

Factors Associated With Involvement in Marriage Preparation Programs

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Abstract: Little is known empirically about the characteristics of couples who do and do not participate in marriage preparation. This study assessed the individual, couple, family, and sociocultural context variables that distinguish couples who become involved in marriage preparation from those who do not, using a sample of 7,331 couples. The results showed that the individual characteristics of valuing marriage, being kind and considerate, and being mature, and the couple context factor of perceived relationship problems, predicted involvement. Implications for increasing attendance in marriage preparation interventions include maximizing efforts to reach the “likely-to-attend group,” as identified in our findings. With this base of support for the value of interventions, we can then look to the less-likely-to-attend group, who will take more resources of time, energy, and money to get to attend.

Key Words: couples, marriage, marriage education, marriage preparation programs.

Marriage preparation programs, especially those in noncaptive educational settings, suffer from “underwhelming participation” (Bowman & Kieren, 1985; Silliman & Schumm, 2000). For instance, two decades ago, Olson (1983) estimated only 30% of couples who marry had participated in even 1 – 2 hr of marriage preparation. A more recent national study (Stanley & Markman, 1997) found that 36% of couples who married in the last 5 years received church-affiliated premarital counseling. This relatively low participation rate persists notwithstanding evidence of its benefits to couples (Carroll & Doherty, 2003; Giblin, Sprenkle, & Sheehan, 1985; Stanley, 2001; Stanley & Markman; Williams, Riley, Risch, & Van Dyke, 1999). These benefits include enhanced conflict management skills, higher dedication to one’s mate, greater positivity in marriage, and, longitudinally, potentially reduced chances for divorce (see Stanley, for a review).

As evidence of the benefits of marriage preparation continues to mount, so does the importance of investigating the characteristics of those who participate and do not participate in marriage preparation

(Sullivan & Bradbury, 1997). Currently, more emphasis is paid to assessing program outcomes in marriage education than to systematically determining the characteristics of the audience (DeMaria, 2005), thus little is known empirically about the characteristics of couples who do and do not participate in marriage preparation. Understanding the characteristics of a target audience is critical to the development of targeted programs (Dumka, Roosa, Michaels, & Suh, 1995; Hawkins, Carroll, Doherty, & Willoughby, 2004; Jacobs, 1988), marketing the programs to those who need them (Weinrich, 1999), and ensuring that the resulting programs are relevant and are based on identified needs of the audience (Duncan & Goddard, 2005).

The purpose of the current study was to identify the individual, couple, family, and social context factors that distinguish couples who participate in marriage preparation from those who do not. The findings have implications for how marriage preparation programs might be developed and marketed to reach those who may benefit from them.

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Characteristics of Marriage Preparation Participants

Some efforts have been made to identify characteristics of participants in marriage preparation programs. For example, in two investigations, Sullivan and Bradbury (1997) assessed the association of involvement in premarital counseling with age, income, education, parental divorce, marital satisfaction, neuroticism, stress level, physical aggression, and impulsivity. Results from their first study largely supported no differences between the groups on these factors. The sole differences between participating and nonparticipating couples were on husband's income and wives' education: husbands with higher income and wives with more education characterized participation in premarital counseling. Results from their second study likewise supported the null finding among wives, but participating husbands were older, were better educated, and had higher marital satisfaction, lower marital aggression, and lower neuroticism scores than nonparticipants.

In a similar but more recent study in Australia, Halford, O'Donnell, Lizzio, and Wilson (2006) assessed 374 newlywed couples on several factors including religious service attendance, income, age, education, female parental divorce, male parental aggression, cohabitation before marriage, forming a stepfamily, relationship aggression, and relationship satisfaction. Attendance in marriage preparation was associated with religious service attendance and with not cohabiting.

Finally in a larger scale study (Stanley, Amato, Johnson, & Markman, 2006) of over 3,000 randomly identified adults across four U.S. states (Oklahoma, Kansas, Arkansas, and Texas), findings revealed that the odds of premarital education attendance increased among individuals married within a religious setting and who were better educated but decreased among those who had ever received public assistance. Blacks were less likely and Latinos more likely than Whites to have received premarital education.

As important as this previous research has been, much of it suffers from several limitations. For one thing, many of these researchers focused on a limited set of factors they often called risk factors. However, for the field to arrive at a fuller explanation of the mosaic of factors that predict couple involvement in marriage preparation requires a more comprehensive investigation that attends to the multiple systemic contexts of a couple's experience. An additional

limitation in nearly all the investigations was the use of a smaller recruited sample. Therefore, the question of what factors predict involvement in marriage preparation needs attention in a sample that overcomes some of these limitations.

