

Love, Poverty, and Marriage

Scott Stanley
with
Marline Pearson
George Young

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- I will cite some very useful resources for understanding trends in marriage among those who suffer from economic disadvantage. There are SO many other sources one could use.
- I will pose these panels on our website (www.PREPinc.com) with a list of useful references)

Raley & Bumpass (2003) *The Topography of the Divorce Plateau*

- Half of all first marriages will dissolve
 - (based current trends; representing a leveling off on a plateau)HOWEVER
- “Our understanding of family stability is impaired if we focus only on divorce rates: for example, children’s family lives have become increasingly unstable during the plateau in the divorce rate (Bumpass & Lu 2000).”

Raley & Bumpass (2003) *The Topography of the Divorce Plateau*

- But, how does divorce breakdown by education?
 - Not HS Grad 60%
 - HS Grad 53%
 - Some College 51%
 - College Graduate 36%
- This is an area within the “plateau” where the differences have widened.

Raley & Bumpass (2003) *The Topography of the Divorce Plateau*

- “Unfortunately, those have the least resources to overcome the costs of family dissolution are experiencing the highest levels and the most increase in the risk.”

Fein (2004) *Married and Poor*

- People with economic disadvantages are likely to *eventually* marry (Fein suggests just as likely as others, though some others would dispute this), but their marriages are *substantially* more unstable.
- But, babies . . .
 - tend to follow marriage among upper middle class couples.
 - tend to precede marriage among disadvantaged newlyweds.

Fein (2004)
Married and Poor

- “Disadvantaged married couples are comparatively young and disproportionately Latino.”
- The marital quality gap between low-income and other couples is much smaller than most believe.
 - “. . . marital quality is at most only slightly lower for poor couples than for more advantaged ones, however.”

Lichter, Batson, & Brown (2004)
Welfare Reform and Marriage Promotion

- “. . . Most disadvantaged and minority women, including most single mothers, **expect** to marry in the future.” (emphasis added)
- “. . . single women from disadvantaged family backgrounds have lower odds of expecting to marry. . .”

Lichter, Batson, & Brown (2004)
Welfare Reform and Marriage Promotion

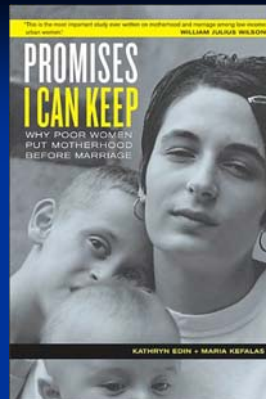
- “We also find **little** evidence that a disadvantaged background is associated with a lack of **desire** to marry.” (Emphasis added)
- “. . . single mothers are no more or less likely to desire marriage than childless single women.”

Florida Baseline Survey
(Karney, 2003)

- 65% of unmarried residents would like to be married some day, and 39% have plans to marry within 2 years.
- Unmarried blacks (84%), Hispanics (82%), or other ethnic groups (94%) are substantially more interested in getting married someday compared to whites (56%).
- Residents in low-income households are more likely to desire a marriage (72%) than residents in high-income households (61%).
- TANF recipients are the most likely to desire a marriage (85%).

Smock & Manning (2004)
“Living together unmarried . . .”

- “Brown (2002) finds that poverty rates among children in cohabiting households are almost as high as those in mother-only households and substantially higher than those in married families.”
- The better economic circumstances of children in married families may be due to parents’ education and not marriage per se (Manning & Brown 2003).



Edin and Kefalas
Promises I Can Keep

- "This book is a must read for students of the family as well as for policy makers and practitioners who hope to *rebuild marriage* in low-income communities."—

Sara McLanahan

(emphasis added)

Edin and Kefalas
Promises I Can Keep

- Interest in marriage is real; respect for marriage is great among the women they interviewed.
- The women they interviewed see having a child outside of marriage as better than having a marriage end in divorce—the latter being much more stigmatized to them.
- The irony: they have aspiration and respect for marriage, but little marriage in fact.

