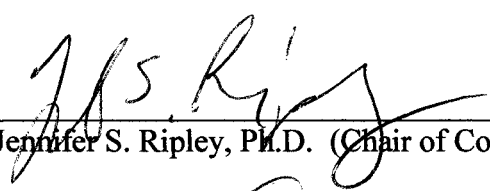
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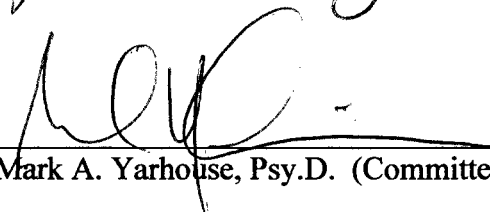
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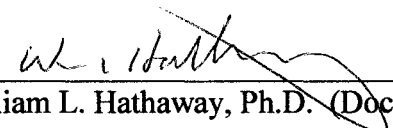
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Abstract

THE IMPACT OF A COMMUNITY MARITAL ENRICHMENT PSYCHOEDUCATIONAL PROGRAM ON INCREASING COUPLE MARITAL SATISFACTION AND PROMOTING PROGRESSION ALONG STAGES OF CHANGE

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The current study investigates a brief original community marital enrichment intervention program implemented in four churches ($N = 100$). A within subjects method with a pre-post and one month follow-up was designed to assess change utilizing the Evaluation and Nurturing Relationship Issues, Communication and Happiness scale (ENRICH), Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale (KMSS), and Stages of Change. Results indicated that participants who completed the follow-up ($n = 35$) increased in measures of marital satisfaction when comparing assessment scores across time. Couples also progressed in a positive direction along the stages of change. Implications for clergy, practitioners working in church settings, and researchers are discussed.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

What makes a marriage fulfilling and lasting? With the high divorce rate in the United States today, many couples, therapists, and researchers are asking just that. Because couples often seek therapy only after a great deal of damage has been done to the relationship, marriage enrichment interventions are designed to reach couples before they progress too far along the course of marital dissolution. Such interventions seek to increase marital satisfaction and decrease marital distress. Given this, marital enrichment interventions may be an effective venue through which relationships may be supported.

Marriage enrichment interventions as a whole have been found to be moderately effective in improving couples' relationships (Giblin, Sprenkle, & Sheehan, 1985; Guerney & Maxson, 1990). Interventions have employed a variety of methods and formats, and are developed from diverse theoretical orientations. Given the diversity within the field, many questions arise. Which format is most effective-- weekend intensive or weekly class style? What are the influences of a community vs. university setting? What instruments are being used to evaluate the programs? Of the existing programs, which are most efficacious?

The present study seeks to evaluate a self-designed marriage enrichment intervention that is conducted in community-based settings utilizing both weekend-intensive and weekly class style formats. In Chapter 2, the existing literature on weekend-intensive marriage enrichment interventions is examined and evaluated according to theoretical base and program formats. In Chapter 3, the problem that will be addressed through the existing research is discussed. Methodology for the investigation is presented. In Chapter 4, the results and evaluation of the

present study are presented. In Chapter 5, implications for the field of marital enrichment, researchers, and clinicians are discussed.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE: COMMUNITY-BASED WEEKEND-INTENSIVE MARITAL ENRICHMENT INTERVENTIONS

Divorce rates in the United States today have reached astonishing levels and continue to rise. It is estimated that 50-67% of first-time marriages end in divorce (Bumpass & Sweet, 1995). For second marriages, divorce rates are an estimated 10% higher (Martin & Bumpass, 1989). Divorce has negative effects on the individuals involved and has been linked to an increase in emotional problems, psychological disorders, and physical illness (Bloom, Asher, & White, 1978). Such an increase in life difficulties not only impacts the divorcing couple and any children involved, but has societal repercussions as well due to a possible increase in work absenteeism, automobile accidents, and even increased risk of an earlier death resulting from illness (Bloom et al., 1978). Some dissatisfied couples choose not to divorce and may experience significant difficulty enduring life together. Others may choose to divorce, however, there has been recent evidence that divorce does not make such people happier (Waite, Browning, Doherty, Gallagher, Luo, & Stanley, 2002). In fact, a recent study found that many distressed couples who remain committed to their marriage through difficult times report significantly increased marital satisfaction five years later (Waite et al., 2002). Given this complex picture, there is a need for interventions aimed at decreasing marital dissatisfaction that eventually may lead to divorce.

Marital enrichment interventions are one such avenue through which marriages may be strengthened. Though early marital enrichment interventions placed minimal emphasis on empirical evaluation, latter evaluation suggest that marital enrichment interventions as a whole

are moderately effective in improving couples' relationships (Giblin et al., 1985; Guerney & Maxson, 1990). Though programs vary in their individual effectiveness, most (yet not all) marital enrichment interventions improve marital functioning.

Over the last 30 years, marriage enrichment interventions have employed a variety of methods, formats, and theoretical emphases. Some interventions are community-based programs conducted by church or community groups, while others are university-based programs. Formats may be weekly, biweekly, or monthly classes for a designated period of time, while others are weekend-intensive. Marital enrichment interventions have also espoused a variety of theoretical orientations.

Method of Literature Review

The current review of the literature will focus on marriage enrichment interventions that meet two criteria: a) they were held in a weekend-intensive format, and b) were community-based interventions. Journal sources for empirical and theoretical literature on marriage enrichment interventions that meet this criteria are summarized in Tables 1 and 2. Articles were selected through a search of PsycInfo Database using keywords marriage and interventions, as well as enrichment. References of the articles obtained were also examined for additional sources. The reference section of an unpublished dissertation that conducted a meta-analysis of marriage enrichment (Hight, 1999) was also utilized. Finally, a hand search of 31 journals was conducted to locate additional articles.

Table 1

<i>Empirical Research in Weekend Marital Enrichment Interventions by Theory Base</i>				
Author (Year)	Subjects (type of subjects, number)	Measures used in study	Design	Findings
<i>Cognitive Behavioral Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program (PREP)</i>				
Kaiser, Hahlweg, Fehm-Wolfsdorf, Groth (1998)	67 married or cohabitating couples with a minimum partnership of 3 years	Self-Report Inventories: Partnership Questionnaire, Problem List, Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale, KPI (coding system for marital interaction)	Couples randomly assigned to intervention or wait-list control group; pre-postassessment design with 1-year follow-up	Couples who participated in the EPL-II weekend psychoeducational program emphasizing communication skills, problem-solving techniques, and exercises reported fewer problems than comparison group couples at postassessment and 1-year follow-up. EPL couples showed greater skill in positive communication and fewer negative verbal communication behaviors, however did not demonstrate comparable changes in marital adjustment.
Braukhaus, Hahlweg, Kroeger, Groth, & Fehm-Wolfsdorf (2001)	62 couples who were part of the previous study's couples	Self-Report Inventories: Partnership Questionnaire, Problem List, Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale, KPI (coding system for	Couples randomly assigned to intervention or wait-list control group; pre-postassessment design with assessments following booster sessions at 1- and 3-months and 1-year follow-up	Couples from previous study who received 2 booster sessions increased positive and decreased negative behaviors at 1- and 3-month follow-up. Reported higher levels of marital satisfaction at 1 year follow-up.

Sullivan & Goldsmith (2000)	22 engaged, newlywed, or cohabitating individuals; both heterosexual and homosexual couples were included in the weekend	interaction) Post-intervention ratings of 12 content areas (1-10 likert-type scale); qualitative questions about helpfulness of weekend	Post-intervention assessment of program usefulness and effectiveness of techniques	Both men and women rated the workshop favorably, with the communication skills training the most helpful.
Renick, Blumberg, & Markman (1992)	Study 1: 44 married couples (N=88); Study 2: 24 couples (N=44), engaged or married less than 1 year	Marital Adjustment Test, Relationship Problem Inventory, Conflict Tactics Scale, Snyder's Marital Satisfaction Inventory, The Communication Skill Test, Couples Interaction Scoring System, Interaction Dimensions Coding System, The communication Box	Study 1: Preassessment, postassessment, 1-, 2-, 3-, 4-, and 5- year follow-up Study 2: preassessment, postassessment, and 2-month follow-up	Study 1: Results to the 5-year mark were provided. PREP was effective in increasing positive marital communication and minimally effective in increasing marital satisfaction. For wives, no differences in communication skills were found between treatment and control wives from the 4-year mark. PREP couples demonstrated higher levels of positive communication Study 2: Compared to couples who participated in Engaged Encounter, PREP couples were higher in positive communication, problem solving, and support/validation.

Hahlweg, Markman, Thurman, Engl, & Eckert (1998)	109 couples w/ MAT score below 100	Marital Adjustment Test, KPI (coding system)	Preassessment, post- assessment, 1½-year, 3-year, and 5-year follow-up w/ booster session offered between 3 and 5 years	Results for first 3 years provided; PREP couples increased in relationship satisfaction than control, showed more positive and less negative communication.
Family Systems <i>Saving Your Marriage Before It Starts (SYMBIS) Approach</i>				
Ripley, Parrott, Worthington, & Parrott (2000)	402 individuals (dating, cohabitating, engaged, or married) seeking premarital or marriage enrichment	Dyadic Adjustment Scale, Couples Assessment of Relationship Elements, Brief Relational Assessment of Couples Elements, Relationship Goals Scale	Baseline and post- intervention assessments taken; between-subjects design	Individuals with low dyadic adjustment at baseline showed significant differences compared to those with high baseline adjustment in the CARE & DAS, indicating increased marital satisfaction. Individuals with high baseline scores reported a decline in measures of marital satisfaction.
Experiential/Humanistic <i>Marriage Encounter</i>				
Milholland & Avery (1982)	40 couples	Self-Disclosure Questionnaire, Interpersonal Relationship Scale- Trust; Interpersonal Relationship Scale- Marital Satisfaction	Couples assigned to experimental or wait- list control group; pre-test, post-test, and 5-week follow-up assessments were made	Participants in Marriage Encounter Weekend reported increased level of trust and marital satisfaction following the weekend (as compared to control group), and results were maintained at 5-week follow-up.

Doherty & Walker (1982)	Case reports of 13 married couples	Reports from marital therapists of Marriage Encounter “Casualties”: Demographics, ME affiliation, couples’ expectations of and reactions to ME, changes over time, couples’ evaluation of techniques and attribution of relationship problems to ME, Therapists attributions of couples’ problems to ME	Therapists questionnaires evaluated for qualitative data as well as a “quantitative” assessment of open responses	Marriage Encounter weekends may cause marital or family deterioration for some couples. The most “harmful” aspect may be emotional overload in some couples.
Lester & Doherty (1983)	129 couples who attended Marriage Encounter weekend	Retrospective survey of couples who attended ME between 1970-80	Data analyzed through descriptive statistics; open-ended responses analyzed for content by two raters	At 4-year follow-up, 80% of couples reported a totally positive experience. One in 10 couples reported 3 or more negative effects of the program on their relationship.
Silverman & Urbaniak (1983)	210 couples who attended Marriage Encounter	Caring Relationship Inventory (CRI),	Survey	Data indicated that ME couples were comparable to the general population.

Weekend	couple's questionnaire, individual questionnaire			
Doherty, Lester, & Leigh (1986)	50 married couples (Archival data from Lester & Doherty's 1983 sample)	Interview, coding of essays of response to Marriage Encounter; Questionnaires	Two investigators coded interview responses and content-analyzed with coding system; Essay data coded for global impact of program	Retrospective analysis revealed that couples who reported both significant positive or negative changes were experiencing marital distress prior to the weekend. The authors suggest that distressed couples who attend the weekend are susceptible to significant further deterioration.
Eclectic				
<i>Strategic Hope-Focused Relationship Enrichment</i>				
Ripley & Worthington (2002)	43 couples (N = 86)	Dyadic Adjustment Scale, Couples Assessment of Relationship Elements, Relationship Dynamics Scale, Global Rapid Couples Interaction Scoring System	Preassessment, postassessment, and 3-week follow-up	Hope-Focused couples showed an increase in positive to negative behaviors compared to control group. No significant differences were found between treatment and wait-list control groups in self-report measures of marital satisfaction, communication, or forgiveness.

Table 2
Theoretical Articles on Weekend Marriage Enrichment

Author (Year)	Findings
Stanley & Trathen (1994)	<i>Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program (PREP)</i> Describes theory underlying Christian PREP. Based on original PREP and Christian principles.
Parrott & Parrott (1997)	<i>Saving Your Marriage Before it Starts (SYMBIS)</i> Authors consider SYMBIS a way in which couples can gain skills and strategies to prepare for a "lifelong marriage."
Genovese (1975)	<i>Marriage Encounter</i> Describes Marriage Encounter and its religion-based approach.
Regula (1975)	Authors conclude that there are "powerful dynamics" that occur within the Marriage Encounter weekend that are helpful to couple growth.
Doherty, McCabe, Ryder, (1978)	The authors feel that Marriage Encounter ideology may be damaging to couples due to its prescribed "God's Plan for Marriage" and lack of focus on individuality of couples, as well as "authoritarian and coercive" weekends. However, authors also conclude that M.E. weekends address problems society is not, leaders of the movement are concerned of the couple's welfare, and leaders are becoming aware of potential problems associated w/ the weekend's design.
DeYoung (1979)	Author suggests that Marriage Encounter's recruitment process and procedures are questionable and need further investigation.
Becnel & Levy (1983)	Authors observe that Marriage Encounter facilitates thought on an individual's meaning of life and existential matters.

Theoretical Aspects

It is thought that a sound theoretical base is vital to program effectiveness (Guerney & Maxson, 1990; Silliman, Stanley, Coffin, Markman, & Jordan, 2002).

Marriage enrichment interventions espouse a variety of theories. Of the reviewed studies, programs fell primarily into behavioral, family systems, experiential, and eclectic theoretical orientations.

Cognitive-Behavioral

Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program (PREP; Markman, Floyd, Stanley, & Lewis, 1986; Markman, Stanley, & Blumberg, 1994) is a cognitive-behavioral marital intervention program that is designed to build couple communication skills while preventing the development of maladaptive patterns of communication. This primary prevention approach is intended to decrease the couple's risk of marital dissolution. PREP was designed to be used with premarital or marital couples, who are either distressed or not.

The PREP program combines both behavioral and cognitive elements. Couples are presented behavioral, structured models of communication such as the "Speaker-Listener Technique" that employ clear rules concerning the communication process (Stanley, Markman, St. Peters, & Leber, 1995). This is thought to decrease the likelihood that a discussion will end in damaging interactions and increase the chance a couple can successfully resolve a problem. Cognitive aspects of PREP include the targeting of "negative interpretations," or one's tendency to perceive or think of one's partner's actions as negative (Stanley et al., 1995). PREP also provides exercises aimed at allowing the individual to identify and evaluate his or her relationship expectations, and share those with his or her spouse (Stanley et al., 1995).

Family Systems

Saving Your Marriage Before It Starts (SYMBIS; Parrott & Parrott, 1995) is a psychoeducational intervention targeting premarital and newly married couples. Using a family systems approach largely influenced by Bowenian theory, its founders seek to improve relationships and decrease chances of divorce (Parrott & Parrott, 1997).

Program elements from the family systems tradition include exercises that make spouses aware of the strong influence of their families of origin. These include emphases on the individual as a part of a transgenerational family system that influences the individual's perceptions of family roles, marital expectations, and "unconscious rules" that govern his or her behavior in the marital relationship (Parrott & Parrott, 1997). In the spirit of the Bowenian tradition, SYMBIS also strives to strengthen the individual's self-differentiation and facilitate the development of healthy relationship boundaries through exercises, teachings on the use of "I statements," and a focus on self-image.

SYMBIS is typically an 8-10-session program that may be delivered in a variety of formats, including weekly classes and intensive weekend programs. Though it is not an exclusively Christian program, the spirituality of the individual and couple is explored and Bible scripture is utilized. A unique feature of SYMBIS is its use of a "marriage mentoring program" in which a newlywed couple is paired with a more "seasoned" couple for one year following the program in an effort to continue supporting the new marriage.

Experiential/Humanistic

Marriage Encounter is one of the first marriage enrichment interventions conducted. It is a religiously-based intervention that utilizes discussion groups and an

experiential approach. After each teaching session, couples are provided open-ended questions to discuss and are instructed to do so with an emphasis on feelings. Such exercises are aimed at increasing marital unity and producing feelings similar to those the couple experienced when they first married. The couple's weekend experience culminates in a group format renewing of marriage vows.

Eclectic

Strategic Hope-Focused marriage enrichment is based on Worthington's (1999) model of brief marriage counseling. Though Worthington's earlier models of marriage counseling have relied significantly on cognitive-behavioral theory (Worthington, 1989), the program now takes a more eclectic approach (Worthington, 1999). The 6-hour program is aimed at strengthening couple relationships and decreasing divorce by promoting hope and skill building. This is done through training that targets couple communication and problem-solving skills, increasing couple intimacy, and emphasising couple commitment.