Given the limited number of empirical studies and the noted limits of those few studies, broad generalizations are difficult to make with much confidence. However, it is clear that participants are not simply randomly attending marital preparation interventions. The previous research suggests that a number of factors from individual, couple, familial, and sociocultural contexts are involved. Therefore, we turn to theory for help in identifying possible predictors of attendance.

Theoretical Framework

Busby, Holman, and Taniguchi (2001) and Holman and Associates (2001) summarized over 50 years of research on the premarital predictors of marital quality. They suggested that this research can best be understood from an ecosystemic developmental perspective. This perspective suggests that the premarital predictors of later marital quality can be organized into a model comprised of individual contexts, couple contexts, family background contexts, and sociocultural contexts. Although numerous contexts could be assessed and related to participation in marriage preparation, this model identifies the most important contexts for premarital and marital relationships (Holman and Associates). The *individual context* comprises inherent individual characteristics (e.g., age, gender), personality traits (e.g., kindness, neuroticism), and beliefs and attitudes (e.g., beliefs about marriage and family life, gender roles). The *couple context* comprises interaction patterns or processes, either positive or negative, such as communication, ways of handling conflict, and affect regulation. The *family background context* is made up of factors such as the style and quality of the parents' couple relationship and the parent-child relationship, whereas the *sociocultural context* includes variables such as social network support, race, and socioeconomic status.

Purpose of the Study

On the basis of our theoretical framework, we examined many of the known individual, couple, family,

and social context predictors of later marital quality, hypothesizing that a number of these factors would distinguish attenders of marital preparation interventions from nonattenders. Existing research supports the possibility that several factors from one or more of these contextual areas could emerge as predictors.

Method

Participants

Our convenience sample from all parts of the United States was composed of 7,331 couples, who are part of a larger study of relationship formation, mate selection, and prediction of marital/relationship quality (see Holman and Associates, 2001, for a description of the larger study). Males in the sample averaged 27.9 years of age ($SD = 8.8$). With regard to education, 8% of male respondents had high school diplomas or lower, 54.5% had some college education or associate degrees, and 37.6% had bachelor or graduate degrees. Just over 28% (28.2) of the fathers of these respondents reportedly had high school diplomas or lower, 21.4% had some college education or associate degrees, and 50.4% had bachelor or graduate degrees; just over 32% (32.4) of male respondents' mothers had high school diplomas or lower, 30.6% had some college education or associate degrees, and 37% had bachelor or graduate degrees. In terms of income, just under 40% (39.7%) of male respondents reported personal yearly incomes of \$14,999 or less, just under 30% (29.8%) reported incomes of between \$15,000 and \$39,999, 18.7% reported incomes of between \$40,000 and \$74,999, and 11.8% reported incomes of \$75,000 to more than \$100,000. Just over 16% (16.2%) of male respondents reported their father's income as \$14,999 or less annually, 20.6% between \$15,000 and \$39,999, 33.6% between \$40,000 and \$74,999, and 29.6% between \$75,000 and \$100,000; 44% of these respondents reported their mother's income as \$14,999 or less, 36.7% between \$15,000 and \$39,999, 15.3% between \$40,000 and \$74,999, and 4% between \$75,000 and \$100,000. Ethnicity of male respondents was comprised of 2.7% African, 2.2% Asian, 85.7% Caucasian (White), 1.3% American Indian, 3.9% Latino, 1.9% mixed/biracial, and 2.3% others.

Females in the sample averaged 26.1 years of age ($SD = 8.3$). With regard to education, 4.8% of

female respondents had high school diplomas or lower, 60.1% had some college education or associate degrees, and 37.6% had bachelor or graduate degrees. Just under 26% (25.8) of the fathers of these female respondents reportedly had high school diplomas or lower, 22.1% had some college education or associate degrees, and 52.2% had bachelor or graduate degrees; just under 29% (28.8) of these respondents' mothers had high school diplomas or lower, 33% had some college education or associate degrees, and 38.2% had bachelor or graduate degrees. Over half (58.7%) of female respondents reported personal yearly incomes of \$14,999 or less, another fourth (24.9%) reported incomes of between \$15,000 and \$39,999, and the remaining percentage (16.4%) reported incomes of between \$40,000 and \$100,000. Over 15% (15.3%) of these respondents reported father income as \$14,999 or less annually, 19% between \$15,000 and \$39,999, 34.2% between \$40,000 and \$74,999, and 31.2% between \$75,000 and \$100,000. Forty-five percent of female respondents reported their mother's income as \$14,999 or less annually, 34.4% between \$15,000 and \$39,999, 16.7% between \$40,000 and \$74,999, and 3.9% between \$75,000 and \$100,000. Ethnicity of female respondents was comprised of 1.9% African, 3.1% Asian, 86.7% Caucasian (White), 1.1% American Indian, 3.6% Latino, 1.9% mixed/biracial, and 1.7% others. A vast majority of respondents of both genders (82.2% male and 81.1% female) were affiliated with a church.

