Sustaining a happy marriage has become more challenging in the past two generations, especially for newlyweds. Many organizations have sought to support couples by offering or requiring marriage preparation programs. The most rigorous of these programs significantly decrease divorce rates and increase marital adjustment. Marital readiness might be further enhanced through investments in positive youth development and relationship skill training during the teen years. Faith-based organizations, including churches, religious organizations, and faith-sponsored agencies, are ideally positioned for outreach at three levels: 1) reaching individuals and couples with values--and skills-based training; 2) enhancing awareness and support within their organizations; and 3) contributing to pro-marriage attitudes and actions across their communities. This article describes the context of marital adjustment and marriage education and proposes three levels of involvement by faith-based communities in building healthy marriages beginning with youth.

THE CONTEXT FOR MARRIAGE AND COUPLES EDUCATION

Marriage Adjustment and Education

Marriage in the 21st Century carries more complex meanings and requires more sustained effort than the economic or social pairings of the past two centuries, yet it remains Americas most popular voluntary institution. Recent reviews of marriage studies show that the positive and negative outcomes of marriage have significant physical, emotional, social, and economic impact on partners, children, extended families, and communities (Whitehead & Popenoe, 1999; Waite & Gallagher, 2000). Fewer partners are as happy in marriage as previous generations (Glenn, 1991) and more youth and adults are ambivalent about marriage prospects (Orthner, 1990). Those who pursue alternatives such as cohabitation (Waite & Gallagher, 2000) and those who divorce, except after a miserable marriage, (Waite, Browning, Doherty, Gallagher, Luo, & Stanley, 2002) are even more likely to be disappointed. Consistent with traditional religious values, contemporary research finds that healthy, satisfying marriages reflect mutual commitment, open communication, effective stress coping, and wisdom in handling issues such as money, sex, and power (Gottman & Notarius, 2000; Greeley, 1991; Robinson & Blanton, 1993; Waite & Gallagher, 2000). Thus, it is surprising that recent research (Barna, 2001a) finds divorce is as common among believers as among unbelievers. So-called "Bible Belt" states (notably OK, AR, LA, TN and FL) have some of the highest divorce rates (Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1999), although these trends may reflect patterns among nominal believers or unchurched couples and high proportions of limited resource couples across the region (Karney, 2001). Nevertheless, Southern Baptist State Executive Director Anthony Jordan, in supporting Oklahoma's Marriage Initiative, admitted that churches too easily accept divorce as a solution to marital problems among members (Nigh, 2000). Since less than 5% of couples opt for Louisiana's Covenant Marriage (although they tend to be more religious) (Sanchez, Nock, Wilson, & Wright, 2002), the majority of couples married in religious settings choose conventional marriage with no-fault divorce. Other studies suggest that cohabitation, a non-traditional marriage alternative and predictor of divorce, occurs at similar rates among Christians as in the general population (Stanley & Markman, 2002).

Clearly, many couples who affirm some level of Christian faith experience struggle in making practical adjustments and have difficulty in expressing the spiritual grace intended for marriage (Garland, 1999).

Research on marital adjustment points to two principal factors accounting for divorce and distress across the population: inconsistent commitment and inadequate interpersonal skills to negotiate marital challenges (Markman, Stanley, & Blumberg, 2001; Waite & Gallagher, 2000). Among Christians, evidence that adults and youth are more typically pragmatic than biblical in moral judgments (Barna, 2001a, 2001b, 2002) suggests that short-term experiences and feelings-especially in the absence of indepth spiritual disciplines or support-govern decisions about staying in or leaving relationships. Studies of couple happiness suggest that pragmatism in the short-term-breaking up to "cut losses" of broken ideals or everyday conflict-is often impractical in the long term, since most distressed couples who stay together report positive adjustment five years later (Waite, Browning, Doherty, Gallagher, Luo, & Stanley, 2002). However, couples who "tough out" the marriage but remain conflicted experience the worst outcomes for themselves and their children (Waite & Gallagher, 2000). High divorce rates among Fundamentalist Christians, a group typically known for commitment to marriage ideals, may reflect the discontinuity between those ideals and the practical realities of less-than-perfect partners (McIntosh & Spilka, 1995) or simply a lack of marriage education. Couples who view commitment as an active process rather than as a static ideal may find it easier to adjust interpretations of events and respond constructively to conflict (Bradbury, Fincham, & Beach, 2000). Attitudes of patience, determination, and openness to change reflected in actions such as expressing affection or nonjudgmental problem solving illustrate dedication commitment, which represents the couple's continuing investment in their relationship. By contrast, external constraints (e.g., economic and social costs of divorce) are typically inadequate to sustain marriages without such investments (Stanley, Trathen, McCain, Bryan, 1998).

