

Healthy Marriages, Relationships and
Families: Interventions, Research and Policy Course

Week _____



African American
Couples and
Families



Promoting Child Welfare: Training Professionals to Support Healthy Marriages, Relationships and Families Project.

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Project Mission: To develop curricula and provide training for students and professionals that enhance their ability to facilitate healthy marriages, relationships and families in the child welfare population, with the end goal of promoting and improving the well-being of children.

Project funded by the US Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families.
Oct. 2003 – Sept. 2008



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U.S. Department of Health & Human Services
Administration for Children & Families

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Course Objectives Covered:

-  Learn and apply assessment tools, skills, and practices appropriate to the target population for couples, children and families as a whole in order to discern challenges and supports to family health, well-being and formation.
-  Demonstrate the ability to apply knowledge of the best practices to assessing, choosing and adapting to target population marital and relationship enrichment, education and skill building programs.
-  Demonstrate an understanding of the continuum from traditional to acculturated values, norms, beliefs and behaviors of major ethnic groups in the provision of child welfare services.



Topics to Be Covered

- ❑ African Americans in America
- ❑ Variables that Impact Understanding
- ❑ Common circumstances among African Americans
- ❑ Cultural Values
- ❑ Barriers to Intervention
- ❑ Recommended Adaptations and Program Content/Methodology



Caveats

- Culture is a broad-based, multidimensional concept comprised of a host of interrelated dimensions (race, religion, gender, poverty, etc.) It is complex, fluid and dialectical. Culture is a powerful organizing principle in human lives. (Hardy and Laszoffy, 2002).
- It is important to understand the culture of a particular group of people that you are working with and to develop effective skills for working with them. It is equally important *not to use your knowledge to stereotype or oppress people* based on these collective characteristics and behaviors gleaned from research. This work is based on patterns. All patterns have exceptions. Treat people as individuals and with dignity and respect. (Know your professional code of ethics.) (Payne et. Al, 2005)

Black Americans

- ❑ About 12.3% (2000 Census) of the American people consider themselves Black.
- ❑ Most are African Americans, descendants of slaves brought to the USA from 1620's – 1860's.
- ❑ Black Americans can also be first or second generation immigrants from the Caribbean and from Africa.
 - ❑ Immigration of Blacks to the United States is often due to political instability or persecution in their homeland or for economic opportunity.
 - ❑ Caribbean includes Puerto Rico, Jamaica, Haiti, Cuba, etc.
 - ❑ African immigrants are from a wide variety of countries on the continent of Africa.



African Americans and Marriage

- 42% of African American adults are married, compared to 61% of whites and 59% of Hispanics (2003).
- 48% of AA households are headed by married couples compared to 76% for all American families.
 - Dropped from 78% in 1950.

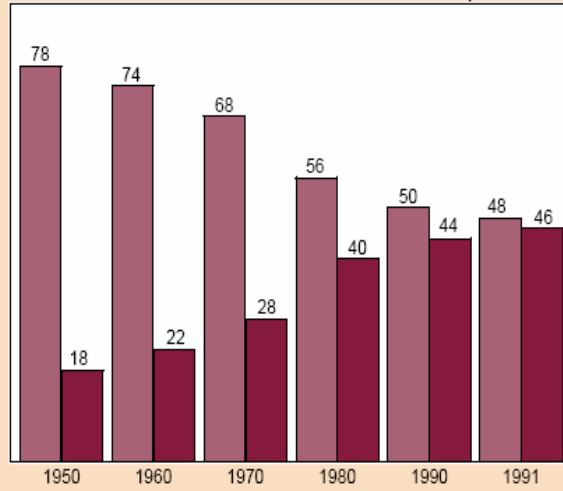
(Malone-Colon, 2007)

US HSS Healthy Marriage
Initiative 2006

Changes in Family Composition

Percent of Black families, by type of householder: 1950 to 1991

Married-couple
Female householder, no husband present



Bureau of the Census

Marriage among Blacks in America has been on the decline. **While**

Divorce and separation rates
Cohabitation
Out-of-wedlock births
Children residing in female-headed
households



Have all increased.