Procedure

Data were collected using a relationship survey called the RELATionship Evaluation (RELATE; Busby et al., 2001). The purpose of this survey is twofold, serving both as an outreach tool to help couples learn about their relationships and as a tool to gather relationship data. RELATE contains 271 questions designed to measure respondents' perceptions about themselves, their partners, and the relationship. Questions focus on the four contextual areas discussed above that are predictive of marital quality (Holman and Associates, 2001), including individual characteristics (personality, styles of interacting, values, and beliefs), couple characteristics (couple communication, patterns of relating, and conflict resolution), family background (parent's couple relationship, parent-child relationships, and

overall family tone), and sociocultural context (social support, race, socioeconomic status, religion, and cultural beliefs). RELATE was administered as a paper-pencil survey from 1997 to 2000, then beginning in 2001, data were also gathered online at the RELATE Web site (www.relate-institute.org). RELATE is generally administered as part of a college course on family relationships, in a workshop setting, or in a counseling setting, although some couples take RELATE after simply finding it on the Internet. Each partner in a couple is instructed to complete the survey on his or her own, after which the couple receives a detailed printout including information about different aspects of the relationship on the basis of their answers to the survey (for more information on RELATE, see Busby et al.).

Preliminary Treatment of Data and Measures

Because RELATE is a large comprehensive assessment of premarital relationships assessing upwards of 60 self- and partner predictors of marital quality, there are multiple indicators of the factors noted above and organized under the rubric of our four contexts theoretical model—family contexts, individual contexts, couple contexts, and sociocultural contexts. Because of the large number of possible explanatory variables, some preliminary analyses were conducted to reduce the number of variables. The first preliminary analysis was a series of confirmatory factor analyses (CFAs) using the Mplus program (see <http://www.statmodel.com/>) to examine the measurement of the latent constructs in the RELATE inventory. Mplus is a relatively new program and is described by its creators as “a comprehensive modeling program that integrates random effect, factor, and latent class analysis in both cross-sectional and longitudinal settings and for both single-level and multi-level data” (see <http://www.statmodel.com/>). The same constructs for both dyad members were included in the model, and the measurement errors for the corresponding items for males and females were correlated. This approach is commonly used in order to accommodate the interdependence of the dyadic data (Kenny, Kashy, & Cook, 2006). Seven latent variables for each gender were hypothesized to contain all possible predictive factors derived from our theoretical model. The variables were specified as ordinal in these analyses and the factor scores for these constructs were obtained. The factor scores are normally distributed and

continuous and do not have the limitations of raw scores, such as nonnormality and bias against extreme individuals (Takane & DeLeeuw, 1987; Wright, 1999).

Each latent construct subjected to CFA was made up of the specific items used to indicate higher order constructs developed through exploratory factor analyses and alpha reliability analyses during the construct development phase of RELATE (see Busby et al., 2001, for a further explanation). We identified seven latent constructs that met our fit criteria and were indicative of our theoretical levels. The first three latent variables were indicators of the individual context, the fourth latent variable is from the family process context, and the last three latent variables were indicative of the couple context. Because of space limitations, the full description of all the RELATE items or scales acting as indicator variables cannot be given. Readers are encouraged to consult Busby et al. or contact the second author for further information.

The first latent variable subjected to CFA involved the following indicators of the individual context and represent related personality features: kindness, extroversion, and neuroticism. This first latent variable is reflected by both self-reports and the same indicators reflected by partners' reports. Errors of items of the self-reports were also correlated with the same items of partners' reports in this and the next analysis. The measurement model of these constructs fits the data satisfactorily ($\chi^2 = 10,769.28$, $df = 531$, $p = .00$, Comparative Fit Index = .90, Tucker-Lewis Index = .95, Root Mean Square Error of Approximation = .05).