Interpersonal skills are critical for couples to live purposefully, negotiate differences, and solve problems without the traditional family rules and supports of past generations. Well-adjusted couples consistently demonstrate self-control, empathy, and constructive conflict resolution in mastering life challenges (Gottman & Notarius, 2000). Among Christian couples, a partner's practice of these skills, rather than orthodoxy or verbal affirmation of values, is correlated with marital satisfaction (Hatch, James, & Schumm, 1986). Unfortunately, relatively few couples approach marriage with the skills and commitment requisite to marital success (Berger & Hannah, 1999; Hunt, Hoff, & DeMaria, 1998; Markman, Stanley, & Blumberg, 2001). Yet relatively simple behavioral exercises and dialogue about commitment and values show promise in fostering these disciplines that produce stable, caring marriages (Silliman & Schumm, 2000; Stanley & Trauthen, 1994). Recent research suggests that local clergy can teach these skills as effectively as experienced clinicians (Stanley, Markman, Prado, Olmos-Gallo, Tonelli, St. Peters, Leber, Bobulinski, Cordova, & Whitton, 2001). Unfortunately, couples most at risk for distress and divorce are least likely to participate in marriage preparation (Sullivan & Bradbury, 1997) and most partners only receive training within one to six months of marriage (Olson, 1988). The growing consensus of scholars, practitioners, and

policymakers is that marriage and couples education can be more effective if begun earlier and expanded to a broader audience (U.S. DHHS, 2002b; Ooms, 1998).

Linkages Between Marriage Education and Youth Development

Promising practices with engaged couples should encourage faith communities from churches to YMCAs to specialized ministries to create early and expanded outreach to youth. A variety of youth ministries have long recognized the formative and transformative potential of work with adolescents. During these years, the emergence of abstract reasoning capacities as well as key aspects of personal identity (e.g., self-concept, personal values, friendship and peer relations, career and future focus) provide a foundation for ongoing adjustment and adult potentialities (Steinberg, 1999). Commitment attitudes and interpersonal skills critical to strong marriages are consistent with best practice outcomes in youth development (Eccles & Gootman, 2002; Mihalic, Irwin, Elliott, & Fagan, 2001; Strommen & Hardel, 2000) that are incorporated in many civic and faith-based youth programs. Dating and marriage topics inspire both immediate and long-range interest among teens (Silliman, 1996). Rap sessions, training workshops, and role modeling of positive relationship skills can help youth apply lessons of character education, life skills, or discipleship training to group or solo dating experiences. Given their limited social reasoning, peer and media pressure, and insecure identity, even youth raised and confirmed in faith communities may fail to apply values of respect and kindness in cross-gender relationships. They typically struggle in finding effective ways of dealing with jealousy, sexuality, or conflict. Such issues may be even more challenging for youth growing up without positive role models or healthy relationships. As these issues are effectively addressed by competent and caring adults, young people can learn to avoid dating violence, non-marital sexuality, and shallow and stereotypical relationships. Familiarity with communication skills and relationship issues may increase likelihood of seeking and benefiting from marriage preparation and enrichment. The remainder of this article presents a model for outreach to teens by faith communities designed to strengthen capacities for stable, healthy dating and marriage relationships.