***Yet most African Americans still value
and desire marriage***

(Malone-Colon, 2007)



African Americans and Marriage

- ❑ 12% divorce rate for African American couples compared to 10% for whites and 7% for Hispanics (2003).
- ❑ 69% of births are to unmarried women, compared to 29% and 44% for Caucasian and Hispanic women respectively (2003).

US HHS Healthy Marriage
Initiative 2006



Economic Resources Impact Marital Quality of AA Couples

Economic resources include income, liabilities and non-financial resources.

For husbands, economic resources are important predictors of marital quality among low-income groups.

Lower economic status engenders a state of vulnerability that renders the marriage more susceptible to other stressors.

(Clark – Nicolas and Gray-Little, 1991)

Top 5 Causes of Marital Instability among African Americans

(Lawson and Thompson, 1999)

□ Financial Strain

- a) Need to work many hours and multiple jobs diminishes shared time.
- b) Intermittent and frequent unemployment as well as underemployment.
- c) Guilt in not providing.
- d) Unemployment decreases self-respect and ability to command respect from family and community.



Marital Instability, continued.

- ❑ Divergent spending practices, differing ideas about what is important.



- ❑ Issues as described in the “Marriage is for White People” article by Joy Jones.

- ❑ Women’s growing economic independence.
- ❑ Erosion of Black males ability to contribute substantially to the family including areas of economics, mortality, and availability.
- ❑ Multi-partner fertility.

(Lawson and Thompson, 1999)

Availability includes – issues related to incarceration, dropping out of the education system, need to nurture multiple children from multiple relationships, etc.



Marital Instability continued

❑ **Changing Values**

- ❑ In past, there was a belief that the capacity to appreciate and give love was a legitimate measure of worth.
- ❑ With assimilation in to larger society, money and jobs determine self-worth. Where does this leave the Black male?

❑ **Personal Incompatibility and Negotiation of Conflict**

- ❑ Greater assault and murder rate among AA couples than other races.

(Lawson and Thompson, 1999)



Between 1940 and 1990

The percentage of Black children living with both parents dropped from 75.8% to 33.2%, largely because of increases in never-married Black mothers.

- During this period African Americans reported more spousal abuse.
- Singles and couples reported less connection to relatives.
- Blacks who married (and stay married) increasingly indicated less marital satisfaction.

(Malone-Colon, 2007)