Edin and Kefalas
Promises I Can Keep

- One woman noted:

"I don't believe in divorce. That's why none of the women in my family are married!" (p. 9)

Edin and Kefalas
Promises I Can Keep

- Whereas marriage seems a promise *not within their reach*, . . .
- . . . having and raising a child appears to these young women to be a promise they can keep.

Edin and Kefalas
Promises I Can Keep

- So many other pathways to meaning and success in life appear *out of reach* to these women; only one highly salient pathway to meaning—motherhood—appears to them to be *within their reach*.

Edin and Kefalas
Promises I Can Keep

- Marriage has become a status symbol of arriving, not a vehicle you get in to travel to that destination.
- The poor have aspirations for marriage that *may* take place *after* financial stability is achieved, including owning a house—and when one can pay for a respectable wedding.
- The motivation for women is respectability—and insurance against marital failure.

Edin and Kefalas *Promises I Can Keep*

- Issues with men
 - Gender distrust
 - Substance abuse
 - Domestic violence
 - Criminal behavior
 - Attitudes about gender roles

Top Ranked Problem areas in relationship: TANF Recipients in Oklahoma (Thank you Tony Russell and Kendy Cox) (Sample = 207)

- 44.9 % jealousy
- 38.3 % hard time talking to one another
- 34.6 % family and friends are not supportive of the relationship
- 33.3 % too much arguing
- 29.6 % problems dealing with children
- 28.0 % conflicts about money

Catch 66 (22 X 3): The Loss of Marriage . . .

- Removes from the equation what is arguably the most powerful socializing force (ever) for responsible behavior in men. (see Nock, 1998)
- Removes from couples the most potent symbol of a boundary around their union. (see Stanley, 2002)
- Significantly lessens the likelihood that fathers will identify, over time, with their children because of the easily broken bond with the mother.

Oklahoma Survey (2002): Reasons for respondents' divorces given in percent indicating factor did contribute to divorce, by receipt of government assistance

Reasons For Respondent's Prior Divorce	Percent Indicating "Yes"	
	Never received assistance	Ever received assistance
Lack of commitment	84%	87%
Too much conflict and arguing	54%	70%*
Infidelity or extramarital affairs	54%	64%*
Getting married too young	40%	47%
Little or no helpful premarital preparation	40%	44%
Financial problems or economic hardship	33%	51%*
Domestic violence	17%	47%*
Lack of support from family members	23%	37%*

Johnson, Stanley, Glenn, Amato, Nock, Markman, & Dion, (2002)

Some Implications for Marriage and Relationship Education

The Diversity of "Low Income" Couple Clients

- Clearly Committed Couples
- "Maybe We Will" couples
 - Mutual uncertainty
- Commitment Mismatches:
 - "I would" partner with a "Maybe later, maybe never" partner
- Constraint commitment, only
 - "I stay because I believe I have to stay."

Challenges Cont'd

- Ambiguous commitment between partners and gender distrust
- Child out-of-wedlock and/or having children from prior relationships that have ended
 - 50% of Fragile Family couples have multiple partner fertility (Mincy, 2001)
- Couples where a high percentage of partners have serious problems

Challenges Cont'd

- A history of neglect and abuse in childhood which affects adult relationship choices and patterns severely
 - Cherlin, A., Burton, L., Hurt, T., & Purvin, D. (2004)
- More low income individuals grew up in father-absent homes.
- Lower levels of family and community support
- Overall context of chaotic and stressful life

Best Practices Seek to Link Participants with Other, Potentially Needed Services

- Domestic Violence Services
- Substance abuse treatment
- Mental health treatment
- Financial aids and supports and guidance