Christian vs. Secular

All of the programs reviewed address religious values, principles, and/or practices either explicitly or implicitly. The majority also include Christian elements.

PREP. The original PREP curriculum includes two presentations that address the impact of spiritual beliefs and/or values on the marriage relationship. These may or may not be presented depending on the needs of the group. Exercises center around encouraging each spouse to identify his or her own spiritual beliefs and values and dialoguing about how each individual's beliefs can culminate in a shared world view for the couple.

“Christian PREP” has also been developed based on the original PREP theory integrating Judeo-Christian principles for marriage (Stanley & Trathen, 1994). Assumptions for this version of PREP are based on Biblical principles. Research into this approach primarily is based on the general PREP research (Markman et al., 1986; Markman et al., 1994) although one recently published study has implemented Christian PREP in local churches (Stanley et al., 1995). Behavioral and cognitive interventions are employed as with the original PREP, while scripture is used to deepen the meaning of the material. Examples of this include a study of the Bible’s focus on agape love when presenting the concept of dedication, presenting scripture on showing respect and validation for one another when teaching on valuing even during conflict, as well as presenting a model of Christ’s teaching on forgiveness (Stanley & Trathen, 1994).

SYMBIS. The SYMBIS program incorporates a discussion on building spiritual intimacy in its final of five modules. This module presents information based on Christian principles that exposes couples to spiritual disciplines that can help strengthen their relationship. Exercises in this session center around helping each individual reflect on his or her own spiritual journey and how one’s religious principles can help the individual value his or her mate in the relationship.

Marriage Encounter. Unlike the previous programs, Marriage Encounter has its roots in the church. With its origins in Spain, it spread to the United States in 1967 as a part of the Christian Family Movement of the Catholic Church. Marriage Encounter soon developed into a separate entity from the Catholic Church and came to serve not only Catholic couples, but Jewish and Protestant, as well (Doherty, McCabe, & Ryder, 1978). Leaders include clergy and couples who had previously attended Marriage Encounter.

Presentations incorporate four themes: “I,” “We,” “We-God,” and “We-God-World” (Doherty et al., 1978).

The overarching goal of Marriage Encounter is unity--God’s plan for marriage. Presentations promote this by presenting scriptural basis for unity while intense dialogue between spouses is intended to increase feelings of couple unity.

Hope-Focused. The Hope-Focused marriage enrichment workshop has its roots in Worthington’s (1999) model of brief marital counseling. The theory underlying it has at its heart the model of “faith working through love” as seen in Galatians 5:5-6. This model utilizes scripture and Biblical principles surrounding commitment, valuing one another, and forgiveness in marriage. Although these components are described in Worthington’s (1999) text on the approach, the research study (Worthington et al., 1997) of hope-focused approach was conducted in a secular context. Only the assessment and feedback portion of the approach has been tested for Christian participants in a pilot project (Ripley & Worthington, 2002).

Stages of Change Theory and Marriage Enrichment

While it is vital to have an understanding of the theoretical bases underlying marriage enrichment interventions, it is also important to understand how the effects of the programs are assessed. Though specific instruments used to measure the impact of the reviewed marital enrichment interventions will be discussed in later parts of the literature review, the current section examines the theoretical underpinnings of the process of change and implications for the field of marriage enrichment.

Change in attitude and behavior has been measured in a variety of ways. Though some view change as dichotomous (Lichtenstein & Danaher, 1976)--either the behavior is

or is not occurring--others see that change can occur even if the ultimate desired outcome has not yet been reached (DiClemente & Prochaska, 1982).

Over the past 20 years, Prochaska and DiClemente (1983, 1984, 1985) have examined how change occurs. They have proposed that change is a process that takes place in stages over a period of time, and that there are “common pathways to change” (Prochaska, 1999, p. 227). Based on these assumptions, they have developed a model of change (Prochaska & DiClemente, 1984, 1985). The model consists of stages of change that the individual progresses through, as well as the processes of change that encompass both attitudes and behaviors that move the individual to the next stage.

Though the stages of change model was originally applied to health behaviors (Prochaska & DiClemente, 1984; Prochaska et al., 1994), it has been expanded to areas such as outpatient psychotherapy (McConaughy, DiClemente, Prochaska, & Velicer, 1989; Prochaska & Norcross, 2001). However, to our knowledge, it has not yet been applied to marital enrichment interventions. Such an application would be of great benefit to the marital enrichment field as it is suspected that an individual’s stage of change at baseline when attending a marital enrichment intervention would be predictive of his or her response to the intervention. Given this, the present study seeks to explore the implications of applying the stages of change model to the assessment of a marital enrichment intervention.

Stages of Change

Though Prochaska and DiClemente’s (1986) initial stages of change model contained only four stages, the model has since expanded to encompass six stages (Prochaska, 1999). They are as follows:

Precontemplation. During this first stage, change is not even being considered. Individuals in this stage are thought to be unaware of or unconcerned about the negative consequences of their behavior and minimize any advantages of change. Participants of a marital enrichment intervention who are in this stage are likely to be oblivious of how their behavior may be contributing to any problems in the marriage and may see no need for change. However, the participant's attendance of the marital enrichment intervention may change this as consciousness raising (Prochaska, DiClemente, & Norcross, 1992); developmental and environmental events (Prochaska, 1999) are also thought to be what launches individuals to the next stage.

Contemplation. The contemplation stage is a time during which individuals become more aware of potential consequences of their behavior and benefits of change. Individuals in this second stage are considering making change within the next six months. Marriage enrichment participants in this stage have likely become more aware of specific difficulties in their marriage and have come to the intervention to explore possible costs and benefits of changing their behavior to potentially resolve their marital difficulties. Progression to the next stage is generally brought about by the individual's self-reevaluation and a recognition of the need for change (Petrocelli, 2002).

Preparation. Individuals in the preparation stage are preparing to change their behavior within the next month, and are taking steps required to do so. Such steps indicate the individual's potential commitment to change as he or she begins to demonstrate effort toward change (Petrocelli, 2002). The individual in this stage who attends a marriage enrichment seminar has become aware of the need for change and may be seeking specific information on concrete ways improve his or her marriage.

Action. The action stage is one in which individuals are making overt changes in their behavior and lifestyles. The individual has demonstrated visible commitment to overcoming his problems through change. In the context of marriage enrichment, the individual is striving to apply learned principles and information in an active effort to improve his or her marriage.

Maintenance. During the maintenance stage, individuals are working to sustain changes and prevent relapse. Marriage enrichment attendees in this stage have already experienced the benefits of improving their marriage and are seeking to maintain the level of improved marital satisfaction they are experiencing. Individuals who move “successfully” through this stage have remained abstinent from their problem behavior for at least 6 months. This is reinforced through supportive relationships, replacing previous behaviors with new ones, and modifying one’s response to stimuli that used to lead to the problem behavior (Petrocelli, 2002; Prochaska & DiClemente, 1984, 1986).

Termination. This final stage is one in which individuals are thought to be free from temptation of their problem behavior. It has been characterized as a stage of total “self-efficacy” (Petrocelli, 2002) and freedom from the risk of relapse. While it is thought that few couples will ever reach this stage in their marriage as a whole, they may be able to conquer specific problems that contribute to marital difficulties, thus, move to this stage in the context of those specific problems.

Prochaska and DiClemente’s Stages of Change model has been empirically evaluated and found to be strong in both reliability and validity of its constructs including the stages and levels of change, as well as its processes (DiClemente & Prochaska, 1985; McConaughy et al., 1989; McConaughy, Prochaska, & Velicer, 1983). Investigations

have also found increasing support for the predictive validity of the model (DiClemente et al., 1991). Though the model was initially evaluated in light of smoking cessation (Prochaska & DiClemente, 1984; Prochaska, Velicer, DiClemente, & Fava, 1988), it has since been applied to a variety of other health behaviors. Prochaska et al. (1994) evaluated the model in light of 12 problem behaviors and found strong generalizability of the model's constructs across the areas.

The model has also been applied to areas such as outpatient psychotherapy (McConaughy et al., 1989; Prochaska & Norcross, 2001), and has brought to light implications for treating clients in therapy. Brogan, Prochaska, and Prochaska (1999) correctly identified clients that would drop out of therapy with 92% accuracy based on the stage they were in when beginning therapy. Those who were in the Precontemplation stage accounted for the majority of clients who prematurely terminated therapy (Brogan et al., 1999). These and other similar findings have indicated that, while the majority of therapeutic interventions are geared toward individuals in the action stage, therapists should not assume that clients are motivated to change (Brogan et al., 1999; Prochaska & Norcross, 2001). Likewise, instructors and researchers of marital enrichment interventions should be sensitive to the varying stages of marriage enrichment participants and be cognizant that there is a great range of motivation to change among attendees.

It has been found that therapies most appropriate for individuals in Precontemplation and Contemplation stages are more exploratory in nature (experiential, cognitive, and psychoanalytic), while other action-oriented therapies such as behavioral and existential are most fitting for the later stages of the model. Individuals must be

motivated to change before it can occur. Such findings, when applied to marriage enrichment, may also have indications for the types and style of interventions that are delivered.

Implications of studies on the stages of change model also suggest that individuals who have progressed to the preparation and action stages when attempting to modify a behavior have more success (DiClemente et al., 1991; Nigg et al., 1999; Prochaska et al., 1994; Prochaska & Norcross, 2001). In order for an individual to change his or her behavior, there must also be attitude change that motivates behavioral change (Prochaska & Norcross, 2001). Given this, changes in attitude often lead to future behavioral change (Petrocelli, 2002; Prochaska, 1999; Prochaska et al., 1994).

Such findings on change bring to light the importance of considering not only changes in behavior, but also changes in attitude when assessing the effects of a marriage enrichment intervention. This new area of research may also impact the way in which marriage enrichment interventions are designed, delivered, and assessed.

Research on Weekend Marriage Enrichment

Formats

Marriage enrichment interventions vary in the setting, method, and format in which programs are implemented. In seeking to evaluate the effectiveness of marriage enrichment programs, it is vital to examine the varying formats of the weekends and the implications of those.

Weekend vs. Weekly. Are there differences in the effectiveness of weekly class style and weekend-intensive formats of marriage enrichment interventions? Both weekly and weekend formats have been shown to be beneficial to marriages. However, it is noted

that a weekly class style of marital enrichment is a more frequently used format (Gurman & Kniskern, 1977) and has been suggested to be a more effective format of marital enrichment (Silliman et al., 2002). This has been attributed to a greater length of time spent in sessions, as well as time between sessions that allow couples to practice learned skills or reflect on material through homework (Markman, Renick, Floyd, & Stanley, 1993; Silliman et al., 2002).

While there is validity to the notion that weekly classes allow the participants more time to learn skills and process information, it is also suggested that weekend-intensive interventions also have their strengths, such as may be more attractive to consumers when considering time allotment. In a study of marriage enrichment marketing factors with 142 participants, respondents indicated that time was the primary constraint to attending a marriage enrichment program (Roberts & Morris, 1998). Given this, members of a society in which time is a commodity may find compact programs more appealing and easier to commit to.

Of the studies reviewed, only one compared the same program utilizing the two formats. Hahlweg, Markman, Thurmaier, Engl, and Eckert (1998) conducted an investigation in which a German version of PREP was implemented in both weekend intensive and weekly formats. Sixty-four percent of couples participated in an intensive weekend format, while the remaining 36% utilized the weekly class format. Couples were assessed in areas of marital adjustment and communication at pre-intervention, post-intervention, 1.5-year follow-up, 3-year follow-up and 5-year follow-up (Hahlweg et al., 1998). Compared to control group, PREP couples demonstrated improvement in marital adjustment only at the 3-year assessment mark, yet consistently maintained higher scores

in areas of communication. There were no significant differences between weekend-intensive and weekly groups.

Ripley and Worthington (2002) adapted Hope-Focused marriage counseling to a weekend marriage enrichment workshop. Though in previous research of the Hope-Focused program participants increased significantly in self-reports of relationship satisfaction (Worthington et al., 1997), the weekend workshop did not demonstrate such increases. Improvements were demonstrated in observational positive communications, but there was no difference between treatment and wait-list control groups in self-report measures of marital satisfaction, communication, or forgiveness. Several alterations in format were made when developing the enrichment workshop, such as creating a compact program rather than the previously evaluated 5-session format. The weekend format may be one factor contributing to a discrepancy in results from previous findings.

Amount of Time. Perhaps one of the most salient aspects of the debate on weekend vs. weekly program formats is due to differences in the actual time spent in sessions. It has been estimated that most community-based programs are only 2-4 hours in length (Schumm & Denton, 1979) while university-based programs are more in the range of 12-30 hours (Markman et al., 1993; Ridley & Sladezk, 1992). Given this remarkable discrepancy, program length is a formatting aspect that deserves some attention.

Of the reviewed weekend format studies, the amount of time spent in the actual intervention greatly varied. SYMBIS is a 6-hour program, the shortest of those reviewed (Parrott & Parrott, 1997). While it has produced short-term positive effects with most couples, the long-term effects have not been investigated (Ripley, Parrott, Worthington, & Parrott, 2000). Hope-Focused marriage enrichment workshop was 6 hours in duration.

The only evaluation of Hope-Focused marriage enrichment in this format demonstrated only modest results in improving relationship communication (Ripley & Worthington, 2002). PREP is 12-15 hours in duration, and has been shown to produce long-term positive effects (Braukhaus, Hahlweg, Kroeger, Groth, & Fehm-Wolfsdorf, 2001; Kaiser, Hahlweg, Fehm-Wolfsdorf, & Groth, 1998; Renick, Blumberg & Markman, 1992). Marriage Encounter is a 44-hour program that has produced conflictual reports over efficacy and benefits of marriage encounter weekends (Doherty & Walker, 1982; Doherty, Lester, & Leigh, 1986; Milholland & Avery, 1982).

When compared to weekend-intensive formats, weekly formats generally have longer hours. The longest by far is PAIRS, a 120-hour program that boasts of increases in marital adjustment and marital satisfaction, and a decrease in conflict and unhappiness from pretest, but shows a decline (often big) from pretest in gains (Durana, 1996). However, this great length of time appears to be an exception rather than the rule. When all is considered, it appears that most marriage enrichment programs generally last 6-18 hours.

The mean of the four weekend-intensive programs that were evaluated was 17.3 hours. Those programs vary in effectiveness, demonstrating only modest connections between time spent programming and results. Though conclusions cannot be drawn from such a small number of programs, it seems that most were beneficial in some capacity. While programs with significantly fewer hours most likely are not as effective, it appears that time may not be as critical as effective programming in over-all program effectiveness (Silliman & Schumm, 2002).

Booster Sessions

While participation in a marital enrichment program may offer initial results such as gains in marital satisfaction, improved communication, and greater feelings of closeness, these gains often wane over time. Given this, booster or follow-up sessions may help sustain improvements in marital functioning gained from marital enrichment interventions. Only a few of the reviewed studies offered booster sessions, while only a portion of those measured their utility.

Brakhaus et al. (2001) built on a study conducted by Kaiser et al. (1998) in which a German version of PREP was conducted in two German cities. Upon post-assessment, couples who participated in the PREP program reported fewer relationship problems and demonstrated increased communication skills when compared to a control group. One-year follow-up occurred after control group had been treated. There were no significant differences between treatment and control groups. Couples who had participated in PREP reported fewer problems when follow-up scores were compared with pre-assessment scores (Kaiser et al., 1998). No significant changes in marital adjustment were noted.

Brakhaus et al. (2001) then evaluated the utility of adding optional booster sessions at 1 and 3 months after the initial close of the study. Couples who participated reported higher marital satisfaction and fewer problems than couples that participated in the intervention only (Brakhaus et al., 2001).

Even though booster sessions appear to be helpful, participants may not be as eager to attend as they were the initial intervention. The Marriage Encounter program provides monthly follow-up meetings, however, it appears that attendance at these

meetings tends to be sparse. Lester and Doherty's (1983) study evaluated Marriage Encounter through a retrospective study. Of the 129 couples who participated in the study, only 9% regularly attended the follow-up meetings, and over one-third had never attended a meeting. The majority of participants who attended reported that they were helpful. However, no empirical data was collected to support this claim.

The SYMBIS program offers a unique form of follow-up session through its "marriage mentoring program." In this program, a newlywed couple is paired with a more "seasoned" couple who typically meets with them three times a year at 3, 7, and 12 months following their wedding (Parrott & Parrott, 1997). This is in an effort to continue education on marriage and to help the new couple deal with "typical" first-year marriage issues. Though this program is well-documented in manuals and books (Parrott & Parrott, 1995), no outcome studies have been conducted to evaluate effectiveness.

As the progression of time following a marriage enrichment program often creates natural attenuation effects, the investigation of the utility of additional follow-up sessions is greatly needed.