African American children living with their own married parents

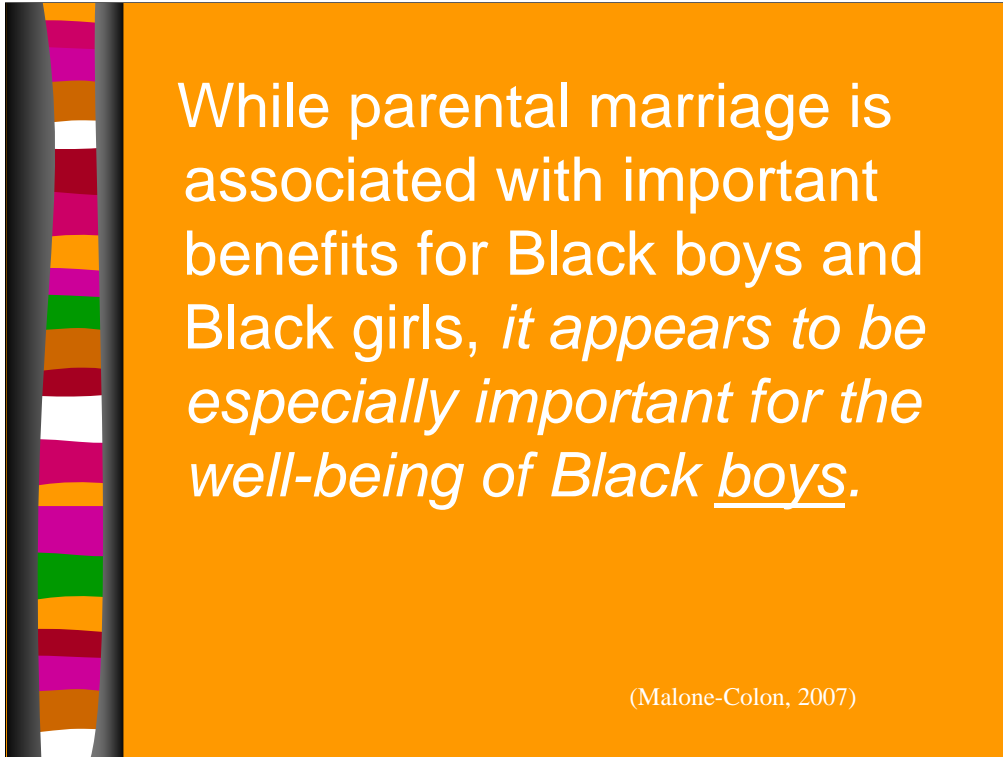
Are less likely to

- Live in poverty.
- Be involved in the juvenile justice system.

Are more likely to have

- Better health outcomes, especially for infants.
- More parental involvement.
- Higher self-esteem.
- A greater chance of delaying sexual activity and therefore less likely to have children as teens.

(Malone-Colon, 2007)



Due to greater male involvement and better household economics.

Research suggests that higher Black marriage rates appear to inhibit crime in largely Black communities.

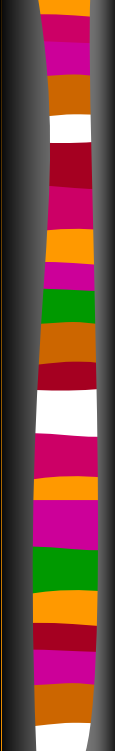
In the African American community, is marriage unattainable or unnecessary?

- ❑ Women have more options for economic and family independence.
- ❑ Multi-partner fertility makes relationships & families more complex.
- ❑ AA men often cannot be the providers they need to be because of the consequences of racism & oppression.
- ❑ Fatherhood is more important than marriage among AA young men.



Joy Jones, Washington Post March 26, 2006

Or a little of
both?




Wary of Marriage: Black teens reveal pessimistic take on institution.

What do you think are the macro and micro issues that are driving this pessimism?

If you were a practitioner which of the culturally competent guiding principles might you incorporate in a relationship education program for working with AA teens or offering therapeutic services?

After reading this provocative article, what research areas might surface that could be explored either in a quantitative or qualitative fashion?

(www.boston.com on 9/25/06)



Have students read and refer to the article by Vanessa E. Jones of the Boston Globe featured in the Post-Standard on Sunday, August 20, 2006 and titled “Wary of Marriage: Black teens reveal pessimistic take on institution.” Retrieved on September 25, 2006 from www.boston.com

If you were a practitioner, which of the culturally competent guiding principles might you incorporate in either developing a relationship education program for working with AA teens or offering therapeutic services?

After reading this provocative article, what research areas might surface could be explored either in a quantitative or qualitative fashion?



Youth: Family and Relationships

Importance of Parents, Family and Relationships -

Parents are seen as an overwhelmingly positive influence in the lives of most young people.

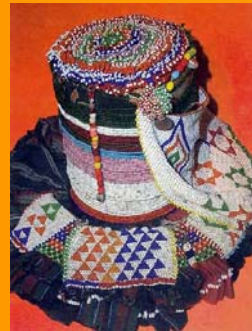
Remarkably, nearly half of respondents mention at least one of their parents as a hero. When asked "What one thing in life makes you most happy?" 46 percent of respondents say spending time with friends, family and loved ones. 30 percent of blacks and Hispanics identified family as the one thing in life that brings them the most happiness, compared with 15 percent of whites.

(MTV Study on Happiness, 2007)

Zulu Proverb

“Ubuntu”

*Meaning: We are who we are today
because of you who came before
us.*



Variables That Impact Understanding

- ❑ The legacy of slavery in eroding marital ties and breaking families apart.
- ❑ Impact of racial discrimination on couple and family relationships.
- ❑ Immigration and Refugee Status.
 - ❑ Separation of families
- ❑ Effects of matriarchy on male-female relationships.
- ❑ Gender distrust and infidelity.