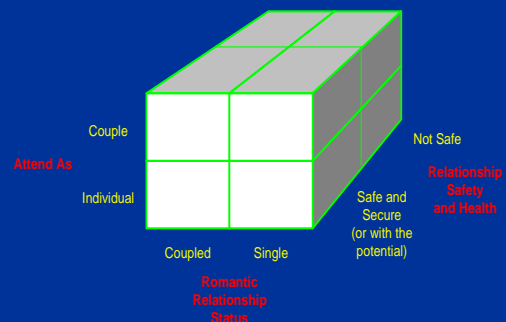
Defining Dimensions of Marriage and Relationship Education Services

Three Defining Dimensions of Relationship Education Services

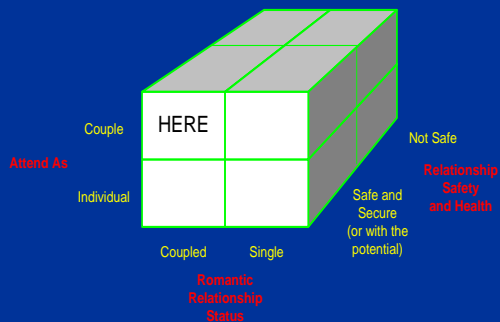
(There are many other important dimensions, as well.)

- **Who Attends The Services?**
 - Is the attendee an individual or a couple?
- **What is the Relationship Status of Client?**
 - Is the attendee in a serious romantic relationship or not?
- **What is the Safety and Health of Relationships?**
 - Is the current relationship (or history) one of general safety or one of danger?

Important Dimensions of Marriage and Relationship Education



The Focus of Most Couple Education is:

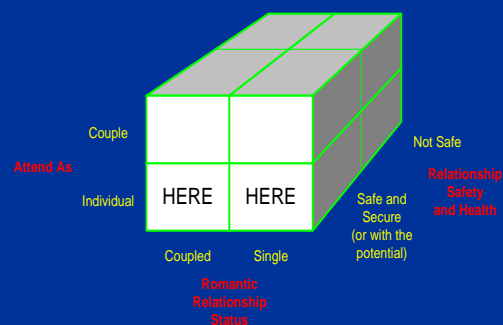


- For low income couples, existing couple education models are/were a good starting place with additional intensity, adjustments for literacy, and very careful adjustments for learning style
- . . . along with adding an additional focus on issues that plague low income couples (at higher base rates), such as:
 - Gender distrust
 - Substance abuse
 - Multiple partner fertility complexity
 - Job, work, and finance related stressors and dynamic

Within My Reach™

PREP's new relationship skills and decision making program for helping *individuals* achieve their goals in relationships, family, and marriage

The Focus of "Within My Reach" is:



- A Focus on the Individual
 - Is part of a comprehensive model of helping more people improve odds of achieving stable, two parent homes in marriage if that is their goal.
 - Has advantages for some people in that it allows issues to be addressed that cannot be addressed as well in couple oriented classes.

Core Development Team

- Authors:
 - Marline Pearson
 - Scott Stanley
 - Galena Kline
 - PREP content and strategies on conflict and communication skill sections, expectations clarification, etc.
- Key Consultation & input:
 - Kathy Edin
 - George Young, Tony Russell, TANF class instructors, and others of OK Marriage Initiative
 - DV experts such as Anne Menard and Mike Johnson
 - Domestic violence advocates
 - Kristin Seefeldt
 - Women who have been through and off Welfare
 - Pilot classes in OK

Overarching Goals

- Help those in viable relationships to cultivate, protect, and stabilize their unions, and to marry if desired.
- Help those in damaging relationships to leave safely, at some point.
- Help those desiring a romantic relationship and/or marriage in the future to choose future partners wisely.

Worth Noting

While *Within My Reach* is focused on the relational life of the participants—and what they might do to make the most effective choices to reach their goals and lower their risks (and those for their children)—one should not assume from that focus that we otherwise do not appreciate the economic needs of those the program is designed to serve. All their efforts to otherwise achieve family health and stability and marriage are more likely to be achieved if they can also make progress economically (and vice versa!).