University- vs. Community-Centered

Do the origins of a program influence its effectiveness? Marriage enrichment interventions may be developed and implemented in both university and community settings. University-centered programs are typically those that are developed by researchers at a university, and may be implemented by the researcher, his or her assistants, or trainees. Program material is generally based on scientific findings and evaluated through research. University-centered programs that were reviewed include PREP, Hope-Focused, and SYMBIS.

Community-centered programs may be based on existing programs, books, or a combination of sources. They may be conducted by clergy, civic leaders, or other leaders of organizations in which they are implemented. Such programs are rarely empirically evaluated. Marriage Encounter was the only program reviewed in some depth that was truly community-centered.

It has traditionally been assumed that university-based programs are more efficacious than community-based programs (Olson, 1983; Silliman & Schumm, 2000). However, community-centered programs have a greater potential for reaching a larger number of individuals. Because of their personal connection with individuals in society, community leaders such as clergy and civic leaders serve as “proximal agents” and have a greater chance to involve individuals in programs.

As researchers have recognized the need to promote more research-based material to the community, some programs are beginning to adapt their programs for community use. The first and only one of reviewed programs to do so was PREP. Though early versions of PREP were university-based, a recent study of PREP has shown efficacy as a community-based intervention when led by trained clergy and lay leaders (Stanley et al., 2001). The community-based “Christian PREP” is based on the original PREP theory while integrating Christian principles for marriage (Stanley & Trathen, 1994).

Only one of the reviewed studies examined the difference between community and university programs. Hahlweg et al. (1998) compared PREP couples ($n = 64$) to a comparison group comprised of 50% of couples who attended a conventional premarital enrichment program offered through an area church ($n = 18$ couples), and 50% who received no intervention ($n = 14$ couples). It was noted that couples who attended the

conventional enrichment program had no significant differences from no-intervention couples on measurements of marital satisfaction or behavior ratings (Hahlweg et al., 1998). While conclusions cannot be drawn from such a small number of studies, it appears that research-based programs designed for community implementation is an area deserving further investigation. This style of marital enrichment may hold a promising future in reaching more couples with sound interventions that will support their relationships.

Measures

Though it has been generally accepted that marital enrichment interventions as a whole are moderately effective (Giblin et al., 1985), there is a wide variety of ways in which programs are evaluated. While some are evaluated using measures that have been found to be valid and reliable, other programs are studied using measures that are not as robust.

Many standardized programs identify specific constructs that their program is designed to change and assess program efficacy based on whether or not participants' scores reflected change in these construct areas. The majority of programs measure relationship satisfaction and/or adjustment, as well as specific relationship aspects.

Self-Report Questionnaires

The overwhelming majority of measurements have been based on self-report questionnaires and inventories. While these are necessary to collect data, some instruments display inconsistent levels of validity and reliability. Though some self-report instruments have been empirically evaluated and determined to be sound measures, many have not.

Marital satisfaction. For most marital enrichment programs, the overarching aim is to increase marital satisfaction. The majority of the studies reviewed sought to measure this construct, often as their primary indication of program effectiveness.

The Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS; Spanier, 1976) is one of the most frequently used measures of marital satisfaction and is found to possess construct, content, and criterion-related validity (Spanier, 1976). The SYMBIS (Ripley et al., 2000) and Hope-Focused (Ripley & Worthington, 2002) evaluations were the only studies that utilized this robust instrument. Measurements of the German version of PREP used an instrument that is highly correlated ($r = .85$) with the DAS (Brakhaus et al., 2001; Kaiser et al., 1988), the Partnership Questionnaire (Hahlweg, Schindler, Revenstorf, & Brengelmann, 1984) to measure marital quality. Another measure of marital satisfaction that is highly correlated with the DAS is the Couples Assessment of Relationship Elements (CARE; Worthington et al., 1997). The CARE was designed around Worthington's theory evaluating seven relationship elements. This instrument has been found to have a high internal consistency and is correlated with the DAS (Spanier, 1976) at $r = .67$ and $.61$ (Worthington et al., 1997). The CARE was used in addition to the DAS in both the SYMBIS (Ripley et al., 2000) and Hope-Focused (Ripley & Worthington, 2002) evaluations.

Marital adjustment and satisfaction was also assessed using the Locke-Wallace Marital Adjustment Test (MAT; Locke & Wallace, 1959). This instrument is accepted as having high reliability and validity (Gottman, Markman, & Notarius, 1977), though it has been found to be a slightly less effective measure of marital satisfaction than the DAS

(Spainer, 1976). Two of the PREP studies (Hahlweg et al., 1998; Renick et al., 1992) utilized this instrument.

A final instrument that was used to measure marital satisfaction is the Interpersonal Relationship Scale (IRS; Guerney, 1977) used by Milholland and Avery (1982) in the first Marriage Encounter outcome study. While a limited amount of evaluation appears to have been conducted on this instrument, one study determined its test-retest reliability to be .92 (Rappaport, 1976). An investigation into the instrument's validity found that it correlated strongly (.69) with the Premarital Communication Inventory (Schlein, Guerney, & Stover, 1990).

Specific relationship areas. Studies sought to assess a variety of relationship aspects. The Synder's Marital Satisfaction Inventory was used to assess sexual satisfaction among couples in one of the PREP studies (Renick et al., 1992). Intimacy levels between couples was assessed using The Brief Relational Assessment of Couples Elements (BRACE; Hight & Worthington, 1998) by Ripley et al. (2000). This instrument's subscales are highly correlated with the DAS. Relationship trust was another aspect of interest, measured by the Interpersonal Relationship Scale-Trust (Milholland & Avery, 1982). Finally, relationship disclosure between partners were assessed using the Self-Disclosure questionnaire (Milholland & Avery, 1982).

Relationship problems. Several of the reviewed programs sought to better understand the problems couples were facing as they entered the program. Two of the studies reviewing the German version of PREP (Brakhaus et al., 2001; Kaiser et al., 1988) utilized the Problem List (PL; Hahlweg, Schindler, et al., 1984), an instrument evaluating the extent that 23 different problem areas may exist in relationships, as well as

the couple's perceived abilities to resolve the conflict. The PL maintains an internal consistency of .84 and is designed to differentiate between distressed and nondistressed couples. Researchers also utilized the Relationship Problem Inventory (Knox, 1970) to evaluate how couples perceived the intensity of their problems (Renick et al., 1992).

Other instruments used include the Conflict Tactics Scale (Strauss, 1979) that evaluates how couples manage relationship conflict and a screen for violence (Renick et al., 1992), as well as the Relationship Dynamics Scale (RDS; Stanley & Markman, 1997) used to evaluate how couples handle conflict.

Relationship goals. Relationship goals were examined by Ripley et al. (2000) by using the Relationship Goals Scale, an instrument based on the work of Snyder et al. (1991) and focuses on hope as an agent for relationship change.

Other mental health factors affecting relationship. Two studies utilized the Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression scale to assist in their assessment of couple distress (Kaiser et al., 1988; Brakhaus, 2001).

Surveys

Lester and Doherty (1983) sought to evaluate the long-term effects of the Marriage Encounter weekends by conducting a retrospective study of 129 couples. The questionnaire was approved by the National Marriage Encounter board in Eastern Iowa and was designed to allow spouses to choose between positive, negative, or neutral responses. Two items assessed global effects of Marriage Encounter, while 11 assessed specific effects of the program, and 2 items were open-ended. Building upon this study, Doherty et al. (1986) examined data from the 50 couples who reported the most positive or negative impact on their relationship. Participating couples were interviewed and

taped, then their responses were categorized into “highly positive,” “somewhat positive,” “neutral,” and “negative” categories.

Other attempts to measure program effects used some rather unconventional methods. For instance, Doherty and Walker (1982) placed a notice in a professional newsletter requesting contact from therapists who have treated Marriage Encounter “casualties.” Therapist reports were then utilized to determine participants’ reaction to Marriage Encounter, the changes that have occurred in their relationship since the intervention, the couples’ attribution of relationship problems, and the therapists’ attribution of the couple’s problems.

Observational Coding

Studies that utilize a combination of self-report and observational coding of couple interaction show greater results than those who use self-report alone. A meta-analysis of enrichment interventions conducted by Giblin et al. (1985) found that programs using observational measures yielded an average effect size of .76, whereas self-report measures alone averaged an effect size of .35.

In the reviewed PREP studies, those that utilized both self-report and behavior observation ratings generally displayed strong results. Kaiser et al. (1998) and Braukhaus et al. (2001) utilized self-report instruments in combination with the KPI coding system for marital interaction (Hahlweg et al., 1984). It is noted that treatment group couples showed some positive change in their self-report measures, but demonstrated significant increases in positive and decreases in negative communication as compared to control group. By measuring a couple’s nonverbal and verbal communication, researchers were able to more accurately assess the impact of the program on the couple’s relationship.

The same type of effects held true in a study conducted by Hahlweg et al. (1998) who compared treatment to control groups using the MAT self-report and the KPI coding system. Assessments were taken at pre-assessment, post-assessment, 1½ years, and 3 years. There was minimal difference in treatment and control groups in self-report measures of relationship satisfaction. In fact, treatment group ratings were slightly lower than the control groups until the 3-year mark when they displayed significantly higher levels of relationship satisfaction. However, treatment group displayed significantly higher levels of positive communication than control group on every assessment when measured by the coding system.

Renick et al. (1992) also found that treatment couples scored higher than control couples on behavioral measures such as the Couples Interaction Scoring System (CISS; Notarius & Markman, 1981), and The Communication Box (Markman & Floyd, 1980). This was consistent at every assessment up to the 4-year mark of the 5-year study following the intervention, though PREP couples did not consistently show significant differences in measures of marital satisfaction when compared to control.

Ripley and Worthington (2002) found similar results when evaluating Hope-Focused participants. No significant differences were found between treatment and wait-list control groups in self-report measures of marital satisfaction, communication, or forgiveness. However, Hope-Focused couples did show a significant increase in positive to negative behaviors compared to the control group. These researchers utilized the Global Rapid Couples Interaction Scoring System (GRCISS; Krokoff, Gottman, & Hass, 1989).

Conclusions on Measures

Though there are some promising beginnings to research in this area, there is a lack of robust measures used in evaluating weekend marriage enrichment. Though the PREP program has made significant effort, there are no other consistent lines of investigation in this area. Measures, for the most part, are self-report with few observational measures. It appears that assessments need to include both self-report and observational measures to fully reflect program effects. This is particularly true when a goal of the program is to increase relationship satisfaction through improving couple communication. Assessments with higher validity and reliability also need to be used to strengthen the research in this area.

Longitudinal Studies

Though longitudinal studies are necessary to understand the long-term effects of interventions, few of the reviewed studies assess long-term effects. PREP was the only one of the reviewed studies that had conducted longitudinal studies.

Renick et al. (1992) reviewed the long-term impact of PREP over a 10-year period using a treatment-control, pre-post design with follow-up. Initial participants were 135 couples who were planning to marry. Couples were assessed through self-report inventories as well as behavioral communication measures at post-intervention, 1½-year follow-up, and 3-, 4-, 5-, 6-, 7-, 8-, and 9-year follow-ups. Results of the 5-year mark were provided. They indicated that PREP was effective in increasing positive marital communication and minimally effective in increasing marital satisfaction, though both of these effects faded over time. This was particularly true for wives, as no differences in

communication skills were found between treatment and control wives from the 4-year mark. Such results may further indicate the need for follow-up sessions.

Hahlweg et al. (1998) conducted a 5-year study of PREP comparing PREP treatment groups to control group. Only the findings from the first 3 years were provided. Couples included in the study scored 100 or higher on the MAT and were considered average or happy couples. PREP couples demonstrated increased levels of marital satisfaction only at the 3-year mark when compared to control group. However, PREP couples consistently demonstrated higher levels of positive and lower levels of negative communication when compared to control. Hahlweg et al.'s (1998) study indicates the utility of PREP with generally well-adjusted couples planning marriage.

Lester and Doherty (1983) sought to determine the long-term effects of Marriage Encounter by conducting a 10-year retrospective study of Marriage Encounter weekends. Though this study assessed Marriage Encounter 10 years in retrospect, no tracking of program effects was conducted throughout those 10 years. Results indicated that an estimated 1 in 10 couples had a negative experience in attending Marriage Encounter. Though this study looks at a 10-year time period and is worth mentioning, it is not considered a longitudinal study that evaluates program efficacy.

While there have been a couple of studies reviewing the long-term effects of the PREP program (Hahlweg et al., 1998; Renick et al., 1992), longitudinal outcome studies reviewing weekend marriage enrichment programs are sparse at best. More studies examining the duration of weekend intervention program effects need to be done before conclusions on program efficacy can be drawn.

Negative Effects of Programs on Couples

Though many marriage enrichment programs had a positive effect on the majority of participants, some attention must be given to those participants who actually decrease in their level of functioning following program participation.

Marriage Encounter was among the first of programs to be questioned about perceived “casualties.” Though early marriage encounter articles gave rave reviews of the program (Genovese, 1975; Regula, 1975), the harmful effects of the program were brought up by Doherty et al. (1978) in their article that challenged the ideology of Marriage Encounter and cited its potentially harmful effects. It was suggested that the program’s perceived benefits were illusory and temporary and that its “authoritarian” and “coercive” approach promoted a “collapse of individuality” in the marital relationship (Doherty et al., 1978).

Doherty and Walker (1982) examined reports of the negative effects of Marriage Encounter on participants’ marriages by surveying therapists who have treated Marriage Encounter “casualties.” The seven therapists that participated had treated a total of 76 Marriage Encounter participants, 19 (25%) of which were negatively impacted by the weekend. While it is commendable that Doherty and Walker (1982) sought to investigate reported casualties, their conclusions rely on the therapist’s opinion. These results differ significantly from Lester and Doherty’s (1983) investigation in which 3% of husbands and 6% of wives reported an overall negative effect of the Marriage Encounter Program on their marriage. Forty percent of couples indicated one negative reaction or area of concern regarding the program, with 9.3% of the sample citing three or more negative results, indicating a more substantial negative impact of Marriage Encounter on their

relationship. Overall, the study revealed that the majority of Marriage Encounter participants (79.5%) reported that their attendance at the weekend had a positive effect on their relationships, whereas an estimated 1 in 10 couples (9.3%) had a negative experience.

Doherty et al. (1986) examined data of 50 couples from Lester and Doherty's 1983 study who reported the most positive or negative impact of Marriage Encounter on their relationship. Results indicated that 12.3% or 1 in 8 couples were strongly affected by Marriage Encounter, with approximately half positively and half negatively. While these results differ from Lester and Doherty's (1983) reports of a 79.5% positive effect, they still purport a significant chance of a negative experience for Marriage Encounter attendees.

Why are there so many "casualties"? Therapists' conjecture in Doherty and Walker's (1982) study included unrealistically high expectations set by the program which were not able to be met by couples, varying levels of excitement between husband and wife regarding the program, an emphasis on the marriage without much discussion of children, or conflict with group leaders during the weekend. Therapists also hypothesized that marital problems stem from "excessive pressure" on the couples to communicate intensely in an unreserved manner, as well as an emphasis on positive communication and feelings to the avoidance of approaching difficult problems and issues (Doherty & Walker, 1982). These challenges culminate in emotional overload.

The largest reported negative effect in Lester and Doherty's (1983) was that needs were recognized and identified during the weekend, but not met or resolved, which in turn increased frustration. This finding was echoed in Lester and Doherty's 1986 study

in which the general “theme” among participants in the “negative” group was that the weekend heightened their awareness of marital distress and dissatisfaction, yet the couples felt unable to resolve their problems.

Lester and Doherty (1986) conclude that couples entering a Marriage Encounter weekend have a great potential for a strongly positive or negative experience due to the intensity of the program. Authors’ recommendations include a screening system to deter couples with strong marital distress from attending, a greater emphasis on problem solving, more in-depth covering of topics, explaining to the group when therapy may be needed and being able to refer couples in distress to a marriage therapist, and a more enrichment-based approach that decreases the strength of the material being delivered.

Though Marriage Encounter is the most frequently cited source of potentially harmful effects that stem from marriage enrichment interventions, other programs have also reported negative effects. In the first outcome study of SYMBIS, Ripley et al. (2002) found that some couples actually got worse. The main analysis revealed that while individuals with low baseline scores on the DAS and CARE improved on these measures, those individuals with high dyadic adjustment at baseline actually declined on their DAS scores. It was suggested that the decreased scores on the DAS was because some of these participants may have been unrealistically positive regarding their relationship expectations, and that their “rose-colored glasses” may have been lifted resulting in a lack of positive change (Ripley et al., 2000).