The second CFA included the following individual context indicators and also features of individual personality: flexibility, maturity, happiness, and self-esteem reflected by both self-reports and the same constructs reflected by partners' reports. These are indicators of a second aspect of the individual characteristic domain. This model also fits the data very well ($\chi^2 = 5,826.57$, $df = 456$, $p = .00$, CFI = .95, TLI = .99, RMSEA = .04).

The third CFA included the individual context indicators of values regarding importance of marriage, gender-based marital and parental roles, labor force participation, importance of money and material things, and autonomy. These are indicators of a third aspect of the individual characteristic domain. Once more, this model fits the data very well ($\chi^2 = 7,438.89$, $df = 376$, $p = .00$, CFI = .92, TLI = .97, RMSEA = .05).

The only latent variable from the family context included indicators of overall evaluation of family process, parent's marriage, father-child relationships, mother-child relationships, current impact of family on respondent and relationships, and self- and partner's autonomy from families of origin. These are indicators of one aspect of the family background domain. This model fits the data also very well ($\chi^2 = 5,547.44$, $df = 223$, $p = .00$, CFI = .96, TLI = .99, RMSEA = .06).

The fifth CFA from the couple context arena included positive communication indicators: empathetic communication, love, and clear sending, as reported by both selves and partners. These are indicators of one aspect of the couple context domain. This model once again fits the data very well ($\chi^2 = 5,317.35$, $df = 251$, $p = .00$, CFI = .93, TLI = .99, RMSEA = .05).

The sixth CFA included negative communication indicators: criticism/contempt/defensiveness, stonewalling, and flooding as were measured in both selves and partners self-reports. These are indicators of a second aspect of the couple context domain. This model fits the data very well ($\chi^2 = 5,317.35$, $df = 251$, $p = .00$, CFI = .93, TLI = .99, RMSEA = .05).

Finally, the seventh CFA included the following indicators: marital satisfaction, physical and sexual abuse, problem areas, and realistic expectation. These are indicators of a third aspect of the couple context domain. This model also fits the data very well ($\chi^2 = 8,870.15$, $df = 407$, $p = .00$, CFI = .90, TLI = .98, RMSEA = .05).

Interestingly, there were no latent variables that met our data fit criteria from the sociocultural context. Therefore, this theoretical area is not represented in the analyses.

Thus, these analyses examined the measurement of the latent factors and reduced the number of measures of factors from dozens of raw items to latent factor scores as byproducts for both genders—seven for males and seven for females. Furthermore, by using CFA in the Mplus environment, we moved from the use of raw, noninterval, nonnormally distributed scores to factor scores that are normally distributed and continuous, thus facilitating greater precision.

The second preliminary analysis was a binary logistic regression analysis (backward stepwise variable selection) conducted to screen out the nonsignificant predictors, with the couple attendance of marriage preparation as the dependent variable. The

couple attendance variable was dichotomous such that either both couple members had attended or were currently attending a marriage preparation or neither couple member had ever attended nor was currently attending marriage preparation. The factor scores of all 14 contexts were used as predictors. Predictors were eliminated from the logistic model if the Wald test indicated a greater than .10 significance level. A total of 8 of the 14 factors (4 each for the males and females) were retained (see Table 1).

The predictors retained in the second preliminary analysis were selected for the final structural equation modeling (SEM). Couple attendance was the endogenous variable, and couple attendance was assessed by asking, "Have you been involved in a class, workshop, or counseling designed to help you prepare for marriage?" The response categories were "No," "Yes, I was involved in a class, workshop, or counseling in the past," or "Yes, I am currently involved in such a class, workshop or counseling." We combined these two "Yes" responses to create a dichotomous variable with *Yes* and *No* as the two values. These "yes" categories were combined because it was hypothesized that because involvement was the key endogenous variable, it would make little difference whether that involvement was in current or past marriage preparation offerings.

The factors measured with indicators in Table 1 were the exogenous latent variables. If a factor of either partner was significant ($p < .10$) in the logistic model, the same factor from the other partner was included in the SEM to take into account the interdependence of the couple data and possible bias of omitting one partner's effect. A less stringent .10 alpha level was selected because of Type II error concerns or the failure to detect an important effect, which we considered appropriate at this phase of analysis. It was considered a better strategy to carry forward something that may not turn out to be useful than to leave out something that might be important.