AN ECOLOGICAL, APPROACH FOR BUILDING STRONG MARRIAGES THROUGH EARLY AND EXTENDED OUTREACH TO TEENS

The ecological perspective seeks to understand development in the context of relationships (e.g., families, peers, mentors) and environments (e.g., neighborhood, economic and social communities, media) which shape each life and which, in turn, are shaped by the growing person (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; cf. Anderson, 2001: 235; Huston, 2000). Practitioners in human development (Garbarino, 1992), social work (Fraser, 1997), and Christian education (Garland, 1999; Strommen & Hardel, 2000) recommend an ecological approach for a variety of prevention and educational programs. The model recognizes that a child's most profound learning occurs in microsystems, intimate relational settings such as families, friendship and peer groups. Nonetheless, personal and relationship learning is significantly influenced by connections-or disconnections-with mesosystem settings such as schools, churches, and youth groups as well as norms and resources in macrosystems such as neighborhoods, peer culture, or the larger society.

Moreover, continuity between systems more effectively supports positive development, as evident when explicit teaching matches role modeling, organizational support, and community norms.

Most marriage preparation (Stanley et al., 2001) and youth life skills (Mihalic et al., 2001) programs target skill training at the microsystem level because it is the most direct and effective strategy to reduce risks and promote competencies and because it is the most feasible strategy (e.g., changes in personalities or social systems require more extensive investments and are more resistant to alteration). Yet large-scale prevention studies indicate that multi-faceted and multi-level strategies are more effective than single strategy approaches (Mihalic et al., 2001; Reese, Vera, Simon, & Ikeda, 2000). Practically speaking, the combination of direct approaches such as skill training or youth activities with indirect efforts such as training parents to coach positive relationships, adult-youth mentoring, and community support, holds the best promise to positively influence teens' exposure to healthy dating and marriage messages. When such efforts shift from isolated professional services to consistent congregational involvement, faith communities also expand potential to change their communities. Faith communities are also well-positioned to weave cultural values and rituals into the learning of commitment and interpersonal skills. Subsequent discussion focuses on strategies targeting a) individual and couple learning (microsystem); b) organizational capacities to train and support those who interact with teens (mesosystem); and c) community values and practices that support healthy dating and marriage relationships (microsystem). Currently, each of these strategies is at least partially implemented. As practice strategies at each level are implemented and linked, following the ecological model, communities can more effectively reduce divorce and violence and promote healthy dating and marriage relationships. Moreover, as these strategies are practiced throughout a child's life and across high-risk as well as low-risk communities, capacities (of couples and communities) to reduce risks and strengthen marriages will more closely match the challenges of contemporary marriage.

TARGETING INDIVIDUALS AND COUPLES TO REDUCE RISKS AND BUILD RELATIONSHIP COMPETENCIES

Research and Practice History

Programming targeted to individuals and couples is the most direct approach to relationship growth and the most typical activity in faith-, school-, and community-based organizations. Estimates suggest that 60% of couples receive some formal preparation before their wedding (Markman & Stanley, 1996), although probably a much smaller number participate in dating or life skills training during teen years. The quantity and quality of youth activities and programs generally remains largely undocumented and untested (Eccles & Gootman, 2002). However, research on dating violence prevention (Foshee, Bauman, Arriaga, Helms, Knock, & Linder, 1998; Macgowan, 1997), sex education (Bearman & Bruckner, 2001; Kirby, 2001; Rector, 2002), and life skills (Hawkins, Catalano, Kosterman, Abbott, & Hill, 1999; Mihalic, et al., 2001; SAMHSA, 2003) demonstrates that well-designed programs can effectively reduce risk behavior as

well as promote self-esteem, reasoning and assertiveness skills, and choices for positive activities. Emerging evidence for teen dating skills training (Gardner, 2000; Heitland, 1986) suggests such programs enhance practical application of skills as well as knowledge of issues. Research in risk prevention and life skills with adolescents (Eccles & Gootman, 2002; Hawkins, et al., 1999; Mihalic, et al. 2001; Moore & Zaff, 2002) and marriage education with young adults (Berger & Hannah, 1999) consistently shows that how programs are implemented is even more important than what they teach. Principles derived from program evaluation research, relevant to dating and marriage education with teens, are listed below.

