

Healthy Marriages & Healthy Relationships: Longitudinal Qualitative Assessment

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Outline

- Project Goals
- Program
- Sample

FINDINGS:

- What do Participants Think about Marriage or Relationships?
- Why Attend a Relationship Class?
- Why Complete a Relationship Class?
- Were There any Challenges?
- What do Participants Learn from the Class?
- How are Lessons Applied Beyond the Classroom?

Programs: No Jerks

- Goals of Class:
 - Learn to identify a 'Jerk'/'Jerkette'.
 - Establish Knowledge, Trust, Reliance, and Commitment in relationship before Touch.
 - Establish a foundation of communication.
 - Learn how to end troublesome relationships.
 - Build a healthy marriage.
 - Find and follow an ideal relationship model.
- Completion of the class is considered attendance at 3 of 4 classes.



Programs: Family Wellness

- **Goals of Class:**
 - Emphasize cooperation, listening, and communication between parents and children.
 - Build healthy relationships between all family members including children, grandparents, parents, and co-parents.
 - Emphasize avoiding the intergenerational transmission of troublesome behavior (e.g. alcoholism and criminal activity).
- Completion of class is considered attendance at 4 of 6 classes.

Interviews

- Wave 1: 57 Respondents
 - June – September 2006
 - 23 respondents completed Family Wellness (40%)
 - 18 respondents completed No Jerks (32%)
 - 16 completed BOTH Family Wellness and No Jerks (28%)
 - 10 Centers
 - Interviews 90 min/ 63 pages
- Wave 2: Reinterview (6-8 months later)
 - February – March 2007
 - 84% of original sample (n=48)
 - Interviews 30 min/ 14 pages
 - 7 respondents repeated Family Wellness or No Jerks between waves 1 and 2 (15%)

What Are Participants' Views of Marriage & Relationships?

- Respondents are positive about marriage and agree that people should marry.

“Well...I really would like to be situated-married, happily married. I really would. It's what I've always wanted.”

- Many of the respondents that were not currently dating hoped to be in a relationships or a marriage in 3-5 years.

“I would love to be married, just not right now.”

- Participants agree that it is better for children if their parents are married.
- Most mothers are cautious about bringing men into their families.

“I don't really want to step into no relationship, because I don't want nobody to come into my life and get out my life again because of his mistakes or whatever. And my kids keep seeing that, and then they think it's okay to keep on hopping into relationships. I want my boys to grow up and have just one woman, one wife...”

Why Attend a Relationship Class?

- Learning about relationships, better understand the opposite sex, and make better decisions about potential partners.
- Work with partner on relationship.
- Incentives.
- Socializing.
- Learn to be a better parent.
- Self-Improvement.
- Positive prior experience in relationship classes.

Partners

- Not all participants wanted their partner to attend. One respondent indicated that she would have been embarrassed if her boyfriend attended because he is an alcoholic.
- When Respondents are asked why their partners did or did not attend the program with them there are varied responses ranging from the practical, “he had to work” to the more complex “he says it’s a white thing.”
- As many respondents note, activities and demands external to the relationship often come first.
- Partners sometimes felt like the class was something the respondent chose to be involved with and not something the two of them decided to take together.



Partners

- Some respondents felt that the female-dominated classes were a turn-off to their male partners while others did not realize that men and women were allowed in the same class

“Well, I, I didn’t, I thought it was just women. You know? I didn’t, I didn’t think men were, you know...I thought it was only supposed to be for the women. So nobody else, you know. So, I don’t think he would come anyway. ‘Cause he asked me if any other men had come.”

- Partner participation could help the couple work on relationship skills but was not always helpful.
- Still others felt that communication, lack of social skills, and not knowing participants in the class were deterrents to participating in the class with their partners.
- The most troubled relationships likely do not have partners who want to come to classes.

What Do Participants Get Out of the Class?

- Independence and Responsibility
- Compromise
- Communication and Listening Skills
- Parenting Skills
- Take it Slow
- Set higher standards for potential partners.

Lessons Learned: Independence & Responsibility

- Many of the respondents learned to stand on their own feet, make decisions for themselves, and not allow anyone to control them, not partners or children.

“... a big one would be speaking up. You know? Umm, standing up for myself.”