(Ooms, 2007)

POLICY: ACF Healthy Marriage Initiative African Americans

- ❑ Seeks to improve child-well being by helping those who choose marriage for themselves to develop the skills and knowledge necessary to form and sustain healthy marriages.
 - ❑ Promotes culturally competent strategy for African Americans.
- ❑ Based on research that shows a strong correlation between family structure and a family's social and economic well-being.



(Administration for Children and Families,
Healthy Marriage Initiative)

Goals of the African American Healthy Marriage Initiative

- Improved child well-being.
- Responsible fatherhood.
- Healthy marriages.
- Stronger African American families.
- Stronger African American communities.



(Administration for Children and Families,
Healthy Marriage Initiative)

Cultural Resiliency: Strengths to Build On

- ❑ Strength and support of the extended family. Kinship Networks.
- ❑ Strong commitment to children.
- ❑ Respect for self and others.
- ❑ Service to others and responsibility.
- ❑ Flexible family roles.
- ❑ Cooperation and belonging. Importance of bonding rituals and traditions.
- ❑ Deep spiritual connection and values.
- ❑ High aspirations for learning and work.



(Alford 2003)



I am because we are, and because we are, therefore I am.

- Africentric tenets of collectivity and interconnectedness are important to understand.
 - There is no harmony without the collective harmony and positive relations that are necessary parts of relational activity. It is not survival of the fittest but achievement by the many.
 - Feelings and emotions are as valid as knowing.
 - Collective responsibility means taking care of each other and sharing the joys and traumas. Minimizes alienation and isolation, and increases support for each other when racist and oppressive environments become overwhelming.

(Alford 2003 & Manning 2004)

Understanding the impact of racism and oppression on the couple relationship

- Stressors of social roles undermine the partner role.
- Efforts to manage these stressors can push
 - Hard work into driven dedication.
 - Becoming strong and tough into domination and abuse of power.
 - Flexibility into disorganization and inconsistency.
 - Caution into immobilization, passivity or withdrawal.



(Pinderhughes, 2002)



In the face of racism and oppression, African American Couples must

- Manage anger and frustration stemming from social causes so that the couple's closeness is not destroyed by projecting these on to the relationship.
- Channel their anger and frustration in ways that do not cause ill health or abuse of self and others.
- Learn to maintain relationships in the face of ongoing disruptive circumstances (i.e. unemployment).

(Pinderhughes, 2002)



Program Implications: Therapy

- Help the couple understand how racism and oppression may be operative in their relationship problems. Understand the significance of context.
 - Issues such as finances & employment, power, partnership, nurturing and companionship are all contextually loaded.
- Increase understanding about how their expectations of one another have been shaped by their social roles and identities.

(Pinderhughes, 2002)

Therapy continued:

- Using narrative concepts in therapy will help couple's clarify –
 - Perceptions and beliefs about their experience and problems.
 - Understand the sources that are often connected with socialization and dominant societal messages.
 - Develop alternative perspectives that will facilitate more harmonious behaviors and improved relationships.
- Support the values of collectivism and spirituality by encouraging couples to connect with support groups and religious organizations in their community.



(Pinderhughes, 2002)

Education Program Implications

Incorporate topics especially germane to many urban, low-income African Americans including

- Multiple-partner parenting.
- Stress reduction.
- Male unemployment.
- Domestic violence issues.
- Involvement in the justice, juvenile justice and child support systems.



(Ooms, 2007)

The Important Role of Churches in Black Communities

Churches are a critical resource to the Black community and are uniquely situated to make an impact.



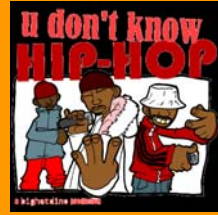
- Marriage is valued and they are in the “business” of creating marriages.
- Church members as role models.
- Offering and Supporting bonding rituals and traditions.

Consider and pursue collaborations, not just for members of a church but for the general community as well.