Principles for Effective Prevention and Competence Building with Youth

* Early intervention is generally more effective than crisis-response or therapy in promoting positive developmental outcomes (Berger & Hannah, 1999; Hair, Jager, & Garrett, 2002);

* Promotion of personal and interpersonal competence and resilience protective factors tends to produce better results than focus on simply avoiding risk (Foshee, et al., 1998; Kirby, 2001; Macgowan, 1997; Rector, 2002; Silliman, Stanley, Coffin, Markman, & Jordan, 2001);

* Long-range outcomes valued by adult educators and researchers are most likely achieved through short-term processes and outcomes most relevant to youth (Eccles & Gootman, 2001; Hair, Jager, & Garrett, 2002);

* Experiential methods result in greater practice of values and skills than didactic methods (Fournier & Olson, 1986; Gardner, 2000);

* Programs of greater intensity, duration, and repetition are more likely to produce attitude and behavior change than those that are less so (Redd, Brooks, & McGarvey, 2002; Hawkins, et al., 1999);

* Programs tend to be more effective when adapted to appropriate developmental, cultural, and risk levels (Institute of Medicine, 1994).

Impacting Microsystems: Strategies for Working with Individuals and Couples

Keeping in mind the principles above, faith communities could extend and expand marriage and couples education with youth through the following strategies:

1 Empower parents as models and interpreters of healthy relationships. Parents are children's most powerful teachers, role models, sources of information and support (Silliman, Schumm, & Jurich, 1992). Even after divorce, parents who communicate constructively rather than with hostility promote better adjustment in children (Amato, 2000). Many faith traditions regard families as primary interpreters of faith and family values (Browning, Miller-McLemore, Couture, Lyon, & Franklin, 1997; Garland, 1999),

and parent models and guidance remain the most important influences on teens (Hair, Jager, & Garrett, 2002; Moore & Zaff, 2002). While most parents maintain dialogue with their teens, all find issues like risk behaviors tough to discuss (Kaiser Family Foundation/Children Now, 1998). Faith communities-at the level of organizational change-can provide resources and training to empower parent modeling, teaching, monitoring, and support (e.g., key roles identified in youth risk and resilience research). Marriage enrichment events such as Marriage Encounter or Marriage Savers (Hunt, Hof, & DeMaria, 1998; U.S. DHHS, 2002b) can help build a sense of renewal and mutual support. Couple skills training such as the Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program (Markman, Stanley, & Blumberg, 2001) can build parents' knowledge and practice base. Marital or family therapy may facilitate problem solving and healing for more acute or chronic problems. Parent education can expand understanding of children's needs and strategies for guidance and discipline, teaching and mentoring. Divorce recovery and parenting apart programs can foster more positive interaction and hope for the next generation in spite of family breakup. Building on the daily modeling, coaching, and encouraging of healthy parent relationships, youth can begin to develop optimistic, empathic, committed relationships with peers.

2. Integrate commitment values and interpersonal skills with existing programs. Within a church's or organization's religious education, youth clubs, intergenerational events, or special ministries, from a child's first years, integration of commitment values and interpersonal skills is an opportunity to teach commitment through norms of respect and responsibility, sacrifice and forgiveness (Anderson, 2001; Garland, 1999; Search Institute, 1990). Youth leaders and teachers who model acceptance and encouragement or apply the same rules of fairness and opportunity to boys and girls provide credible role models for Bible lessons or discussions of relationship issues. Those who help children and youth think about and internalize values-whether the discussion is about David and Bathsheba or exploitive peers at school-set the stage for understanding and application of relationship values during teen years. Planned or spontaneous events, where leaders teach youth to negotiate complex, emotional issues with self-control and reason, express convictions with integrity and tolerance, and demonstrate both empathy and assertiveness under stress, create a legacy for marital problem solving. Teacher and leader training initiated at the organizational level could do much to support commitment and interpersonal skills consistent with the message of strengthening marriage.