General Program Efficacy and Conclusions

PREP

Overall, the PREP program has found to be efficacious at 4- and 5-year follow-up in producing decreased amounts of negative communication, increased amounts of positive communication, and increased levels of marital satisfaction in PREP participants when compared to control group (Freedman, Low, Markman, & Stanley, 2002; Halford, Sanders, & Behrens, 2001; Markman et al., 1993). Though the program is successful in its aims of strengthening a couple's skills, a criticism of the program is that it has not been shown to alter couple perceptions of their relationship (Widenfelt, Baucom, & Gordon, 1999). Additionally, weekend PREP studies have largely been conducted in Germany, raising questions regarding whether the results are generalizable. Despite any perceived limitations, PREP has shown itself to be beneficial in improving marriages, and has been revised based on conducted research. It is also among the first of empirically-based programs that has been adapted to be used in community settings and led by community leaders. As community leaders such as clergy are considered "proximal agents" and have greater potential to positively influence a large number of people, such community-based programs are likely to be used to impact more marriages.

SYMBIS

As the SYMBIS program has been largely communicated through books and workbooks, Ripley et al.'s (2000) study is a good start to empirical evaluation of the program. An initial evaluation of the SYMBIS program assessed the effects of the program on 402 individuals. The main analysis revealed that individuals with low dyadic adjustment at baseline showed significant differences compared to those with high

baseline adjustment in the CARE. Furthermore, individuals with low baseline adjustment also showed a positive difference on outcome measures on the DAS, CARE, indicating increased marital satisfaction. However, individuals with high baseline scores reported a decline in measures of marital satisfaction. Though there are likely justifications for this type of decrease, the SYMBIS approach has not yet been revised based on this and other recent marital enrichment research.

Further evaluation will be useful in determining the long-term impact of the program on couples' relationships. In particular, the program needs a clinical trial to investigate the efficacy of the program with a control across some reasonable length of time. Until this type of study is conducted, conclusions about this intervention are premature.

Marriage Encounter

Marriage Encounter was among the first of marital enrichment programs. Like the field itself, the program has experienced changes as new information has surfaced. Though the program has been reportedly beneficial to many couples, it appears to have been harmful to others (Lester & Doherty, 1983). It is noted that the Marriage Encounter approach, to our knowledge, has not been modified in light of research that has been conducted. A cautious look at the program's content and theoretical base in light of current research may serve to further strengthen the program and decrease the number of "casualties." Published experimental clinical trials have not been published and initial interest in investigating the approach appeared to wane after the 1980s. A more recent investigation of the program is warranted to understand Marriage Encounter's continued and current impact on marriages.

Hope-Focused

Though the Hope-Focused marriage counseling approach has shown to be quite effective in improving relationships in one study (Worthington et al., 1997), the reviewed investigation into the Hope-Focused Marriage Enrichment weekend workshop showed positive change only in observational measures (Ripley & Worthington, 2002). The alteration of the program to a workshop format included several changes, one of which was an elimination of a 3-hour assessment and couple feedback. This intervention of assessment and feedback alone has been found to significantly impact marriages favorably (Ripley et al., 2002; Worthington et al., 1997). Ripley and Worthington (2002) discuss this and other factors influencing the study outcome. Revisions based on the current study's findings will produce greater insight into the programs effectiveness.

Summary and Conclusions

The existing body of literature on community-centered, weekend-intensive marital enrichment interventions (excluding dissertations) is sparse. Though there has been a modest number of sound studies that do meet the criteria of being community-based and weekend-intensive, the existing studies leave much room for further empirical evaluation. It appears that, traditionally, a large number of community-based marriage enrichment programs have not been empirically evaluated, or even empirically-based. Others that are empirically evaluated are in a weekly or biweekly class or seminar format. In today's society in which time is a commodity, a weekend-intensive format may be one of the most practical venues in which interventions can be delivered.

There is a great need for further research in formats of marriage enrichment. Work in this area that would greatly further the field include:

- Studies that seek to determine specific intervention techniques responsible for results.
What, specifically, causes self-reported marital satisfaction to increase? What causes observational marital interactions to become more positive?
- Studies that implement robust instruments to measure the program's effects, both self-report and observational.
- Studies that investigate the long-term effects of marital enrichment programs.
- Studies that examine the difference between weekend-intensive and weekly formats of the same program in reaching the program's aims.
- Examination of religious-congruent approach to marriage enrichment in content and setting compared with secular versions of programs.
- The utility of "booster" sessions after marriage enrichment weekends and mechanisms to encourage participants to make use of these interventions.
- Evaluation of the effects of a marital enrichment intervention as measured by progression along the stages of change.
- Development and evaluation of research-based, religiously-congruent marital enrichment programs used in community settings.

CHAPTER 3

METHOD

Participants

Participants will include a minimum of 25 married couples ($N = 50$) who attend the proposed marriage enrichment program conducted in their church. They will be recruited from three Protestant church samples through promotional material, announcements, and word of mouth in their church. While participants will come as couples to the marriage enrichment program, data will be analyzed individually.

Measures

Marital Satisfaction

Marital satisfaction will be measured by the Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale (KMSS; Schumm, Nichols, Schectman, & Grisby, 1983). This brief, 3-item questionnaire evaluates relationship quality by measuring an individual's satisfaction with his or her partner, relationship with his or her partner, and marriage. The KMSS has been evaluated as valid and reliable with strong internal consistency (.74 to .98), as well as strong criterion-related validity, concurrent, and discriminant validity (Schumm, Bollman, & Jurich, 2001). Test-retest reliability assessed over a period of 6 months was also found to be strong (.62 for wives and .72 for husbands) (Eggman, Moxley, & Schumm, 1985).

Marital satisfaction will also be measured by a 15-item ENRICH (Evaluation and Nurturing Relationship Issues, Communication and Happiness) Marital Satisfaction scale. Ten items on the ENRICH measure marital satisfaction, while the other 5 assess idealistic distortions in perception of one's marriage. This instrument may be particularly useful in marital enrichment settings as it is not only brief, but it adjusts for extreme answers

through its idealization distortion items. The instrument asks questions related to marital quality on a likert-type scale (1 = extremely unhappy and 5 = perfect). Any endorsement of 1 or 5 on any of the 5 distortion items is adjusted for. Fowers and Olson (1993) found high estimates of internal reliability (Chronbach's alpha was .86) and test-retest reliability (reliability coefficient was .86 when assessed over a 4-week period). Evaluations of concurrent validity indicated that the ENRICH Scale had a correlation with the Lock-Wallace Marital Adjustment Test (MAT; Locke & Wallace, 1959) of .73 when examining individual scores, and .81 with couple scores (Olson et al., 1989).

Relationship Change

Stages of change will be measured using an adapted version of Prochaska and DiClemente's stages of change questionnaire (McConnaghy, Prochaska, & Velier, 1983). This 4-item questionnaire has been used to determine which stage along a continuum of change the subjects were. Original language concerning smoking behavior will be changed to that concerning marriage, while the remainder of the scales will read as the original scales did.

Relationship Goals

Participants' purpose and goals for attending the enrichment program will also be assessed. Six common goals for attending similar programs will be stated, and participants will be asked to rate "how much is this your goal?" on a scale of 1-5, 5 being the primary goal for attending.

Demographics

Standard demographic questions will be asked during the initial assessment at the time of registration. Areas will include age, race, relationship data, data on children, church attendance, and previous marital enrichment experience.

Intervention

“Today’s Marriage: Investing for a Lifetime” is a 6-8-hour marital enrichment intervention designed to be implemented in a community church-based environment. The program will be delivered in both weekend-intensive and weekly class style formats. Components of the program include psychoeducational lecture, brief skills training, time for couples to practice skills, and discussion time for individual couples. Content of the intervention is based on current research in marital dynamics and therapy, drawing heavily from behavioral-based interventions. Content areas are as follows:

1. “Investing with Perseverance.” The session begins by setting the precedence that a good marriage does not just happen--it takes a continuous investment of time and energy. Participants test their knowledge of marriage and common myths about marriage are dispelled based on research. This is followed by a psychoeducational presentation of factors that both damage and protect a marriage, and ways couples can begin to strengthen their marriage through their daily interactions with one another (Gottman, 1999).

2. “Investing in Intimacy.” Marital friendship, a cornerstone of intimacy, is explored during this session (Sternberg, 1986). Couples explore the protective factors of marital friendship, barriers to maintaining a friendship (Stanley, McCain, & Bryan,

1998), and ways to promote feelings of intimacy and strengthen marital friendship in both principle and practice (Chapman, 1995).

3. “Investing in Valuing.” Couples are introduced to the concept of valuing one’s spouse even during conflict (Gottman, 1999). Worthington’s (1999) 4-stage model of communicating with LOVE is given as a guideline to resolving conflict.

4. “Investing in Unity.” The aim of this session is to explore a Biblical foundation of unity and how the religious beliefs of each spouse can be a source of strength in staying connected as a couple. Couples are challenged to examine obstacles to unity in their relationship and seek ways to move beyond them. The vital role of forgiveness in a marital relationship is discussed, and Worthington’s (1999) REACH model of forgiveness is briefly presented as a way to help couples learn to forgive.

5. “Investing in Promise.” The importance of a long-term commitment sustained by daily behaviors that invest in one’s marriage is discussed (Stanley et al., 1998). The concept of marriage as a covenant, a binding agreement between two spouses and their God, is presented. Couples are given the opportunity to write and verbalize their own commitment to one another in a capstone exchanging of vows (Ripley, Yarhouse, Pawlowski, Russell, & Rademacher, 2002).

Procedure

Prior to beginning the enrichment interventions, a pilot study will be conducted in a church in the Virginia Beach area. Through this, preliminary data will be collected, and the intervention and its assessment process will be refined.

Couples will be recruited through advertisements to attendees of three churches in the Hampton Roads, Richmond, and Atlanta, Georgia areas. Couples who volunteer to

participate will be screened by a phone, paper, or Internet-based questionnaire. If they are currently in marital therapy, had violence in their relationship in the past 5 years, or are considering separation or divorce, couples will be screened out of the study.

Couples who qualify for the study will then register for the intervention. Couples will be charged a fee of \$25 for the intervention with a notice that the instructor will return \$15 upon their completion of all four assessments. At the time of registration, couples will complete an initial pre-intervention assessment 3-4 weeks prior to the intervention. The assessment will include demographic information, KMSS, ENRICH, stages of change questionnaire, and goal questions. At this time couples will also be asked to sign a consent form explaining the potential benefits (increased marital satisfaction) and risks (potential distress due to interaction with marital issues), noting their agreement to participate in the study. To maintain confidentiality, individual responses will be linked using birthdates. Participants will be asked to complete a second assessment when they arrive to the program. This assessment will include the KMSS, ENRICH, and stages of change questionnaire.

The intervention will then be administered in the form of a marital enrichment program. Weekend format will consist of 2-3 hours on Friday night and 3-4 hours on Saturday morning, while the weekly format will include 4 weekly sessions, 1½-2 hours in duration. Each program will total 6-7 intervention hours. Post-assessments will occur immediately following the workshop and will once again include the KMSS, ENRICH, and stages of change questionnaire. A follow-up assessment will then occur 4-6 weeks after the workshop and will be comprised of KMSS, ENRICH, stages of change

questionnaire, and restated goal questions (“On a scale of 1-5, how effective was the weekend in helping you reach your stated goal of _____?”).

Proposed Results

Quality Checks

Intervention workshops will be videotaped and/or observed live by independent raters who will evaluate how closely the instructor follows the intervention as delineated and to assure that all workshop components are included. Raters will observe a minimum of 4 hours of the intervention and will have a detailed checklist of workshop components. Participant interaction with the instructor and other participants will also be examined for any outstanding differences.

Analysis

A within-subject repeated measures MANOVA will be conducted to assess the effects of the intervention across time with the stages of change, KMSS, and ENRICH. A separate MANOVA will be conducted to investigate whether the goals of the participants predicted degree of change scores for the stage of change measure, KMSS, and ENRICH. Follow-up analyses will investigate each dependent variable individually. Of particular interest to the investigators is:

1. The effect of the intervention on ratings of marital satisfaction.
2. Whether or not participants progressed along the stages of change in seeking to better their relationships.
3. Participant goals for their attendance at the program, and if those goals were met.

4. The influence of weekend-intensive vs. weekly class formats on program effects.

CHAPTER 4

TODAY'S MARRIAGE: WHAT ENRICHES IT?

What makes a marriage fulfilling and lasting? With the high divorce rate in the United States today, many couples, therapists, clergy, and researchers are asking just that. Because couples often seek therapy only after a great deal of damage has been done to the relationship, marriage enrichment interventions are designed to reach couples before they progress too far along the course of marital dissolution by learning concepts and skills to prevent marital dissolution. Given this, marital enrichment interventions may be an effective venue through which relationships may be supported. As a whole, they have been found to be moderately effective in improving couples' relationships (Giblin et al., 1986; Guerney & Maxson, 1990) and have employed a variety of methods, formats, and theoretical orientations.

Though marital enrichment interventions are often conducted through religious organizations, investigations into program effectiveness are sparse. Religious organizations have an opportunity to provide programs that integrate religious principles with research-based psychoeducational material to reach a great number of people in their organization and community. In addition, the faith-based initiatives and pro-marriage initiatives in government are in great need of evaluating these types of programs. Given this, the following section will review a faith-based marriage program delivered in a weekend-intensive format.

A Review of Current Programs

PREP and Christian PREP

Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program (PREP; Markman et al., 1986; Markman et al., 1994) is perhaps one of the best known cognitive-behavioral marital intervention programs for engaged or newly married couples. “Christian PREP” based on the original PREP theory while integrating Christian principles for marriage has also been developed (Stanley & Trathen, 1994). PREP is designed to build couple communication skills while preventing the development of maladaptive patterns of communication in efforts to decrease the chance of marital dissolution.

Evaluations of the original PREP program report have been found to be efficacious at the 4- and 5-year follow-up in producing decreased amounts of negative communication, increased amounts of positive communication, and increased levels of marital satisfaction in PREP participants when compared to control group (Freedman et al., 2002; Halford et al., 2001; Markman et al., 1993). PREP is also the only one of the reviewed programs that has conducted longitudinal studies. Renick et al. (1992) reviewed the long-term impact of PREP over a 10-year period and reported that to the 5-year mark, PREP was effective in increasing positive marital communication and somewhat effective in increasing marital satisfaction, though both of these effects faded over time. Hahlweg et al. (1998) conducted a 5-year study of average or “happy” couples. PREP couples demonstrated increased levels of marital satisfaction up to the 3-year mark when compared to control group and consistently demonstrated higher levels of positive and lower levels of negative communication.

Though the program is successful in its aims of strengthening a couple's skills, a criticism of the program is that it has not been shown to alter couples' perceptions of their relationship (Widenfelt et al., 1999). Additionally, studies of weekend formats of PREP have been conducted in Germany, raising questions regarding whether a weekend format can be generalized. Despite any research limitations, PREP has shown itself to be beneficial in improving marriages and has been revised based on conducted research. It is also among the first of empirically-based programs that has been adapted for use in community settings and led by community leaders (Stanley & Trathen, 1994). As community leaders such as clergy are considered "proximal agents" and have greater potential to positively influence a large number of people, such community-based programs will likely impact more marriages.

Saving Your Marriage Before It Starts

Saving Your Marriage Before It Starts (SYMBIS; Parrott & Parrott, 1995) is a psychoeducational intervention that targets premarital and newly married couples. Using a family systems approach largely influenced by Bowenian theory, its founders seek to improve relationships and decrease chances of divorce (Parrott & Parrott, 1997). Though it is not an exclusively Christian program, spirituality of the individual and couple is explored, and scripture and Biblical principles are utilized. A unique feature of SYMBIS is its use of a "marriage mentoring program" in which a newlywed couple is paired with a more "seasoned" couple for one year following the program in an effort to continue supporting the new marriage.

An initial evaluation of the SYMBIS program (Ripley et al., 2000) assessed the effects of the program on 402 individuals. The main analysis revealed that individuals

with low dyadic adjustment at baseline showed improvement on measures of dyadic adjustment and marital satisfaction while individuals with high baseline scores reported a decline in measures of marital satisfaction. It was suggested that the decreased scores on the DAS indicated that some of these participants may have been unrealistically positive regarding their relationship expectations and that their “rose-colored glasses” may have been lifted resulting in a lack of positive change (Ripley et al., 2000).

As the SYMBIS program has been largely communicated through books and workbooks, the Ripley et al.’s (2000) study is a start to empirical evaluation of the program. Though there are likely justifications for the decreases in dyadic adjustment as seen in the initial evaluation, the SYMBIS approach has not yet been revised based on this and other recent marital enrichment research. Further evaluation will be useful in determining the long-term impact of the program on couples’ relationships. In particular, the program needs a clinical trial to investigate the efficacy of the program with a control across some reasonable length of time. Until this type of study is conducted, conclusions about this intervention are premature.