Results

The overarching purpose of the current study was to answer the question: What individual, couple, family, and sociocultural context variables distinguish between couples who become involved in marriage preparation versus those who do not? To answer this question, we used SEM to test the relationships

Table 1. *Factor Structure of Study Variables*

Factors	Item Content	Factor Loadings (Male)	Factor Loadings (Female)
Marital importance	It is perfectly normal to never want to get married	.56	.57
	Being married is among the one or two most important things in life	.63	.61
	If I had an unhappy marriage and neither counseling nor other actions helped, my spouse and I would be better off if we divorced (recoded)	.60	.57
	Once I make the choice to marry, divorce is never an option	.63	.58
	Marriage involves a covenant with god not just a legal contract recognized by the law	.81	.79
	Living together is an acceptable alternative to marriage	.87	.85
	Relationship problems	Financial matters	.65
Having children		.55	.55
Rearing children		.66	.67
Intimacy/sexuality		.69	.68
Parents/in-laws		.50	.51
Roles (who does what)		.81	.78
Weight		.57	.57
Who is in charge		.77	.73
Time spent together		.52	.52
Partner's kindness	Considerate	.79	.83
	Loving	.81	.81
	Kind	.86	.86
	Friendly	.78	.70
Maturity	Fight with others/lose temper	.84	.86
	Easily irritated or mad	.80	.76

Note. $\chi^2 = 2,618.203$, $df = 285$, $p < .000$, Comparative Fit Index (CFI) = .970, Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI) = .986, Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) = .033.

between the exogenous variables listed in Table 1 and the endogenous variable of couple attendance.

We first tested the measurement model. Table 1 shows the item content and the standardized loadings of the factors used in the SEM. The goodness of fit indices and factor loadings show that the constructs are measured very well ($\chi^2 = 2,618.203$, $df = 285$, $p < .000$, CFI = .970, TLI = .986, RMSEA = .033). The correlations of the factors are listed in Table 2.

Second, we tested the full structural model. The final SEM fits the data also very well ($\chi^2 = 2,704.478$, $df = 296$, $p < .000$, CFI = .969, TLI = .986, RMSEA = .033) and the R^2 of the dependent

variable was .281. Because the endogenous dependent variable was dichotomous, we were able to examine not only the path coefficients but also the odds ratios. These results are reported in Table 3.

All eight predictors entered into the model make significant contributions at $p < .05$. The best predictor of couple attendance at a marriage preparation course was the importance female respondents placed on marriage, such that the greater the importance she placed on marriage, the more likely the couple had attended a marriage preparation course. Furthermore, there was a 34% increase in the likelihood of attendance by couples on the basis of one unit of change in importance of marriage. There was

Table 2. *Correlations of Study Variables*

	Marital Importance (Male)	Marital Importance (Female)	Problems (Male)	Problems (Female)	Partner's Kindness (Male)	Partner's Kindness (Female)	Maturity (Male)
Marital importance (female)	.85**						
Problems (male)	-.18**	-.14**					
Problems (female)	-.14**	-.17**	.69**				
Partner's kindness (male)	.28**	.25**	-.51**	-.44**			
Partner's kindness (female)	.26**	.29**	-.45**	-.58**	.46**		
Maturity (male)	.25**	.22**	-.35**	-.29**	.25**	.36**	
Maturity (female)	.20**	.21**	-.34**	-.42**	.38**	.29**	.18**

** $p < .01$.

a 19% increase in the likelihood of attendance by couples on the basis of one unit of change in importance of marriage by the males. Relationship problems as perceived by both the male and the female also made a significant, if rather modest, contribution to attendance. The presence of relationship problems increased the odds of attendance by 17% and 18%, respectively, for female and male respondents. The additional predictors of kindness and maturity, although related in a statistically significant

manner, accounted for only very slight increases in attendance probability.

Discussion and Implications for Marriage Preparation Programs

There are several limitations to the study worth noting. We were not able to determine whether our respondents attended the marriage preparation course "voluntarily." For example, they may have been constrained to attend in order to marry in a particular church. Furthermore, we do not know what type of intervention they attended. It could have been anything from a short session with a pastor to an intensive multiple session, multiple hours' intervention. Knowing the level of commitment required may have been a factor in whether the couple chose to attend or not.