(Franklin 2004 & Ooms 2007)

Program Implications continued

- Understand the specific cultural nuances in contemporary African-American Youth (hip-hop and others) and avoid making premature negative judgments about elements of this subculture.
- Expand the concept of “cultural competence” to include the significance of spiritual resources and grounds for marriage and family. Adapt materials accordingly.



(Franklin, 2004)

Program Implications continued

Curriculum should address barriers to marriage

- Unemployment.
- Financial Management.
- Building and repairing trust.
- Complexities of negotiating parenting roles, behaviors and expectations with extended families, co-parents of previous unions and current partners.



(Ooms, 2007)



Promising Programs

- *African American Marriage Education and Relationships Enhancement. The African American Family Life Education Program.* Indiana University.
www.aafle.org
- *Exploring Relationships and Marriage with Fragile Families.* (A part of the Building Strong Families project) Center for Fathers, Families and Workforce Development. www.cfwd.org.

The *African American Marriage Enrichment Program*® is a research based, skills building curriculum designed to help individual's establish intimate relationship. Additionally, the curriculum assists couples who desire to build satisfying marriages.

The curriculum is on the cutting edge as it openly and interactively engages and guides participants through an eight (8) week course conducted by a trained AAFLE Certified Family Life Educator.

Class titles include:

1. Roadmap to a Relationship
2. The ABC's of an African American Good Thing
3. Effects of Racism on African American "Good Things" Thinking, Feeling and Behaving Part A
4. Effects of Racism on African American "Good Things" Thinking, Feeling and Behaving Part B
5. Being Men and Women in African American Good Things Part A
6. Being Men and Women in African American Good Things Part B
7. New Promises, Marital Satisfaction; What's Love Got To Do With It?
8. The Marriage Commitment or Re-commitment Ceremony

CFWD's **Baltimore Building Strong Families (BBSF)** program seeks to *enhance the health and well-being of children in Baltimore through the provision of an array of family support services and relationship education skills that help parents strengthen their couple relationship and sustain a healthy marriage if they choose to wed.*

As part of a nationwide initiative under the auspices of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), Administration for Children and Families (ACF) and Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. (MPR), the BBSF program assists low- income parents in gaining healthy relationship skills in order to achieve better outcomes for their children.

The program targets unmarried couples between the ages of 18 and 35 who are expecting or have children younger than 3 months. Couples enrolled in the program attend 22 sessions of the *Loving Couples, Loving Children* curriculum which focuses on conflict resolution, communication between parents, and effective parenting. Couples also receive assistance with:

Job Readiness and Employment Placement

Education

Housing

Childcare

Conflict Management

Child support intervention



Promising Programs cont.

Within My Reach at www.prepinc.com

This program is an adaptation of the widely used PREP program designed specifically for the needs of economically disadvantaged populations. In addition to lessons typical of PREP It includes information on how to cultivate, protect and stabilize their union, how to be safe in relationships and how to choose future partners.

Your love life is not neutral.

What happens in ones romantic attachments will affect the possibility of success in every other aspect of life-especially in child rearing and employment. Success in life on virtually every dimension depends on success in relationships, or at the very least, the absence of high danger or derailment of personal goals due to problems in personal relationships.

Therefore, based on relevant research and the expertise of leading scholars and providers, Dr. Scott Stanley, Marline Pearson, Galena Kline, the PREP team, and colleagues have developed a **strategic new curriculum to improve the chances for the economically disadvantaged to attain relationship success for themselves and their children.**

This new research-informed program, Within My Reach, seeks to help:

Those in viable relationships, to cultivate, protect, and stabilize their union, including reaching for their dreams of eventually being married if they desire:

Those in damaging relationships to leave safely; and/or

Those who desire a romantic relationship and/or marriage in the future to choose partners wisely: to decide about, rather than slide through, major relationship transitions.

Recommended Reading



- Clark-Nichols, P., and Gray-Little, B. (1991). Effect of economic resources on marital quality in black married couples. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 53, 645-655.
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View Video – Soul Food to lead off discussion on oppression and its impact on AA couples.



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