The Target Population for Within My Reach

- TANF Recipients in TANF Classes regardless of current relationship status and other similar groups
 - Other groups are obvious matches as well.
- Participants attending as individuals, NOT couples

Core Philosophy

- “Your relationships are not neutral.”

“The decisions you makes in romantic attachments will affect every other aspect of life—especially your child’s outcomes, your mental and physical health, and your work success.”

Structure of Curriculum

- 14 hours core material
- Ancillary (and optional) material based on time, format, and program needs (to be developed or added as program is disseminated)
 - Step family (and like) dynamics
 - Fatherhood issues
 - Parenting
 - Money management
 - Etc.

Three Major Sections (Foci)

- ONE: Understanding Relationships, Risk and Choices
- TWO: Maintaining and Building Relationships
- THREE: Moving Forward Toward Goals “Within My Reach”

Major Focus One: Understanding Relationships, Risk and Choices

- What is your five and 10 year vision?
- Partner Choices
- Major risk dynamics
- Knowing self
 - Family of origin influences, personality
 - Expectations and core values

Major Focus Two: Maintaining and Building Relationships

- Conflict dynamics
 - Damage to relationships
 - Effects on children
 - Domestic violence and safety
- Skills for talking without fighting, listening, and being heard
- Broad focus of usefulness of skills in all relationships

Major Focus Three: Moving Forward Toward Goals “Within My Reach”

- Infidelity, trust, and responsibility
- Commitment
- Marriage and children
 - Effects of multiple transitions on children
- Planning for the future
 - Decisions to reach goals
 - Barriers to marriage

Personal Safety

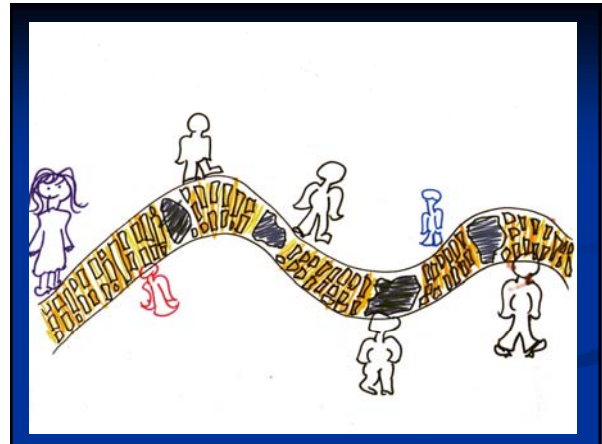
- *Within My Reach* has very strong and clear messages and suggestions about domestic violence and safety throughout the curriculum.
- Developed with much consultation from many experts in this area (and many types of experts).

Sample Strategies and Theory of Risk:

Or, how we teach individuals about sampling probabilities, forecasting, data driven inference, and the importance of trajectories when making partner choices.

- First, we engage participants around their sense of relationships and marriage today.

- They write on this:
- “Think about what you want your life and your relationships to look like 5 or 10 years from now.”



The Major Risk Model in the Focus On Understanding Relationships, Risk and Choices

- The core of the risk model is informed from our research on cohabitation and commitment, e.g.:
 - Stanley, Whitton, & Markman, (2004). Maybe I do: Interpersonal commitment and premarital or nonmarital cohabitation. *Journal of Family Issues*, 25, 496-519.
 - Kline, Stanley, et al. (2004). Timing is everything: Pre-engagement cohabitation and increased risk for poor marital outcomes. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 18, 311-318.
 - Stanley & Markman (1992). Assessing commitment in personal relationships. *Journal of Marriage and The Family*, 54, 595-608.

The Crux of It

- **Sliding vs. Deciding**
 - Our work emphasizes risk is associated with the way transition into cohabitation occur (especially with regard to commitment between partners).
 - Wendy Manning and Pam Smock have found that people slide into cohabitation. Not deliberative.
 - This is consistent with our inertia theory of risks related to cohabitation.