“... the most important thing that I walked away with was basically, umm, being very independent.”

“Sometimes they say...there’s a saying in Family Wellness. The parent is always in charge.”



Lessons Learned: Compromise

- Respondents learned that they have to consider the feelings of others and work together to build upon their relationships.

“And relationships is no one-way street. It’s no one person’s right or one person’s wrong. You have to sit down and talk about it, and talk like that.”

“Umm, that it’s not all about me. That I need to have a compromising attitude.”



Lessons Learned:

Communication and Listening

- Many of the respondents learned how to speak to those around them, as well as how to listen.

“I’ve learned how not to judge people. Umm, I’ve learned how to communicate better, to speak what’s on my mind without being hurtful to somebody.”

“Ahh, it addressed the communication, ahh, between me and my wife and my family, period. It gave me a lot of tools and a lot of new ways to look at communication...it was really helpful.”



Lessons Learned: Parenting

- Some respondents mention that the program taught them how to speak to their children

“Trust, honesty, how to talk to you kids...listen to your kids, ‘cause they are little people. They have minds too, and they have feelings too.”

“I have more patience, Especially with my girls. Before I was always scolding and punishing them, but not so much anymore.”

- The program had some tips for participants that they found really helpful. These included making chore lists, having family talks, etc.

“So, I just put up a...chore sign up on the refrigerator. And when they came home from school they looked at it and they did it – no problem.”



Lessons Learned:

Take it Slow

- The program teaches respondents to put the sexual aspects, or TOUCH, of their relationships off until they had established trust and commitment.

“Mostly everybody’s touch is way up off the charts. You know? You would actually have sex with somebody before you would commit, rely, trust, or know that person.”

- Respondents learned to take it slowly, find out what people are really like.

“Umm, how to be careful, how to be a good judge of character, how to look deeper. Don’t just look at the outside shell, ‘cause people are more than what they appear to be.”

Lessons Learned:

Setting High Standards for Partners

- Respondents scrutinize their romantic partners and relationships with a new-found understanding of what they need and want from others.

“The very first thing that they ask you is, tell us what makes a jerk. And what’s so funny is that when we listed probably fifty things...like selfishness...arrogance, things like that, I realized that those are the people that I’m naturally drawn to...it really made me sit down and, and make a physical list of those traits that I wanted to find in a person.”

- Once respondents have identified their wants and needs in a romantic partner they can be more discerning about who they choose to date.

How Have Participants Applied Class Lessons?

- Partner
- Children
- Family and Friends
- Coworkers

- Challenges:

Unreceptive others

Memory

Single Parents



Life Applications: Partner

- Respondents felt the class helped in their selection of and interactions with partners.
- Cautious about new partners:
“[I] really didn’t have an idea of what I was looking for before—just someone to pay attention to me and...help me with my kids. I still want that. But, I probably would have went to any length to get it; and it wouldn’t even have mattered if they were...being mean or anything. I just probably would have accepted it.”

Life Applications: Partner

- **Take it Slow:**

“I didn’t learn about the person...I got too involved in one level and not in another. So I, it didn’t work out...I made a mistake by not going at the same pace with all the levels of the relationship. Which are to learn about a person as well as to, umm, get commitment and intimacy at the same level, as opposed to just intimacy all the way-and to learn about it later.”

“The RAM scale. I have that on my living room wall. And, umm, the guys will come over and watch TV or whatever. Well, I say, you should try taking this class...I explained it all to him. And I asked him, like umm, to move the squares up to the place where he thinks we are at. And then, like, a month or two later he said, where you think we at now?...And I’m like, go ahead and move it. Have we gotten to know each other any better? And, and I said it’s supposed to be like stair steps...And he, he, his was a little bit the first...the first and the last one was up. And then the other two was completely on the ground.”



Life Applications: Partner

- **Communicate:**

“...communication skills. I think that is a big thing...in a relationship. And he has mentioned that to me that we should communicate more. And I kinda, like, yell a lot and just get really mad really easy. I think maybe that’s something that I have to work on, is my communication skills.”

“...how to listen more, how to speak up, how to...pay more attention to Sharon... I let her speak up, and she listens to me. And then I listen to her so that I can hear her, hear her thoughts to see how she feels about our relationship...she wasn’t speaking up, and I wasn’t doing the listening.”