3. Sponsor workshops on relationship skills and issues. Youth from pre-teen through late adolescence strongly desire positive relationships with peers, parents, and other adults (Steinberg, 1999). Events targeted to specific ages, genders, or circumstances ranging from open forum discussions to videotape series to knowledge and skill workshops provide valuable education and outreach. However, youth leaders should be aware that occasional discussions or well-intentioned training workshops may not significantly alter attitudes or behaviors. Research with young adults indicates that 12-24 hours of intensive interpersonal skill training is needed to significantly change behavioral outcomes (Silliman & Schumm, 2000). Several secular and faith-based curricula addressing relationship skills and issues are available (Mack, 2000; SmartMarriages, 2003), and many targeting positive values and life skills (although not specifically dating skills)

show strong evidence for changing knowledge, attitudes, and behavior (Mihalic, et al., 2001; SAMHSA, 2003). A few programs addressing dating violence (SAMHSA, 2003), or sex education (Kirby, 2001) demonstrate effectiveness in research-based evaluations. Among faith-based programs, only the "True Love Waits" abstinence pledge/education program shows research evidence of effectiveness in changing behavior (Bearman & Bruckner, 2001). One promising curriculum targeting dating skills is Connections: Relationship Skills for Teens (Gardner, 2000). While research suggests that participation in faith-based youth groups is correlated with positive outcomes for youth (Benson, 1997; Search Institute, 1990; Bridges & Moore, 2002), other research suggests that group participation or training in values, knowledge, and skills for healthy relationships (e.g., money, sex, dating conflict resolution) does not necessarily transfer from religious or character education to dating behavior (Bridges & Moore, 2002). Programs grounded on the ecological model such as "Safe Dates" (Foshee, et al., 1998) and "True Love Waits," combining skill training with positive peer pressure and community support for prosocial norms, tend to be more successful because they reinforce the message of skill-building programs.

4. Foster peer leadership and support. As noted in the "Safe Dates" and "True Love Waits" examples, well-trained positive peer role models can profoundly influence both individual behaviors and peer culture (Moore & Zaff, 2002). Religiosity and association with friends and adults in faith based organizations is associated with higher levels of social skills and adjustment (Bridges & Moore, 2002). Specialized training in mentoring or workshop facilitation on dating or marriage relationships-initiated at the level of organizational change-could expand leadership and ministry opportunities. At the same time, peer teaching helps open access to accurate information, as well as positive peer pressure and openness, to help-seeking for engagement and marriage relationships. In addition, peer teachers may help youth leaders select workshop topics, identify youth or families in crisis or divorce, and recruit non-member youth who might benefit from training or mentoring.

5. Reach out to at-risk teens. Research indicates that participation in faith-based communities correlates with fewer risk activities (Benson, 1997; Bridges & Moore, 2002). Conversely, youth at higher risk for relationship violence, sexually transmitted diseases, or pregnancy have a greater need for positive values, accurate information, credible role models, and consistent support. Emerging evidence suggests that faith-based organizations can significantly impact juvenile crime, substance abuse, and teen sexual risk behaviors (Bridges & Moore, 2002). In some cases, counseling or more intensive educational programs may be required to help youth overcome the hurt or habits related to risk behaviors. While staff should clearly understand the origins and effects of specific risks (e.g., emotional pain and anxiety related to parental divorce, shame and defensiveness related to promiscuity or drug addiction), it is also helpful to recognize that many simple solutions, such as having positive alternative activities, or supportive friends with positive values (Moore & Zaff, 2002), can profoundly influence risk-vulnerability. Each volunteer or professional youth leader should be trained to prevent or respond appropriately to risk behaviors (e.g., inappropriate affection, conflict or violence), and know when to consult or refer cases to more qualified helpers. Faith communities are