Marriage Encounter

From an experiential/humanistic perspective, Marriage Encounter is one of the first marriage enrichment interventions conducted. Originating in the Catholic church and expanding to serve Jewish and Protestant populations, it is a religiously-based intervention aimed at increasing marital unity. The program utilizes discussion groups and exercises in an effort to produce feelings similar to those the couple experienced when they first married. Though the program has been reportedly beneficial to many couples (Genovese, 1975; Regula, 1975), it has been reported to have been harmful to

others (Doherty et al., 1978; Doherty & Walker, 1982; Lester & Doherty, 1983; Doherty et al., 1986; Lester & Doherty, 1986).

It is noted that the Marriage Encounter approach has not been reported in the literature to have been modified in light of research that has been conducted. A cautious look at the program's content and theoretical base in light of current research may serve to further strengthen the program and decrease the number of "casualties." Published experimental clinical trials have not been published and initial interest in investigating the approach appeared to wane after the 1980s. A more recent investigation of the program is warranted to understand Marriage Encounter's continued and current impact on marriages.

Strategic Hope-Focused Marriage Enrichment

From a strategic perspective, Hope-Focused marriage enrichment is based on Worthington's (1999) model of brief marriage counseling. The program is aimed at strengthening couple relationships and decreasing divorce through the promoting of hope and skill building. The theory underlying the program has at its heart the model of "faith working through love" of Galatians 5:5-6. This model utilizes scripture and Biblical principles surrounding commitment, valuing one another, and forgiveness in marriage. Though the Hope-Focused marriage counseling approach has shown to be quite effective in improving relationships in one study (Worthington et al., 1997), a replication of the Hope-Focused Marriage Enrichment in a weekend workshop format showed positive change only in observational measures (Ripley & Worthington, 2002). The alteration of the program to a workshop format included several changes, one of which was the elimination of a 3-hour assessment and couple feedback. This intervention of assessment

and feedback alone has been found to significantly impact marriages favorably (Ripley et al., 2002; Worthington et al., 1997). Revisions based on the current study's findings will produce greater insight into the programs effectiveness.

Program Formats

Marriage enrichment interventions vary in the setting, method, and format in which programs are implemented. In seeking to evaluate the effectiveness of marriage enrichment programs, it is important to examine the varying formats and implications of format variations.

Weekly versus weekend. Both weekly class style and weekend-intensive formats have been shown to be beneficial to marriages. However, it is noted that a weekly class style of marital enrichment is a more frequently used format (Gurman & Kniskern, 1977) and has been suggested to be a more effective format of marital enrichment (Silliman et al., 2002). This has been attributed to a greater length of time spent in sessions, as well as time between sessions that allow couples to practice learned skills or reflect on material through homework (Markman et al., 1993; Silliman et al., 2002). However, weekend-intensive interventions also have strengths, such as the possibility of being more attractive to consumers when considering time allotment (Roberts & Morris, 1998). Of the studies reviewed, only PREP compared the same program utilizing the two formats (Hahlweg et al., 1998). No significant differences in program effectiveness were reported between weekend-intensive and weekly groups. Ripley and Worthington (2002) also adapted Hope-Focused marriage counseling to a weekend marriage enrichment workshop. Though in previous research of the weekly Hope-Focused program participants increased significantly in self-reports of relationship satisfaction

(Worthington et al., 1997), the weekend workshop did not demonstrate such increases. It was suggested that the weekend format may be one factor contributing to a discrepancy in results from previous findings.

Time in treatment. Perhaps one of the most salient aspects of the debate on weekend vs. weekly program formats is due to differences in the actual time spent in sessions. It has been estimated that most community-based programs last only 2-4 hours in length (Schumm & Denton, 1979) while university-based programs are typically 12-30 hours (Markman et al., 1993; Ridley & Sladezk, 1992). Given this remarkable discrepancy, program length is a formatting aspect that deserves some attention. Of the reviewed weekend format studies, the amount of time spent in the actual intervention varied. The mean of the four weekend-intensive programs that were evaluated was 17.4 hours. Those programs vary in effectiveness, demonstrating only modest connections between time spent programming and results. While programs with significantly fewer hours most likely are not as effective, it appears that time may not be as critical as effective programming in its contribution to program effectiveness (Silliman & Schumm, 2002).

Follow-up booster sessions. Another formatting aspect is the use of booster sessions, meetings after the intervention aimed at reinforcing learned skills. While participation in a marital enrichment program may offer initial gains, they often wane over time. Booster or follow-up sessions may be instrumental in helping to sustain improvements in marital functioning gained from marital enrichment interventions. In a study by Braukhaus et al. (2001), couples who had participated in optional booster sessions of a PREP program reported higher marital satisfaction and fewer problems than

couples that participated in the standard program. While booster sessions appear to be helpful, participants may not be as eager to attend as they were the initial intervention. Lester and Doherty (1983) found that only 9% of individuals assessed regularly attended the optional Marriage Encounter follow-up meetings, and over one third had never attended a meeting. While the majority of participants who attended reported that they were helpful, no empirical data was collected to support this claim. The SYMBIS program offers a unique form of follow-up session through its “marriage mentoring program.” Though this program is well-documented in manuals and books (Parrott & Parrott, 1995), no outcome studies have been conducted to evaluate effectiveness. As the progression of time following a marriage enrichment program often creates natural attenuation effects, the investigation of the utility of additional follow-up sessions is needed.

University and community origins. A final aspect of program formatting is the origin of the program as interventions may be developed and implemented in both university and community settings. University-centered programs that were reviewed include PREP, Hope-Focused, and SYMBIS. Marriage Encounter was the only program reviewed in some depth that was designed and implemented through the community.

It has traditionally been assumed that university-based programs are more efficacious than community-based programs (Olson, 1983; Silliman & Schumm, 2000). However, community-centered programs have a greater potential of reaching a larger number of individuals. As researchers have recognized the need to promote more research-based material to the community, programs such as PREP (Stanley & Trathen, 1994) have adapted their programs for community use. Only one of the reviewed studies

examined the difference between community and university programs. Hahlweg et al., (1998) compared PREP couples ($n = 64$) to a comparison group comprised 50% of couples who attended a conventional premarital enrichment program offered through an area church ($n = 18$ couples), and 50% who received no intervention ($n = 14$ couples). It was noted that couples who attended the conventional enrichment program had no significant differences from no-intervention couples on measurements of marital satisfaction or behavior ratings (Hahlweg et al., 1998). While conclusions cannot be drawn from such a small number of studies, it appears that research-based programs designed for community implementation is an area deserving of further investigation. This style of marital enrichment may hold a promising future in reaching more couples with sound interventions that will support their relationships.

Measures

Though it has been generally accepted that marital enrichment interventions as a whole are moderately effective (Giblin et al., 1985), there is a wide variety of ways in which programs are evaluated. The majority of programs measure relationship satisfaction and/or adjustment, as well as various specific relationship aspects. The overwhelming majority of measurements have been self-report questionnaires and inventories. Few studies also utilize observational coding though studies that utilize a combination of self-report and observational coding of couple interaction show greater results than those who use self-report alone (Braukhaus et al., 2001; Hahlweg et al., 1984; Kaiser et al., 1998; Renick et al., 1992; Ripley & Worthington, 2002). Giblin et al., (1985) found that programs using observational measures yielded an average effect size of .76, whereas self-report measures alone averaged an effect size of .35. Though there

are some promising beginnings to research in this area, there is a lack of robust measures used in evaluating marriage enrichment. While the PREP program has made significant effort in using strong measures (including observational), and Hope-focused has one published study (Ripley & Worthington, 2002), there is a lack of consistent lines of program investigation. Measures, for the most part, are self-report with few observational measures though it appears that assessments need to include both self-report and observational measures to fully reflect program effects. This is particularly true when a goal of the program is to increase relationship satisfaction through improving couple communication. Assessments with higher validity and reliability also need to be used in order to strengthen the research in this area.

Stages of Change Theory and Marriage Enrichment

While it is beneficial to investigate specific instruments used to measure the impact of the marital enrichment interventions, it is also important to examine the theoretical underpinnings of the process of change and implications for the field of marriage enrichment. Change in attitude and behavior has been measured in a variety of ways. Though some view change as dichotomous (Lichtenstein & Danaher, 1976)--either the behavior is or is not occurring--others propose that change can occur even if the ultimate desired outcome has not yet been reached (DiClemente & Prochaska, 1982, 1983). Over the past 20 years, Prochaska and DiClemente (1982, 1984, 1985) have examined how change occurs. They have proposed that change is a process that takes place in stages over a period of time and that there are “common pathways to change” (Prochaska, 1999, p. 227). Based on these assumptions, they have developed a model of change (Prochaska & DiClemente, 1984, 1985) consisting of stages that the individual

progresses through, as well as the processes of change that encompasses both attitudes and behaviors that move the individual to the next stage.

Stages of Change

Though Prochaska and DiClemente's (1986) initial stages of change model contained only four stages, the model has since expanded to encompass six stages (Prochaska, 1999). The first stage is *precontemplation*, a stage in which change is not even being considered. Individuals in this stage are thought to be unaware of or unconcerned about the negative consequences of their behavior and minimize any advantages of change. Next is *contemplation*, a time during which individuals become more aware of potential consequences of their behavior and benefits of change and consider making changes within the next six months. Progression to the next stage is generally brought about by the individual's self-reevaluation and a recognition of the need for change (Petrocelli, 2002). The third stage is *preparation*, one in which individuals are preparing to change their behavior within the next month and are taking steps required to do so. Such steps indicate the individual's potential commitment to change as he or she begins to demonstrate effort toward change (Petrocelli, 2002). The fourth stage is *action*, during which individuals are making overt changes in their behavior and lifestyles, signifying a commitment to change. Fifth is *maintenance*, a stage in which individuals are working to sustain changes and prevent relapse. Individuals who move "successfully" through this stage have remained abstinent from their problem behavior for at least 6 months. The sixth and final stage is *termination*, one in which individuals are thought to be free from temptation of their problem behavior. It has been

characterized as a stage of total “self-efficacy” (Petrocelli, 2002) and freedom from the risk of relapse.

While the stages of change model was originally applied to health behaviors (Prochaska & DiClemente, 1984; Prochaska et al., 1994), it has been expanded to areas such as outpatient psychotherapy (McConaughy et al., 1989; Prochaska & Norcross, 2001). The model has been empirically evaluated and found to be strong in both reliability and validity of its constructs including the stages and levels of change, as well as its processes (DiClemente & Prochaska, 1985; McConaughy et al., 1989; McConaughy et al., 1983). Investigations have also found increasing support for the predictive validity of the model (DiClemente et al., 1991; Lam et al., 1988). However, to our knowledge, it has not yet been applied to marital enrichment interventions. Such an application would be of great benefit to the marital enrichment field as it is suspected that an individual’s stage of change at baseline when attending a marital enrichment intervention may be predictive of his or her response to the intervention. Furthermore, it brings to light the importance of considering changes in attitudes and assumptions in addition to behavior that may not be accounted for by other measures.

Investigation

The current study investigates a brief community intervention program using a method that is feasible for typical community marriage psychoeducational programs. A within-subjects method with a pre-post and one-month follow-up design is used to assess change. A brief self-report method of assessment is used with the goal of keeping assessment times less than 10 minutes. The stage of change model will be applied as a novel addition to the marriage enrichment literature. It is hypothesized that statistically

significant positive change will occur as a result of the intervention and be maintained at follow-up.

Method

Participants

Participants were 100 married individuals who attended *Today's Marriage* enrichment program conducted in their church. They were recruited from four Protestant church samples through promotional material, announcements, and word of mouth in their church. While participants came as couples to the marriage enrichment programs, data was analyzed individually.

Measures

Marital satisfaction. Marital satisfaction was measured by the Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale (KMSS; Schumm et al., 1983). This brief, 3-item questionnaire evaluates relationship quality by measuring an individual's satisfaction with his or her partner, relationship with his or her partner, and marriage. The KMSS has been evaluated as valid and reliable with strong internal consistency (.74 to .98), as well as strong criterion-related validity, concurrent, and discriminant validity (Schumm et al., 2001). Test-retest reliability assessed over a period of 6 months was also found to be strong (.62 for wives and .72 for husbands; Eggman et al., 1985).

Marital satisfaction was also measured by a 15-item ENRICH (Evaluation and Nurturing Relationship Issues, Communication and Happiness) Marital Satisfaction scale (Fowers & Olson, 1993). Ten items on the ENRICH measure marital satisfaction, while the other 5 assess idealistic distortions in perception of one's marriage. This instrument may be particularly useful in marital enrichment settings as it is not only brief, but it

adjusts for extreme positive answers through its idealization distortion items. The instrument asks questions related to marital quality on a likert-type scale (1 = extremely unhappy and 5 = perfect). Any endorsement of 1 or 5 on any of the 5 distortion items is adjusted for. Fowers and Olson (1993) found high estimates of internal reliability (Chronbach's alpha was .86) and test-retest reliability (reliability coefficient was .86 when assessed over a 4-week period). Evaluations of concurrent validity indicated that the ENRICH Scale had a correlation with the Lock-Wallace Marital Adjustment Test (MAT; Locke & Wallace, 1959) of .73 when examining individual scores, and .81 with couple scores (Olson et al., 1989).

Relationship change. Stages of change were measured using an adapted version of Prochaska and DiClemente's stages of change questionnaire (McConnaghy et al., 1983). This 4-item questionnaire has been used to determine stage along a continuum of change. Original language concerning smoking behavior was changed to that concerning marriage.

Relationship goals. Participants' purpose and goals for attending the enrichment program was also assessed. Six common goals for attending similar programs were stated, and participants were asked to rate "how much is this your goal?" on a scale of 1-5, 5 being the primary goal for attending. The goals were "To spend quality time with my spouse," "To get to know other couple and talk with them about marriage," "To learn more about God's plan for marriages," "To get ideas on how to communicate better," "To get ideas on how to resolve conflicts," and "To make new commitments to my marriage/spouse."

Demographics. Standard demographic questions were asked during the initial assessment at the time of registration.

Intervention

“Today’s Marriage: Investing for a Lifetime” is a 6-8 hour marital enrichment intervention designed to be implemented in community church-based environment. The program was delivered in both weekend-intensive ($n = 73$) and weekly class style ($n = 27$) formats. Components of the program include psychoeducational lecture, brief skills training, time for couples to practice skills, and discussion time for individual couples. Content of the intervention is based on current research in marital dynamics and therapy, drawing heavily from behavioral-based interventions. Content areas are as follows:

1. “Investing with Perseverance.” The session begins by setting the precedence that a good marriage does not just happen--it takes a continuous investment of time and energy. Participants test their knowledge of marriage and common myths about marriage are dispelled based on research. This is followed by a psychoeducational presentation of factors that both damage and protect a marriage, and ways couples can begin to strengthen their marriage through their daily interactions with one another (Gottman, 1999).

2. “Investing in Intimacy.” Marital friendship, a cornerstone of intimacy, is explored during this session (Sternberg, 1986). Couples explore the protective factors of marital friendship, barriers to maintaining a friendship (Stanley et al., 1998), and ways to promote feelings of intimacy and strengthen marital friendship in both principle and practice (Chapman, 1995).

3. “Investing in Valuing.” Couples are introduced to the concept of valuing one’s spouse even during conflict (Gottman, 1999). Worthington’s (1999) 4-stage model of communicating with LOVE is given as a guideline to resolving conflict.

4. “Investing in Unity.” This aim of this session is to explore a Biblical foundation of unity and how the religious beliefs of each spouse can be a source of strength in staying connected as a couple. Couples are challenged to examine obstacles to unity in their relationship, and seek ways to move beyond them. The vital role of forgiveness in a marital relationship is discussed, and Worthington’s (1999) REACH model of forgiveness is briefly presented as a way to help couples learn to forgive.

5. “Investing in Promise.” The importance of a long-term commitment sustained by daily behaviors that invest in one’s marriage is discussed (Stanley et al., 1998). The concept of marriage as a covenant, a binding agreement between two spouses and their God is presented. Couples are given the opportunity to write and verbalize their own commitment to one another in a capstone exchanging of vows (Ripley et al., 2002).

The marriage educator was a female 4th-year doctoral student in a Psy.D. program who also had a religious studies degree in Christian education. Similar to most community marriage education programs, she designed the program. Her husband, a local music minister, also accompanied her to assist with worship music. To ensure consistency, the intervention workshops were videotaped and/or observed live by independent raters who evaluated how closely the instructor followed the intervention as delineated. Raters observed a minimum of 4 hours of the intervention, and had a detailed checklist of workshop components. Participant interaction with the instructor and other

participants were also examined for any outstanding differences. Furthermore, the instructor utilized the same teaching material and basic schedule for each seminar.

Procedure

The first stage of the study was conducted in a church in the Virginia Beach area. Through this, data was collected, and the intervention and its assessment process were refined. Three additional workshops were subsequently conducted. Couples who volunteered to participate were screened by a paper-based questionnaire. If they were currently in marital therapy, had violence in their relationship in the past 5 years, or were considering separation or divorce, couples were screened out of the study.