The Crux

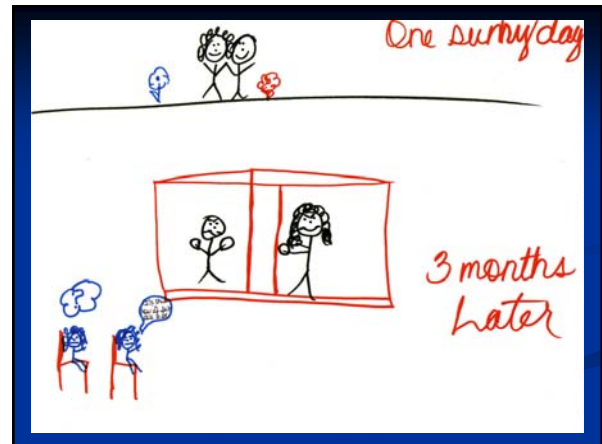
- High risk transitions: Constraints are increased before a clear choice or commitment has been made.
- . . . and, usually before information is gathered that might have led to a different path—a different decision.

To Put It Another Way (There's always another way.)

- Giving up options before making a clear choice is not usually a good thing.
- While some cohabitation dynamics work differently among those in poverty than for others, I believe that this risk dynamic of not making decisions about important transitions will usually universally associated with greater risk—and especially for women. (see Stanley, Kline, & Markman, 2005 paper)

Risk Management

- The key is to having information about the risk of a transition **before** one has gone through it and foreclosed options.
- Sliding-relationship transitions, not decision-based, are becoming common if not the norm for all economic groups . . .
 - . . . **BUT lower income individuals have fewer resources to cope with a loss of any options on a higher risk path.**

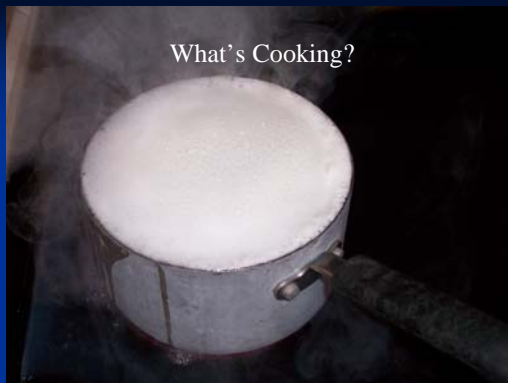


Going Slower and Making Decisions

- Major risk dynamics: e.g.,
 - Safety theory: Three major types of safety
- Knowing self,
 - values,
 - family of origin, personality dynamics
 - Expectations and core beliefs
- **“What do I want to be making decisions about instead of just letting things happen to me?”**

Infatuation Hides Information About Risk or, at Least, About Compatibility

- Serious dangers can be missed.
- This is especially risky when transitions are occurring that are difficult to reverse and high cost, e.g.,
 - Pregnancy
 - Cohabitation, especially if relationship ends up to be dangerous, as cohabitation makes it much harder to exit



Major Focus Three: Moving Forward Toward Goals “Within My Reach”

- Infidelity, trust, and responsibility
- Commitment
- Marriage and children
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Losing the Story of Marriage:

Marline Pearson and Barbara Dafoe Whitehead have focused on this as a cultural phenomenon.

- In some communities, there are none to be seen or touched or experienced.
- As part of a survey we conducted this year in TANF classes in OK (n = 207 so far):
 - 6.6 % had parents who married and stayed married
 - 22.7% of the respondents parents were never married
 - 28.3% of the respondents parents divorced while they were children

- What about the focus toward the future, and marriage?

- **What is the major risk for people who have reasonably healthy relationship with potential for solid future?**

Risks

- If a major risk in partner selection is incurring constraints before making a clear, wise choice, and thereby foreclosing options (and maybe even becoming trapped in a dangerous situation), . . .

Risks

... The major risk for individuals in solid relationships with the potential to make it is similarly expressed:

- If they don't make clear decisions and choices at key times of opportunity, we know they are unlikely to make it together over time—they are not likely to make it to marriage even though they express the desire to do so.

www.PREPinC.com

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