“Just me being upfront with him and telling him exactly how I feel about things and what I want to get out of certain situations. I am upfront with him about that stuff. And we do talk about that a lot.”

“I’m not an argumentative person. So, and my boyfriend know that. And he’s an argumentative person. So, I kinda help him now because he sits and talks to me now, instead of yelling and arguing and stuff.”

Life Applications: Children

- Organize their lives: make chore lists, family talks

“I decided to give my son small tasks instead of...you know how you be telling your kids do this, do that...That’s not good, I learned. ‘Cause kids can’t...remember everything you tell them. So I learned to quit telling them to do everything at one time, and just break it down for them.”

- Work together as a team and not send different messages:

“When I got done I understood that it’s not good for us, you know, one person said do this and the other person’s saying no. And we gonna raise the boys, and we gonna raise them right. We both need to be here instead of there, you know. Not far apart, we should be close.”

- Discipline:

“...when he used to do things that displeased me or that I thought was wrong for him to do I used to yell at him and now I’ll sit him down and explain to him that that’s unacceptable behavior...So and I gained that knowledge on about how to do that. And um, in a more effective way than I used to do.”

Life Applications: Family & Friends

- Communication with family members:

“Definitely the speaking up part probably helped me out...I’m actually speaking with my father again...I wouldn’t have ever spoke up about anything, my dad wouldn’t have either.”

- Participants learn to stand up to others:

“[I’m] able to tell ‘em how I feel and not just let them run over the top of me.”

- Participants become more selective of friends:

“The most significant thing that I learned in the No Jerks class is...truly getting to know an individual...whether it be in an intimate relationship...or just whether it be a friendship.”

Life Applications: Coworkers

- Assertiveness
- Deescalating Tensions
- Active Listening

“I: Was the program targeting communication in the workplace?”

R: No, it wasn't targeting that. But, that's what it helped me with.”

Life Applications: Coworkers

“I calm them down...I be like, I understand your frustration. I say, just calm down...I’m just trying to help you...let me see what I can do...And I take full responsibility; I take them under my wing...out of ten customers nine of them be satisfied.”

“And it helped me with my customer service skills-how to talk to people.”

“I have...tell them, I appreciate what you’ve done. Not just criticize them...not just talk down to them...Because I wouldn’t want nobody to do that to me...I just used to be mad, like, everyday at work...If you actually sit up there and show some appreciation to your co-workers or to anybody, if they messed up in some type of way, just, I appreciate what you’ve done.”



Challenges

- Others may be unreceptive to class lessons:

“I tried it with my mom. But, I just think that my mom’s bullheaded...she just don’t want to communicate with me.”

- Memory:

“And sometimes we would have to flash [course materials] at each other to remember. You know, to remind us”

Single parents may face challenges implementing lessons alone:

“I wish they would sometimes have focused on people that have, are single families...”

Did the Program Extend Beyond the Classroom?

- Spreading the Word- “Relationship Experts”:
 - Communication
 - Parenting
 - Relationship
 - Partners

Spreading the Word: “Relationship Experts”

Participants feel they have become relationship experts with much to teach others:

“...we’re waiting for a class to, you know, re-start again...he wants to go to the class also...I keep my little packet...I...talked to him about exactly what was going on in the class and how these things can help us. And we actually reviewed a lot of the material that I had left. And he likes it.”

“My brother...Umm, well with trying to help him with his wife also...they’re in the stage where they want to break up. So I got in there and I tried to let them know...You have to try to work things out. You have to go with your feelings...You have to express yourself...I have helped some people if they listened.”



Conclusions

- The barriers to healthy relationships are complex.
- Program evaluations, and qualitative assessments more generally, offer insight into the complex lives of participants that is not always possible with survey data.
- It is important to evaluate a wide variety of marriage programs, especially those that are more community-based and not federally-funded.
- Having detailed assessment of programs allows program developers to cater to the needs of their target audience.
- Fostering communication between researchers and policy practitioners is important to ensure marriage programs are targeting those most in need.
- This evaluation has demonstrated the wide-reaching outcome of healthy relationship and healthy marriage classes.

THANK YOU!

Please email wmannin@bgsu.edu or call 419-372-7279 with comments or suggestions!