Couples who qualified for the study then registered for the intervention. Couples were charged a fee of \$25 for the materials (with the weekend offered at no cost) with a notice that the instructor would return \$15 upon their completion of all assessments. At the time of registration, couples completed an initial pre-intervention assessment 3-4 weeks prior to the intervention. The assessment included demographic information, KMSS, ENRICH, stages of change questionnaire, and goal questions. At that time couples were also asked to sign an IRB approved consent form explaining the potential benefits (increased marital satisfaction) and risks (potential distress due to interaction with marital issues), noting their agreement to participate in the study. To maintain confidentiality, individual responses at the three assessments were linked using birthdates instead of names. The design of the study also initially included asking participants to complete a second assessment when they arrived to the program. However, due to inclement weather as well as challenges with distribution of first assessments, this

assessment was inconsistent enough (only 44% completed) that it was eliminated from subsequent analysis.

The intervention was then administered in the form of a marital enrichment program. The weekend format consisted of 3-4 hours on Friday night and 3-4 hours on Saturday morning, while the weekly format included 4 weekly sessions, 1½ -2 hours in duration. Each program totaled 6-8 intervention hours.

Post-assessments occurred immediately following the workshop, and once again included the KMSS, ENRICH, and stages of change questionnaire. A follow-up assessment occurred 4-6 weeks after the workshop, and was comprised of KMSS, ENRICH, stages of change questionnaire, and restated goal questions (“On a scale of 1-5, how effective was the weekend in helping you reach your stated goal of _____?”).

Results

Prior to analysis, participant data was examined for missing values. Case-wise scale means were calculated and replaced missing item values. Unfortunately, there was a large number of participants who did not complete the follow-up questionnaire despite the offering of an incentive in a partial refund of the cost of the weekend. Ninety-three individuals completed the baseline, 93 individuals completed the post-treatment assessment, and 35 individuals completed the one-month follow-up.

Preliminary Analyses

Due to the problem of participant drop-out, a MANOVA was run comparing those that completed all three assessments and just the pre-assessment and post-assessment. Results indicated no significant difference on the relational measures at baseline, Wilks’ Lambda = .97, $F(3, 89) = .85$, $p = .47$. Therefore, it is assumed that

the 35 individuals who completed the post-assessment were not different in the constructs of interest than those that dropped out of the study.

A second MANOVA was conducted to compare the four different marriage enrichment groups to determine if there were differences at baseline for the entire sample. Results indicated there was a significant difference, Wilks' Lambda = .79, $F(9, 224) = 2.57, p = .008$. To determine where the difference occurred, ANOVAs were analyzed and found that the ENRICH ($F[3, 97] = 4.82, p = .004$) and the Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale ($F[3, 97] = 3.36, p = .02$) were significantly different at baseline. Pairwise comparisons indicated that one church (Group 2) was significantly lower on the Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale than the others. For the ENRICH, one church group (Group 4) was significantly lower than two others (Groups 1 and 3). Given the significant differences at baseline, detailed review of the changes in mean scores for each group as well as all participants should be utilized as part of the main data analysis. Table 1 details the outcomes of the data by church group. However, the number of participants in each group varied.

Table 1

Means and Standard Deviations for Measures by Church Group for All Participants

Instrument/Church	Baseline
ENRICH- overall ($n = 98$)	47.01 (14.96)
Group 1 ($n = 45$)	50.65 (14.30)
Group 2 ($n = 10$)	43.66 (20.02)
Group 3 ($n = 16$)	52.36 (7.92)
Group 4 ($n = 27$)	39.01 (14.22)
Kansas- overall ($n = 98$)	16.74 (3.41)
Group 1 ($n = 45$)	17.31 (2.45)
Group 2 ($n = 10$)	14.10 (6.01)
Group 3 ($n = 16$)	17.75 (2.44)
Group 4 ($n = 27$)	16.19 (3.62)
Stages of Change- overall ($n = 98$)	5.94 (1.45)
Group 1 ($n = 45$)	5.84 (1.62)

Group 2 ($n = 10$)	6.40 (1.07)
Group 3 ($n = 16$)	5.94 (1.65)
Group 4 ($n = 27$)	5.93 (1.45)

Note: Standard deviation scores are in parentheses.

Another test to determine where format influenced outcome was conducted. A mixed-design between (weekly vs. weekend format) within (time) MANOVA was conducted to determine whether the format of the intervention influenced outcome. The 2 X (3) mixed-design MANOVA indicated no significant difference, Wilks' Lambda = .72, $F(3, 28) = 1.85, p = .12$. Therefore, the format of the intervention was not a significant predictor of outcome across time.

Main Analyses

A within-subject repeated measures multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was implemented to assess the effects of the intervention across time with the ENRICH, KMSS, and stages of change. Only participants who completed all assessments ($n = 35$) were included in the analysis. Results indicated a statistically significant effect of time on the variables: Wilks' Lambda = .75, $F(3, 55) = 6.00, p = .001$.

To evaluate the effects of the dependent variables, a univariate analysis of variance (ANOVA) was also performed utilizing the Greenhouse-Geisser procedure to measure within subjects effects. Results indicated a significant effect for the ENRICH $F(1, 57) = 6.11, p = .02$, KMS $F(1, 57) = 3.83, p = .055$, Stages of Change $F(1, 57) = 10.66, p = .002$.

Pairwise comparisons of means indicated that on all three measures, there was a positive difference when comparing baseline to post assessment, and baseline to follow-up, but minimal change when comparing post-assessment to follow-up. ENRICH baseline to post-assessment there was a mean difference of -6.5 (1.75), $p = .001$, baseline

to follow-up mean difference of $-6.07 (1.97)$, $p = .004$, and post-assessment to follow-up difference of $.43 (1.41)$, $p = .76$. SOC baseline to post-assessment mean difference was $-.86 (.18)$, $p = .000$, baseline to follow-up was a difference of $-.71 (.31)$, $p = .025$, and post-assessment to follow-up mean difference was $.14 (.32)$, $p = .66$. KMSS baseline to post assessment mean difference was $-.57 (.49)$, $p = .26$, baseline to follow-up mean difference $-.14 (.41)$, $p = .73$, and post-assessment to follow-up mean difference $.43 (.52)$, $p = .42$.

Analysis of Means

A review of the mean scores for participants ($n = 35$) that completed all assessments indicated that participant report of marital satisfaction as measured by the ENRICH improved by approximately half of one standard deviation, from $M = 49.1$ at baseline to 55.6 at post to $M = 55.2$ at 6-week follow-up (see Table 2). Couples also progressed in a positive direction along the Stages of Change, from $M = 5.7$ at baseline to $M = 6.4$ at follow-up, as well as the KMSS ($M = 17.2$ to $M = 17.3$).

Table 2

Means and Standard Deviations of Treatment Outcome for Participants Who Completed All Assessments ($n = 35$)

	Baseline	Post-Intervention	Four- to Six-Week Follow-up
<i>Marital Satisfaction</i>			
ENRICH	49.12 (12.76)	55.62 (9.83)	55.19 (10.39)
KMS	17.17 (2.32)	17.74 (3.03)	17.31 (2.22)
Stages of Change	5.66 (1.63)	6.51 (1.46)	6.37 (1.37)

Note: ENRICH= Evaluation and Nurturing Relationship Issues, Communication and Happiness, range 15-75; KMSS= Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale, range 3-21; Stages of Change, range 1-7 where 1 is precontemplation, 2 is contemplation, 3 is early preparation, 4 is doubtful preparation, 5 is preparation, 6 is unintentional action, and 7 is action. Standard deviation scores are in parentheses.

Paired t-tests also indicated that most of participants' ($n = 35$) goals were met as reflected in increase in mean. Goal 1, "To spend quality time with my spouse," baseline was $M = 3.94 (.84)$ and follow-up was $M = 4.14 (.69)$. Goal 2, "To get to know other couples and talk with them about marriage," increased from baseline $M = 2.62 (.85)$ to $M = 3.29 (1.06)$ at follow-up. Goal 3, "To learn more about God's plan for marriage," baseline $M = 4.00 (.84)$ increased to $M = 4.17 (.75)$ at follow-up. Goal 4, "To get ideas on how to communicate better," did not follow the same trend of increase as it was $M = 4.29 (.57)$ at baseline and $M = 4.09 (.74)$ at follow-up. Goal 5, "To get ideas on how to resolve conflict," remained the same from baseline $M = 3.89 (.83)$ to follow-up $M = 3.89 (.76)$. Goal 6, "To make new commitments to my marriage/spouse," resumed the trend of increase from baseline $M = 3.87 (.93)$ to $M = 4.29 (.52)$ at follow-up.

An evaluation of the case by case change for the individuals who completed the entire study ($n = 35$) on ENRICH, KMSS, and Stages of Change was also conducted (Table 3). The majority of individuals' assessments indicated that scores changed less than one standard deviation in either a positive or negative direction from baseline to follow-up. Of participants who exceeded one standard deviation of change, the majority were in the positive direction. Most notably, 12 of 13 of such participants increased scores by one standard deviation in the positive direction on the ENRICH. The Stages of Change also indicated positive change with 9 in the positive and 4 in the negative directions. The least amount of positive change was seen on the KMSS with 7 participants reporting positive change of 1 or more standard deviations and 5 reporting negative change.

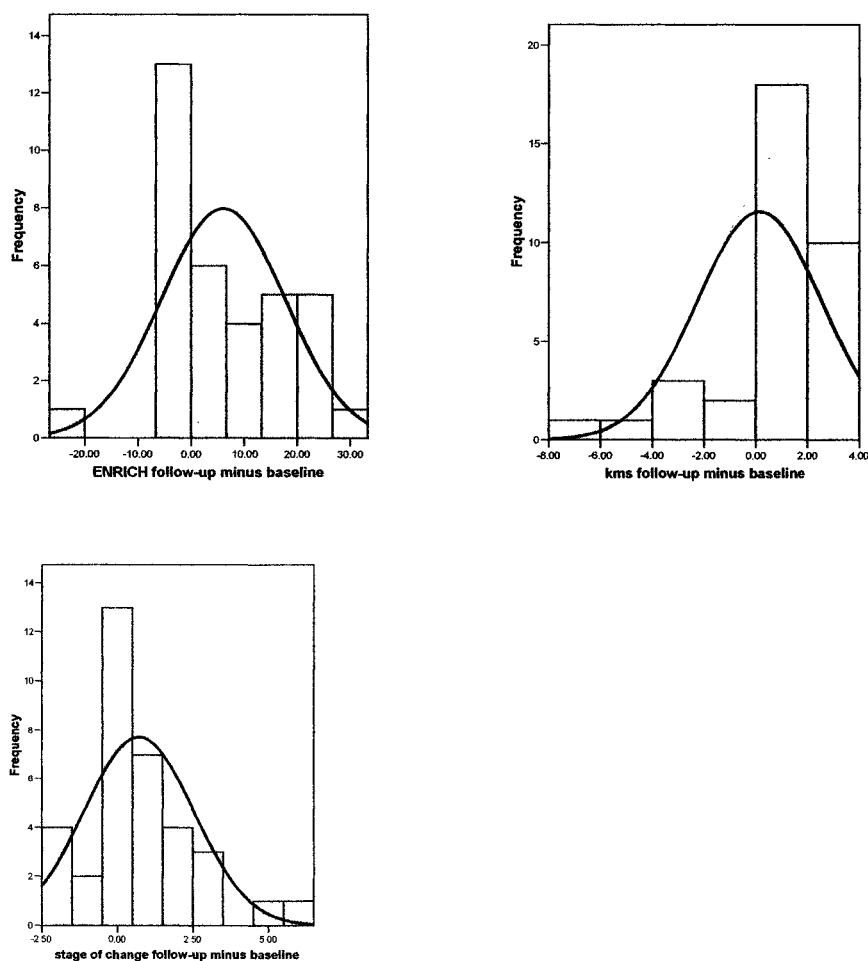
Table 3

Case by case change for the 35 participants completing all three measures comparing baseline to one-month follow-up.

	Negative by 1 SD	No Change or less than 1 SD	Positive by 1 SD
ENRICH	1	22	12
KMSS	5	23	7
Stage of Change	4	22	9

Note: One standard deviation for ENRICH ($sd = 9.25$, average of men and women) and KMS ($sd = 2.57$) were taken from scale development articles (Fowers & Olson, 1993; Schumm et al., 1986). Stage of Change ($sd = 1.44$) was taken from the current study's sample.

Figure 1. Histogram graph of case by case change for the 35 participants completing all three measures comparing baseline to one-month follow-up.



Participant Pre-Post Difference for all 95

To examine the immediate effects of the treatment with the participants who completed the pre-assessment and post-assessment, paired t-tests compared baseline to post-assessment. Improvements in participants' mean scores were indicated on the ENRICH ($n = 95$) $M = 47.90$ (14.77) to $M = 52.65$ (11.88), $t = -3.93$, $p = .000$), KMSS ($n = 93$) $M = 16.87$ (3.28) to $M = 17.58$ (3.48), $t = -2.27$, $p = .03$) and Stages of Change ($n = 95$) $M = 5.91$ (1.46) to $M = 6.49$ (1.43), $t = -5.39$, $p = .000$).

Discussion

An initial evaluation of *Today's Marriage* indicated that couples increased in measures of marital satisfaction when comparing assessment scores across time. Couples also progressed in a positive direction along the stages of change. In all measures of marital satisfaction and stages of change, there was a positive difference when comparing baseline to post-assessment and baseline to follow-up, and gains were maintained from post-assessment to follow-up. Analysis furthermore indicated that participants' goals were largely met when baseline means for participants completing the entire study ($n = 35$) were compared to follow-up. Overall, it appeared that the program had a positive immediate impact on couple's relationships.

As with most studies, there remain points of question when examining the data. As previously discussed, the ENRICH and the Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale were significantly different at baseline. The group that was significantly lower on the ENRICH was the weekly class format, raising the possibility of the contribution of program format. Although there were no statistically significant differences in outcome between the weekend-intensive and weekly class formats, it is hypothesized that the anticipation of a

couple-focused weekend during which many couples arranged childcare and an overnight trip may have contributed to higher baseline responses. Because the ENRICH is a more sensitive measure than the KMSS, it was likely more influenced such positive feelings of anticipation. Additionally, it was noted that Group 2 had a noticeably lower baseline score on the KMSS than the other groups. It is thought that given the small subsample ($n = 10$), low scores on even a couple of participants greatly decreased the overall group mean. Future researchers comparing differing intervention formats will likely experience such challenges as they design and collect field, as opposed to laboratory, data.

Limitations of the Study

Limitations of the study include a low number of participants who completed all assessments ($n = 35$) compared to the number that completed at least one pre- and post-assessment ($n = 93$). While a financial incentive was present to encourage participants to return the follow-up assessment, only one third of participants chose to do so. This highlights one of the predominant challenges in assessing the continued impact of interventions, particularly in community settings with few resources for research.

Another limitation is the lack of observational measures in the study. Studies that utilize a combination of self-report and observational coding of couple interaction show greater results than those that use self-report alone (effect size .76 compared to .35; Giblin et al., 1985). By measuring a couple's nonverbal and verbal communication, researchers are often able to more accurately assess the impact of the program on a couple's relationship. Given this, the utilization of observational measures would have enriched the current study.

An additional limitation is the short amount of time between the conclusion of the intervention and the follow-up assessment. The 4-6-week follow-up design does not allow enough time to accurately assess any long-term effects of the program. In fact, this has been a challenge of the field of marital enrichment programs as a whole. While there have been a couple of studies reviewing the long-term effects of the PREP program (Hahlweg et al., 1998; Renick et al., 1992), longitudinal outcome studies reviewing weekend marriage enrichment programs are sparse at best. While participation in a marital enrichment program may offer initial results such as gains in marital satisfaction, improved communication, and greater feelings of closeness, these gains often wane over time. More studies examining the duration of weekend intervention program effects need to be done before conclusions on program efficacy can be drawn.

Finally, there was no control group. The addition of a wait-list control group would have contributed to a more complete observation of the program's effects.

Today's Marriage: A Comparison

Program evaluation includes examining similarities and differences in program delivery between the present intervention and those reviewed. Compared to the programs reviewed with an average of 17.4 hours, the current intervention was shorter in length, totaling 6-8 hours of curriculum. Variances in program length were due to group size as larger groups took longer to move between sessions and breaks, as well as preferences of the facility in which they were conducted. However, it is noted that two of the reviewed comparison programs were 6 hours in duration (SYMBIS and Hope-Focused), and the previous examination of program length and efficacy was not able to observe a direct correlation between program length and effectiveness.