However, there are also several advantages this study has over previous research. First, we had access to a very large sample, allowing us to test the impact of multiple factors and predictors. Furthermore, this data set contained data from both partners, which has been seldom seen in previous research. Third, we were able to test the relationship between a large number of theoretically and empirically derived predictors of participation in a marriage preparation intervention. Fourth, the large sample size and number of predictors allowed us to use statistical procedures (CFA, SEM) that produced greater precision in our findings. For example, because we had

Table 3. *Structural Equation Model (SEM) Test of Predictors on Involvement in Marriage Preparation: Standardized Coefficients, Significance Test From Mplus, and Odds Ratio*

Independent Variables	B	Z Value	Odds Ratio
Marital importance (male)	.178	4.571	1.19
Marital importance (female)	.289	7.339	1.34
Relationship problems (male)	.166	6.236	1.18
Relationship problems (female)	.157	5.320	1.17
Partner's kindness (male)	.046	2.081	1.05
Partner's kindness (female)	.054	2.246	1.06

Note. Maximum likelihood estimation was chosen over the default estimator for categorical indicators because of easier interpretation of parameters estimates and trivial differences from using the other estimator.

partner data and used SEM, we were able to control for interdependence of the couple data, and the use of latent variable analysis allowed us to use several classes of variables made up of multiple indicators rather than just a few indicator variables.

Our research question asked if individual, family, couple, and sociocultural context variables would distinguish between those who become involved in marriage preparation versus those who do not. The results suggest that individual characteristics of both partners—valuing marriage, being kind and considerate, and being mature (as opposed to being more likely to lose temper and get angry)—all distinguished between attending couples and nonattending couples. The couple context factor of perceived relationship problems also makes a small but non-trivial contribution. Notably, none of the family context factors predicted involvement, supportive of earlier investigations; on the other hand, none of the sociocultural factors predicted attendance, which is a departure from previous research. This suggests the greater importance of individual and couple characteristics in predicting involvement in marriage preparation. The more value that both partners place on marriage, the greater the perceived kindness of both partners, and the more mature (i.e., less likely to get angry and lose temper) each person perceives themselves to be, the greater the likelihood of participation in marriage preparation; however, the couple context variable suggests that the more relationship problems each person sees, the greater the likelihood of participation in marriage preparation. The picture that emerges is that couples most likely to attend marriage preparation believe marriage is more important than nonattenders, see themselves as better able to control their temper and angry outbursts than nonattenders, and see their partners as slightly more kind, considerate, and loving than nonattenders. However, both partners in attenders also perceive themselves as having somewhat more relationship problems as compared to nonattenders. This suggests that those couples who acknowledge their relationship problems are most willing to attend a class to deal with those problems (given an atmosphere of safety and openness in the couple relationship). Especially noteworthy is the importance of the females' perception of the value of marriage as the most important predictor. There is a 34% increase in the likelihood of attendance by couples when the female perceives marriage as important, whereas the increase in likelihood of

attendance by couples is about half as likely (19%) if the male perceives the marriage as important.

Because our data were cross sectional, it could be argued that couple attendance *caused* the attending couples to value marriage more, be more kind and considerate, and act in a more mature manner. While the answer to causal direction awaits longitudinal research, we argue that it is unlikely that attendance at an intervention would cause *more* relationship problems in a group of attenders who attended many different types of interventions. The more logical and parsimonious explanation is the one we propose: those couples who value marriage as an institution the most, who possess good will and other personal and couple resources, and yet who see a number of (solvable) problems in their relationship are the most likely to seek out an intervention. Conversely, couples with less commitment to the institution of marriage, with less resource reserve and good will, and who note fewer relationship problems will either not see a need or be afraid to attend.

What are the implications for family professionals trying to increase attendance to marriage preparation interventions? First, go to the “likely-to-attend” demographic, especially to females who highly value marriage as a lifestyle choice. Although family professionals are concerned about reaching “high-risk” individuals and couples, we need to recognize that we are far from having reached all couples in the “likely-to-attend” group—couples who highly value marriage and have fairly good intra- and interpersonal skills. Therefore, determining where this demographic is and “mining” that demographic should not be overlooked. Wringing our collective hands about not being able to reach the highest need group is of little value. Our findings suggest who this most-likely-to-attend group is and we as professionals should maximize our interventions with this group, locking in support for our interventions with this group. Then with this base of support for the value of interventions, we can look to the less-likely-to-attend group, who will take more of our resources of time, energy, and money to get to attend.

Second, create marketing strategies for the less-likely-to-attend group. Our findings suggest that this less-likely-to-attend group consists of couples who value marriage less and who possess fewer of the intra- and interpersonal skills, which predict higher quality and more stable marriages. Our findings do not suggest *how* to market to this group but do suggest that this less-likely-to-attend group is broader than

those from so-called “high-risk categories” for marital dissolution, such as experiencing parental divorce and having lower income (Sullivan & Bradbury, 1997).

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