The intervention was delivered in both weekend-intensive and weekly class format. While the PREP program had also been delivered in both formats and found no outcome differences (Hahlweg et al., 1998), the other programs were weekend format. Likewise, the current intervention found no outcome differences between weekend and weekly class formats. A unique aspect of the program was that it was designed to be a community-centered program while it utilized research-based principles and interventions most typical of the university-based programs reviewed. While the three university-centered programs reviewed (PREP, SYMBIS, Hope-Focused) also combine elements of research and religious principles, the reviewed studies of the only truly community-centered program evaluated (Marriage Encounter) did not report the utilization of scientific research. Finally, the current intervention did not utilize any form of booster or follow-up sessions as did PREP, SYMBIS, and Marriage Encounter. Due to natural attenuation of the effects of programs on participants, the addition of such sessions would enrich the evaluation of future investigations into the program's efficacy.

Interventions utilized were similar, yet not identical to those used in the reviewed programs. Material was largely didactic in nature, with individual couple discussion and practice components in each session. This was similar in style to SYMBIS, Hope-Focused, and somewhat similar to PREP, though the current intervention does not have as many skill-building components as PREP. Like Marriage Encounter, couple discussion time is allowed, but not to the length or intensity that is promoted in ME. While *Today's Marriage* allows for some discussion and questions between the presenter and attendees, group discussions are not utilized as in the ME and Hope-Focused programs. Lecture was derived from principles based on marital research as well as Judeo-Christian beliefs.

While the style of integration is unique in the creation of each program reviewed, they each contain components of both marital theory and/or research and Biblical principles to varying amounts. Exercises included a mixture of originally created and published activities, while the reviewed programs typically utilized original material. A strength of this approach is its similarity to the kinds of programs typically done in local churches or other community groups (Stanely et al., 1998). This program combined several approaches, tailored to the interests of the leader, and delivered them in a combination of psychoeducative and dyadic and individual couple/group discussion format.

There is a great variety of marriage enrichment programs with varying formats, components, and aims. As many have shown to be effective to some degree, future research is necessary to compare the efficacy of different contents to others, particularly across time.

Commentary on Methodology

When striving to assess the effects of interventions delivered in a community setting, there are certainly many challenges. An evaluator must often depend on an individual or small group of individuals in the church or community setting to assist in the recruitment of volunteers, dissemination and collection of assessments, and answering questions related to the seminar. In the present study, such challenges were compounded by unexpected events such as inclement weather that prevented dissemination of materials following the planned methodology. Such challenges may have been minimized with the utilization of Internet-based methods of registering couples and assessment completion. However, that would also rule out participants who are not Internet-capable or savvy. It was also observed that the more pastoral involvement in the seminar through

promoting and encouraging church members to attend, the higher the follow-up questionnaire and return rate.

Another challenging aspect of field-setting studies is the design of assessments that utilize robust measurements, but do not require a large amount of time for participants to complete. The present study took this into consideration when selecting the KMSS, a brief, 3-question instrument with strong empirical backing, and the ENRICH, a short instrument that also adjusts for ceiling effects of many measures of marital satisfaction. While these are very promising self-report instruments, consideration should be given to the addition of observational measures. This is a difficult problem to overcome. Community programs rarely have the resources and training to conduct proper behavioral observations of couples' communication or conflict resolution. New methods of measuring couples' behaviors may be needed to make this aspect of assessment possible for the typical marriage educator.

A unique aspect of the present study is utilization of the stages of change, a promising approach as an evaluation component in marital and marital enrichment interventions. Viewing a person's process of change that encompasses both attitudes and behaviors is a promising addition to the evaluation of marital enrichment interventions and a valuable aspect of program effects to investigate. In the present study, participants were relatively high in the stages at baseline, $M = 5.66$ for 35 individuals who completed the entire study, $M = 6.03$ for 58 individuals completing baseline and post-assessment. Future studies should include all members of a church body to see if this stage of change was indicative of the church group in general or was unique to those that attended the intervention.

Recommendations for Clergy and Church Leaders

Pastors today are often overburdened with the counseling needs of their congregation. It is likely that in his or her career, a pastor will have many opportunities to talk with couples about difficulties in their relationships. It is unfortunate that many couples wait to seek support until substantial damage has been done to their relationship. Given this, preventative interventions such as offering marriage enrichment seminars may help give couples the tools needed to keep their relationships healthy.

In selecting a marriage enrichment seminar, some consideration should be given to the effectiveness of the program. While a variety of marital enrichment programs exist, they are not all created equal. It has been found that many different types of interventions have been helpful in, at least for the short-term, improving couple's feelings about their relationships. However, programs vary in effectiveness and such effectiveness should be considered when choosing marital enrichment programs for a congregation.

Further consideration should also be given to a more continual method of supporting marriages. It is often the case that churches may offer a couple of events a year for married couples, typically a marriage enrichment weekend or retreat. While such programs appear to give marriages a much-needed "boost" and often teach a couple skills necessary to sustain their relationship, the effects of such times of learning often decline (Christensen & Heavey, 1999). Some churches also offer classes for married couples to attend together, which may or may not be focused on building the marital relationship. While involvement in religious activities as a couple has been found to strengthen the marital relationship (Mahoney, Pargament, Tarakeshwar, & Swank, 2001; Mahoney et al., 1999), there is a need for the development of more intentional ways of strengthening

and supporting marriages. Pastors may not be well-versed in research methodology and therefore it is important for psychologists and other mental health professionals to assist in understanding what research can offer the local church.

Creating marriage ministries in the church is one avenue through which this may be done. As such ministries could consist of a great array of classes, conferences, fellowship events, and outreach activities, customizing the marriage ministry to the need of church couples and vision of the church is necessary. One element within this program may include the development of a Marriage Mentoring program, such as the one seen in the SYMBIS program (Parrott & Parrott, 1997), in which a newly married couple is paired with a couple that has been married for a number of years. Furthermore, the creation of a marriage ministry allows the involvement of a variety of church members as it is often headed by a leadership team, distributing the responsibility that might otherwise be placed on the already taxed staff member in charge of the church's marriage ministry. Regardless of the elements involved, it should be crafted to the unique needs of a specific congregation and provides a consistent, intentional way of supporting marriages within a church (Ripley & Kemper, 2004).

Recommendations for Practitioners Working in Church Settings

There is a continued need for practitioners to deliver religiously-congruent interventions in church settings. Practitioners have the opportunity to join with clergy and church leaders to create new and disseminate existing marital programs that integrate research-based interventions with religious principles. The intertwining of one's religious beliefs and psychoeducational material often adds a richness to the material being learned, and creates a more wholistic learning environment. Furthermore, members of the

community whose faith is important to them are more likely to engage in a program if it is religiously affiliated or takes their faith tradition into account.

Eck (1996) concluded that “integration does not detract from the truths of psychology, theology or any other discipline, but rather deepens those truths through a greater cross-disciplinary application and unification of their truths” (Eck, 1996, p. 102). While the ways in which individuals seek to integrate psychology and theology are quite diverse and a complex area of study, this is a burgeoning area that deserves further attention. Scholars and practitioners are challenged to articulate how the two will unite in theory and practice. Interventions and models that thoughtfully grapple with how the two disciplines can combine with integrity are quite useful in advancing the existing body of knowledge in the field of marriage enrichment. Continued dialogue between practitioners, clergy, and researchers in the field is much needed in order to increase intervention effectiveness and is essential in the continued building of reciprocal respect between disciplines.

Recommendations for Researchers

There are often several practical challenges to conducting research when working with church populations. As previously mentioned, one often depends largely on volunteers to distribute information to and recruit potential attendees, collect data, and provide logistical support. Unforeseen circumstances that interfere with the design of the study may also occur. Despite such challenges, there is an incredible need for continued diligence in this area.

As seen in this and several other reviewed studies, more robust measures are needed in the evaluation of marriage enrichment program. Though self-report

questionnaires can be an efficient, effective way of evaluating changes in feelings and attitudes toward one's marriage, studies indicate that the full impact of the program is better evaluated through the addition of observational measures (Giblin et al., 1985). Furthermore, an area of research that would greatly advance the field of study is the investigation into which components of marital enrichment interventions are responsible for change. This lofty, yet admirable aim would aid practitioners in developing more targeted, effective interventions.

Conclusions

The existing body of literature on community-centered weekend marital enrichment interventions (excluding dissertations) is sparse. It appears that, traditionally, a large number of community-based marriage enrichment programs have not been empirically evaluated, or are even empirically-based. Others that are empirically evaluated are in a weekly or biweekly class or seminar format. In today's society in which time is a commodity, a weekend-intensive format may be one of the most practical venues in which interventions can be delivered. There is a great need for further research in formats of marriage enrichment. Work in this area that would greatly further the field include studies that implement robust instruments to measure the program's effects, as well as those that investigate long-term effects of programs. While the field itself has come a long way, there is much work yet to be done.

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Consent and Registration Form

Name- Husband _____ Wife _____

Birthdate ____/____/____

Birthdate ____/____/____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ ZIP _____

Phone (____) _____

Stephanie Kemper, M. A. is a graduate student at Regent University working on her Doctor of Clinical Psychology Degree. Throughout her time at Regent, Stephanie has been involved in marital research under the leadership of Jennifer Ripley, Ph.D., and has felt a leading from God to continue supporting marriages in the community. As she will be presenting at the Marriage Enrichment Retreat at your church, part of her mission is to ensure that she tailors her seminar to the needs of those in attendance and ensures that she is providing high-quality interventions that make a difference in your marriage. Towards that end, and in partial fulfillment of the requirements of her dissertation, she is conducting a study of marriages in your church and an evaluation of the seminar. Below you will find information about the study and a questionnaire. If you have questions you can email Stephanie at jskemper@aol.com or Dr. Ripley at jennrip@regent.edu

Consent Form-Evaluation of Marriage Seminar

1. **Introduction:** Stephanie Kemper, under the supervision of Jennifer S. Ripley, Ph.D. is investigating the effects of the marriage seminar you will attend. This investigation is for the purpose of research obtained for her Doctoral Dissertation. You will be asked to complete a series of short questionnaires.
2. **Benefits:** The information you provide will be used to shape and tailor the marriage seminar. You will contribute to the understanding of the effects of this marriage seminar for the benefit of future recipients. Additionally, participants who complete the study at each church will be entered into a drawing for a gift certificate to Outback Steakhouse or a comparable restaurant in your area.
3. **Costs of Participation, Risks, Inconveniences, Discomforts:** There are no anticipated costs, risks, inconveniences or discomforts associated with this study except the time spent completing the questionnaire. However, it is impossible to estimate all the risks for subjects of research. If you should need marital or individual therapy it is available at the Regent University Psychological Services Center at (757) 226-4488.

4. **Research related injury (the University requires this statement):** Although there are no known risks or discomforts associated with this study, I understand that it is impossible to anticipate all possible risks associated with participation in this study and that the consequences of my participation in this research are unpredictable. Nevertheless, I give my informed consent and release Regent University, its agents, trustees, administrators, faculty and staff from all claims, damages or suits, not limited to those based upon or related to any adverse effect upon my marriage, including separation or divorce, which may arise during or develop in the future as a result of my participation in this research. I understand that this release of liability is binding upon myself, my heirs, executors, administrators, personal representatives, and anyone else who might make a claim through or under me.
5. **Confidentiality of Records:** The investigators will treat your identity with professional standards of confidentiality. The information obtained in this study may be published, but your identity will not be known or revealed.
6. **Withdrawal from the study:** Participation in this study is voluntary. You are free to withdraw your consent and discontinue participation at any time without penalty. As well, you are free to ask any questions of the experimenter following the study.
7. **Current phone numbers:** If you have any questions or concerns regarding the study, Stephanie Kemper may be emailed at jskemper@aol.com or Jennifer Ripley may be reached by calling her office at 757-226-4296 or email at jennrip@regent.edu
8. **Subject Rights Information:** If you have any questions about the study or your rights as a participant, you may contact Scott Sautter, Ph.D., Chair of the Human Subjects Research Committee at Regent University at 226-4000.
9. Completion of this questionnaire indicates acceptance of this form equivalent to a signature indicating consent to participate in research to evaluate this seminar.

Pre-Registration Questions

Please answer with the first answer that comes to mind as that is usually the most accurate.

1. Are you and your partner currently in couples therapy?
2. Are you or your partner currently considering divorce or breaking up?
3. Has there been any kind of violence in your relationship in the past 3 years?

If you answered yes to questions 1, 2 or 3 then please call (757) 226-4488 to schedule an appointment to meet with a counselor and discuss your marriage. Previous research has shown that a brief marriage seminar, such as the one being offered at your church, is not the best care for your marriage. The best we can offer you is found in marital counseling-- and we want to make sure we offer you the best care possible.

If you answered "no" to all of the above questions, then you are asked to create a "code name" for the study. You will be asked some questions about the marriage seminar after the weekend and the use of a code name will ensure that your current information can be matched with the follow-up information in a confidential manner. Just make sure you pick a name that you won't forget later. For example, you might select your mother's maiden name or your next door neighbor's name. Do not pick the same name as your spouse. You each should complete this individually. This code name also ensures that the researchers will not be aware of your actual identity throughout the study.

Code name: _____

Relationship Questionnaire

Code name _____

Gender _____

Birthdate ____/____/____

What Are Your Goals?

Though the marriage enrichment weekend is not long enough to address every area, we would like to better understand what you wish to receive from attending the weekend. Please read each statement and rank each goal according to the extent it is your purpose for attending the weekend.

- 1= Not at all my goal
 2= Somewhat my goal
 3= Moderately my goal
 4= Mostly my goal
 5= Totally my goal

Please endorse 5=“Totally my goal” ONLY ONE time. (Which one is your MAIN purpose for attending the weekend?)

1. To spend quality time with my spouse

How much is this your goal?

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all my goal	Somewhat my goal	Moderately my goal	Mostly my goal	Totally my goal

2. To get to know other couples and talk with them about marriage

How much is this your goal?

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all my goal	Somewhat my goal	Moderately my goal	Mostly my goal	Totally my goal

3. To learn more about God's plan for marriages

How much is this your goal?

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all my goal	Somewhat my goal	Moderately my goal	Mostly my goal	Totally my goal

4. To get ideas on how to communicate better

How much is this your goal? 1 2 3 4 5
 Not at all Somewhat Moderately Mostly Totally
 my goal my goal my goal my goal my goal

5. To get ideas on how to resolve conflicts

How much is this your goal? 1 2 3 4 5
 Not at all Somewhat Moderately Mostly Totally
 my goal my goal my goal my goal my goal

6. To make new commitments to my marriage/ spouse

How much is this your goal? 1 2 3 4 5
 Not at all Somewhat Moderately Mostly Totally
 my goal my goal my goal my goal my goal

ENRICH Scale

Answer each question by circling one answer

	Strongly disagree	Moderately disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Moderately agree	Strongly agree
1. My partner and I understand each other perfectly.	SD	MD	N	MA	SA
2. I am not pleased with the personality characteristics and personal habits of my partner.	SD	MD	N	MA	SA
3. I am very happy with how we handle role responsibilities in our relationship.	SD	MD	N	MA	SA
4. My partner completely understands and sympathizes with my every mood.	SD	MD	N	MA	SA
5. I am not happy about our communication and feel my partner does not understand me.	SD	MD	N	MA	SA
6. Our relationship is a perfect success.	SD	MD	N	MA	SA
7. I am very happy about how we make decisions and resolve conflicts.	SD	MD	N	MA	SA
8. I am unhappy about our financial position and the way we make financial decisions.	SD	MD	N	MA	SA
9. I have some needs that are not being met by our relationship.	SD	MD	N	MA	SA
10. I am very happy with how we manage our leisure activities and the time we spend together.	SD	MD	N	MA	SA

11. I am very pleased about how we express affection and relate sexually (or physically if not sexually involved).	SD	MD	N	MA	SA
12. I am not satisfied with the way we handle our responsibilities as parents (skip question if you are not a parent).	SD	MD	N	MA	SA
13. I have never regretted my relationship with my partner, not even for a moment.	SD	MD	N	MA	SA
14. I am dissatisfied about our relationship with my parents, in-laws, and/or friends.	SD	MD	N	MA	SA
15. I feel very good about how we each practice our religious beliefs and values.	SD	MD	N	MA	SA

Relationship Improvement Questionnaire

1. In the next six months, do you intend to make changes to improve your marriage (beyond attending this seminar)?

Yes No

2. Do you feel confident that you know how to make changes that would improve your marriage?

Yes No

3. In the next month, do you intend to make changes to improve your marriage (beyond this seminar)?

Yes No

4. Are you currently attempting to make improvements in your marriage (beyond this seminar)?

Yes No

If yes, then how?

Relationship Satisfaction Questionnaire

1. How satisfied are you with your marriage/relationship?

Extremely Very Somewhat Mixed or Somewhat Very Extremely
Dissatisfied Dissatisfied Dissatisfied Uncertain Satisfied Satisfied Satisfied

2. How satisfied are you with your relationship with your husband/wife?

Extremely Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied	Somewhat Dissatisfied	Mixed or Uncertain	Somewhat Satisfied	Very Satisfied	Extremely Satisfied
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3. How satisfied are you with your husband/wife as a spouse/partner?

Extremely Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied	Somewhat Dissatisfied	Mixed or Uncertain	Somewhat Satisfied	Very Satisfied	Extremely Satisfied
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INVESTING FOR A LIFETIME

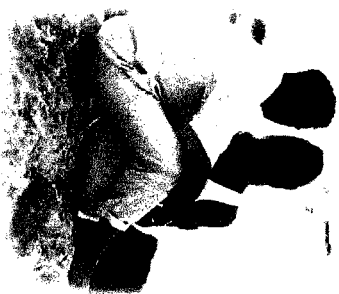
SESSION ONE:
INVESTING WITH PERSEVERANCE
 Marriage Truths and Myths
 Protecting Your Marriage in a Stressful World

SESSION TWO:
INVESTING IN INTIMACY
 Strengthening Your Marital Friendship
 Love Languages

SESSION THREE:
INVESTING IN VALUING
 Communicating Value
 Handling Conflict with Love

SESSION FOUR:
INVESTING IN UNITY
 God's Design for Oneness
 Forgiveness

SESSION FIVE:
INVESTING IN PROMISE
 Commitment for the Long Haul
 Your Marriage Covenant



Test Your Marriage Knowledge

(Circle one answer)

1. All marriages need maintenance in order to run smoothly. **True** **False**
2. Gender differences are the primary reason marriages break down. **True** **False**
3. About 50% of Christian couples say they are happy or very happy in their marriage. **True** **False**
4. Marriages tend to start off happy, then go downhill. **True** **False**
5. High expectations for marriage usually set it up for failure. **True** **False**
6. Men benefit more from being married than women do. **True** **False**
7. A strong marital friendship is more important than high levels of passion in sustaining a long-term relationship. **True** **False**
8. Young, attractive, single men and women have sex and enjoy it more than married couples. **True** **False**
9. Learning listening skills is the way to save a marriage. **True** **False**
10. Even small improvements in your relationship can significantly improve your marriage **True** **False**



SESSION ONE

INVESTING WITH PERSEVERANCE

Protecting Your Marriage in a Stressful World

WHY INVEST?

In the United States today, an estimated _____ % of first marriages end in divorce

MARRIAGE PROTECTORS

\$\$\$ Your Relationship Account \$\$\$

Your relationship is like a bank account. When you have a positive interaction, you invest in your relationship. When you have a negative interaction, you withdraw from your relationship.



Positive interactions = + \$1 Negative interactions = - \$5

The goal: Stay out of the RED

List 5 things that YOUR SPOUSE would consider a positive interaction.

Compare notes when you finish to see if you're on the right track!

\$ _____

\$ _____

\$ _____

\$ _____

\$ _____

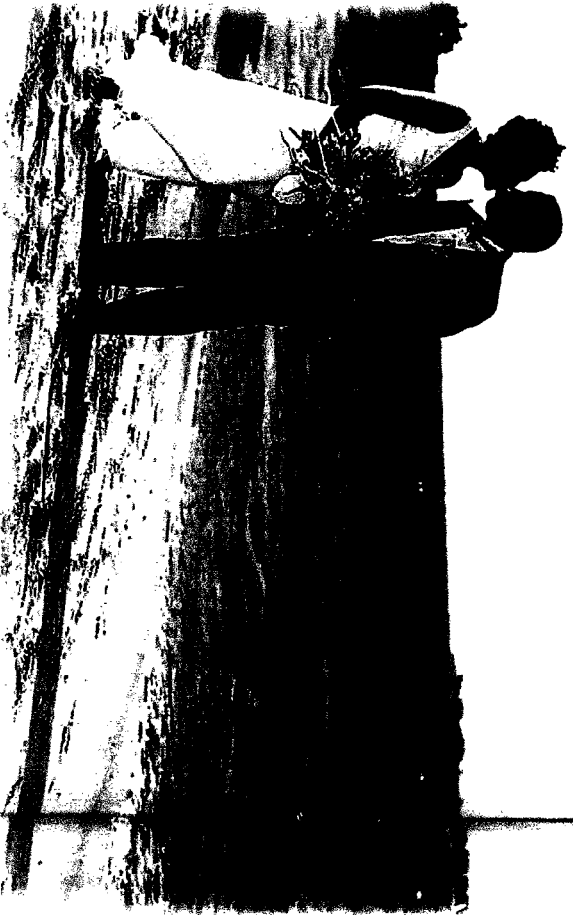
What are the main causes to these breakdowns in marriage?

"...marriages end in a whimper, the result of people gradually drifting apart and not feeling liked, loved, and respected."

-John Gottman (1999)

Note to self:

Do at least one of these things today!



Notes: _____

OTHER RELATIONSHIP INVESTMENTS

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

In a recent study, the determining factor in whether wives felt satisfied with sex, romance, and passion in their marriage was, by _____%, the quality of the couple's friendship. The determining factor for men was, by _____%, the quality of the couple's friendship.

4. _____

5. _____

SESSION ONE

Do you want to increase the marriage protectors in your relationship? You might consider beginning a daily devotion with your spouse! Here are a few devotional books for couples you may want to check out:

ADDITIONAL INVESTMENT TIPS:

Moments Together for Couples

Dennis & Barbara Rainey

(Particularly good for those who have children!)

Like a Kiss on the Lips: Meditations on Proverbs for Couples

Drs. Les & Leslie Parrott

Night Light: A Devotion For Couples

Dr. James & Shirley Dobson

SESSION TWO

INVESTING IN INTIMACY
Building the Marital Friendship

Friendship: mutual _____ for and _____ of each other's company.

WHY IS BEING FRIENDS VITAL?

Friendship is a major "protector" of your marriage:

1. It gives you a _____ to help you deal with stress and life's transitions.
2. It keeps you _____ and fosters _____.
3. It helps you _____ the negative behavior and increase the positive behavior.

Test Yourself: How Well Do You Know Your Spouse?

WHY MARRIAGES SOMETIMES LACK FRIENDSHIP

Friendship Barriers:

BREAKING DOWN THE BARRIERS

Friendship requires investments of:

1. _____

In Principle:

"There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven...a time to work and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance...." Ecclesiastes. 3:1,4

In Practice:

Discuss: When are some potential times in the week you and your mate could set aside for each other?

2. _____

In Principle: Save some of yourself for _____.

Time and energy also needs to be spent on _____!

In Practice:

3. _____

In Principle: Investing in your friendship makes your marriage a happier place to be and improves family life.

In Practice:

Brainstorm: What are some activities you consider fun? What are some fun things you and your spouse could do together?

LOVE LANGUAGES (Gary Chapman, Ph.D.)

To be effective communicators of love, we must learn to speak the language of our mate.

1. Words of _____: words that build up, compliments, kind words

Actions: Send notes/cards
Avoid: Criticism

2. _____: giving someone your undivided attention

Actions: Taking long walks together, taking trips, doing projects together
Avoid: Long periods apart, more time with friends than spouse

3. _____: visual symbols of one's love

Actions: Gifts on special and not-so-special occasions
Avoid: Forgetting special days

4. _____: doing things you know your spouse would like you to do

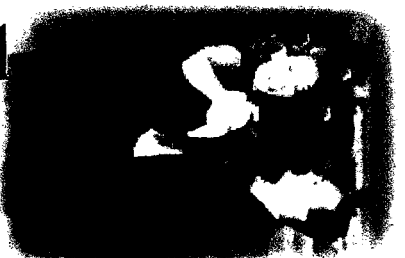
Actions: Helping with household chores, repair and maintenance, acts of kindness

Avoid: Ignoring spouse's requests while helping others

5. _____: nonverbal exchanges, touch

Action: Touches, hugs, pats, kisses
Avoid: Physical neglect or roughness

SESSION TWO



Notes:

FRIENDSHIP

For more on building intimacy as a couple, consider the following resources.

ADDITIONAL INVESTMENT TIPS:

The Book of Romance: What Solomon Says about Love, Sex, & Intimacy
Tommy Nelson

Simply Romantic Nights
Dennis & Barbara Rainey

How to Be Your Husband's Best Friend: 365 Ways to Express Your Love
Cay Bolin & Cindy Trent

How to Be Your Wife's Best Friend: 365 Ways to Express Your Love
Dan Bolin & John T. Trent

The Five Love Languages: How to Express Heartfelt Commitment to Your Mate
Dr. Gary Chapman

SESSION THREE

INVESTING IN VALUING
Handling Conflicts with Love

What does it mean to value something?

THE PRACTICE OF VALUING

It is important to value your spouse with your attitude and mindset.
It is also important to value your spouse with your words and actions.

I Value You

I appreciate when
my spouse...

Qualifies this reflects
in my spouse...

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

STAGES IN THE CONFLICT PROCESS

1. _____

2. _____

"Reckless words pierce like a sword." Proverbs 12:18

Devaluing Components:
"The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse"
(John Gottman, Ph.D.)



C _____: putting down the thoughts, feelings, or
character of your spouse

D _____: defending yourself against
attack before it begins

C _____: putting yourself on a "higher
plane" than your partner

S _____: refusing to communicate

3. _____ Pattern

VALUING DURING CONFLICT

1. _____

2. _____

"Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing. For, whoever would love life and see good days must keep his tongue from evil and his lips from deceitful speech."
1 Peter 3:9-10

3. Address your _____

"Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body. 'In your anger do not sin'; Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold."
Ephesians 4:25-27

4. Communicate with LOVE (Everett Worthington, Ph.D)

L: _____

O: _____

V: _____

E: _____

Let's Practice Communicating with LOVE!

Choose something to discuss with your spouse using the LOVE steps. Perhaps there's a minor unresolved problem or simply something you'd like to talk about. Choose someone to go first. Then switch.

Notes: _____



Could you use some additional information in this area? Here are some resources you may find helpful.

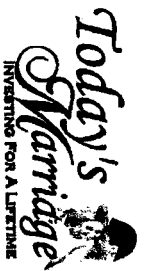
ADDITIONAL INVESTMENT TIPS:

Making Love Last Forever
Dr. Gary Smalley

The Book of Romance: What Solomon Says about Love, Sex, and Intimacy
Tommy Nelson

(a repeat from the last session- are you getting the hint that this book has great information?)

SESSION THREE



SESSION FOUR

INVESTING IN UNITY

God's Design for Marriage

God said, "It is not good for man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him." Genesis 2:18

Why do you suppose this was?

"Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. The man said, 'This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called woman, for she was taken out of man.'" For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh. The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame."

Genesis 2:22-24

GOD'S DESIGN OF ONENESS

1. Unity in _____; emotional unity

"Bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh..." Genesis 2:23

2. _____ Unity

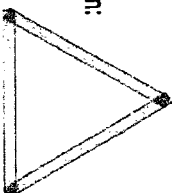
"...and they will become one flesh..." Genesis 2:24

"Haven't you read that 'in the beginning the Creator made them male and female' and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh? So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate.'"

Matthew 19:4-6

3. _____ Unity
"...what God has joined..." Matthew 19:6

Illustration:



4. _____ Unity

"...let man not separate." Matthew 19:4-6

Evaluate Your Closeness

Rate the four areas of unity:

1= not at all close 3= moderately close 5= very close

Emotional Unity	1	2	3	4	5
Physical Unity	1	2	3	4	5
Spiritual Unity	1	2	3	4	5
Permanent Unity	1	2	3	4	5

Discuss:

Which area would you consider your strongest as a couple?

In which area do you need the most improvement as a couple?

What could you do to strengthen this area?

THE ROLE OF FORGIVENESS IN STAYING UNITED

The Importance of Forgiving:

What forgiveness is NOT:

Barriers to Forgiveness:

The Keys to Handling Forgiveness:

_____ and _____

"Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, 'Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?' Jesus answered, 'I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.'"

Matthew 18:21-22

ADDITIONAL INVESTMENT TIPS:

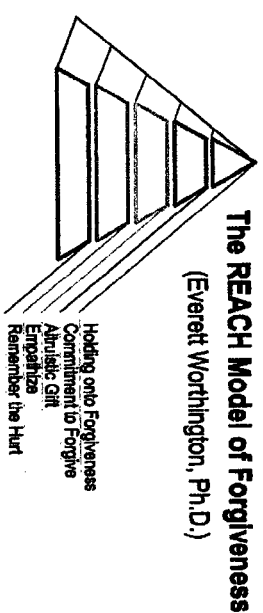
Becoming Soul Mates: Cultivating Spiritual Intimacy in the Early Years of Marriage

Drs. Les & Leslie Parrott

To Forgive is Human: How to Put Your Past in the Past

Drs. S.J. Sandage & Everett L. Worthington, Jr.

SESSION FOUR



R_____

- Acknowledge what happened
- Look at facts and how you feel

E_____

- Try to understand what your partner was feeling, thinking, and going through when they offended you
- What was the misunderstanding? Your partner's goal?

A_____

- Realize you are capable of inflicting similar hurt
- Think of a time that you have been forgiven
- What does it feel like to be forgiven?
- Forgive as an altruistic gift

C_____

- Verbalize your forgiveness

H_____

- Know that recalling the hurt is not unforgiveness

Forgiveness in your marriage...

Is there anything you need to ask forgiveness for?

Is there anything you have not forgiven your spouse for?

SESSION FIVE

INVESTING IN PROMISE

Commitment for the Long Haul

GOD'S PLAN FOR LIFE-LONG INVESTMENT

Covenantal Marriage

God designed marriage with a _____ commitment in mind.

What is a Covenant?

LONG-TERM INVESTING IN MARRIAGE

1. Know that you will have _____ and _____.

Covenant vs. Contract

2. If you withdraw your

investment when things
get rough,

_____ is compromised.

Marriage as a Covenant



DATE _____

Today, I make this vow...

111

SESSION FIVE

INVESTING IN PROMISE

ADDITIONAL INVESTMENT TIPS:

When Bad Things Happen to Good Marriages: How to Stay Together When Life Pulls You Apart

Drs. Les & Leslie Parrott

His Needs, Her Needs: Building an Affair-Proof Marriage

William F. Harley

Lasting Love: How to Avoid Marital Failure

Alistair Begg



MORE INVESTMENT TOOLS

It is our hope that this conference will challenge you to daily invest in your marriage. The following pages contain some additional material to help you get started in conversations and activities with your spouse. Remember that connecting with your husband or wife regularly is vital to a thriving relationship. So what are you waiting for? Get started!!

TEST YOURSELF: How much do you know about your spouse? Answer as many questions as you can in the time allowed.

Start

Name your spouse's favorite TV show.

What is your spouse's favorite color?

Name your spouse's two closest friends.

Where was your spouse born?

When is your spouse's birthday?

When is your spouse's favorite time for making love?

What is your spouse's favorite meal?

What is one of your spouse's favorite hobbies?

Does your spouse have a favorite sport to play?
To watch?

What is your spouse's greatest fear?

Who is your spouse's favorite relative?
Least favorite?

What would be your spouse's dream job?

What is your spouse's dream vacation?

Finish

When time is up, compare answers.

How did you do?



Some Additional Topics for "Friendship Talks"

What is one of your spouse's favorite childhood memories?

Did your partner have a role-model growing up?

What is your partner's secret ambition?

What are the major stressors in your life right now?

(Ask your spouse: *How could I be of best help to you?*)

What do you need from me?

What are your goals for your relationship?



How can you work together to reach some of those goals?

If you could do anything in life, what would it be?

Memoirs of Our Life Together

Write your memories of each event. What were you feeling?

Why was it meaningful to each of you?

When we met...

The attraction began when...

The day we got engaged...

Our wedding day...

One of the best things that's happened in our relationship...

The best thing that happened in our marriage in the last year...

The hardest thing that happened in our marriage in the last year...

By next year at this time, we hope...

ADDITIONAL INVESTMENT RESOURCES:

PARENTING

The New Dare to Discipline

Dr. James Dobson

Bringing Up Boys

Dr. James Dobson

Raising Great Kids

Dr. Henry Cloud & Dr. John Townsend

Boundaries with Kids

Dr. Henry Cloud & Dr. John Townsend



FINANCES

Complete Financial Guide for Couples

Debt-Free Living: How To Get Out of Debt and Stay Out

Family Budget Workbook: Gaining Control of Your Personal Finances

Larry Burkett

SEX & INTIMACY

Love Life for Parents: How to Have Kids and a Sex Life Too

Dave & Claudia Arp

Hidden Keys of a Loving, Lasting Marriage: A Valuable Guide to Knowing, Understanding, and Loving Each Other

Gary Smalley

Vita

Stephanie D. Kemper was born on June 2, 1976 in Galax, Virginia. She graduated with honors from Carroll County High School in Hillsville, Virginia in 1994. She received a Bachelor of Science Degree from Gardner-Webb University in Boiling Springs, North Carolina in December 1997 where she double majored in Psychology and Religious Education. She attended Regent University in Virginia Beach, Virginia where she received a Masters of Arts degree in Clinical Psychology in July 2002. She is a candidate for the degree of Doctor of Psychology in Clinical Psychology from Regent University.