expected to play important roles in the Strengthening Marriage Initiative included in the 2003 reauthorization of TANF welfare reforms (U.S. House of Representatives, 2003). Youth-based activities that reduce risks such as teen pregnancy and dating violence and help teens prepare for marriage are likely to be funded activities. Organizations that offer quality programs consistent with research-based best practices (see Appendix A), and that develop sustainable systems for recruiting, continuous support, and community engagement are most likely to reverse cycles of poverty, violence, divorce, and fatherlessness among America's most vulnerable youth. Clearly, a network of support for healthy marriages, beginning within faith-based and civic organizations, is needed to rebuild the culture of marriage. The sections that follow outline strategies at the organizational and community level that are needed to support the direct efforts of parents, youth leaders, specialists, and peers in preparing youth for healthy dating and marriage relationships.

Targeting Faith-based Organizations to Reduce Risks and Build Strong Relationships

The influence of entertainment and commercial media on the attitudes and behaviors of teens is testimony to the significance of organizational systems in shaping behavior. Driven by a clear mission, print and electronic media, using imaginative marketing as well as efficient training and delivery systems, not only affect social life, they effectively define the culture for millions. Clarity of mission, imaginative teaching, and effective support systems are also critical for faith communities to promote healthy dating and marriage relationships. While many models of organizational change can work to guide this process, Senge, Kleiner, Roberts, Ross, Roth, and Smith's (1999) paradigm of the Learning Organization seems particularly appropriate to the challenges of supporting families in a post-modern society. Profound change occurs, according to Senge et at., when the following growth processes are set in motion:

1. Enthusiasm and a willingness to commit (in failure and success) must be sustained by at least a passionate few.

2. Concrete investments, however small, must flow from commitment.

3. Learning capabilities of both the core team and organization must be expanded: everyone must better understand the issues at stake and options for addressing them.

4. New practices that emerge from committed, well-informed and innovative investments, begin to become part of organizational life.

5. Positive results of new practices are evident to participants and others, and negative results become the stuff of continuous expansion and improvement.

6. Positive results and growing support build credibility and enthusiasm for expansion. While space does not permit a detailed discussion of strategies and implications of these growth processes, review of the model provides a valuable reminder that the most

significant changes in families, organizations, and communities result from consistent investments and growth rather than "quick fixes" led by dynamic leaders.

Impacting Mesosystems: Strategies for Organizational Capacity-building

The success of the Roman Catholic Church in promoting marriage education provides some valuable lessons for congregations or denominations initiating marriage education programs. Concerned with increasing annulment and divorce rates in the 1970s, church leaders created a theological and ecclesiastical directive (mission statement) informed by insights of clergy, laity, and social science research (Center for Marriage and Family, 1995; McCord, 1998). While national offices supported training, resource development, and program evaluation, implementation strategies and policies were left to diocese and local churches. Two strategies, involving a combination of creative teaching and effective support (key elements in the learning capacities component of profound change), explain the success of marriage preparation in the Catholic Church: (a) increase awareness of the need for and potential among members, especially engaged couples and their families; and (b) equip lay and clergy leaders to train couples in practical skills for living out their faith. Since couples and congregations need both to know and to act, awareness and equipping strategies should be complementary and interdependent. Whether implemented "top-down" as the mission of an organizational board or as "grass-roots" youth activities that change family and organizational attitudes, several specific strategies can facilitate the growth of youth and young adult marriage preparation efforts:

1. Make a case for relationship and marriage education. While traditionally supported in faith communities, marriage is widely viewed as a private, self-directed relationship whose outcome is a matter of fate or faith instead of effort or education (Nigh, 2000; Ooms, 1998). Similarly, teen dating may be viewed as a game or fling with little depth or effect on adult bonding. For some, the "M" word is synonymous with stigmatizing single mothers, coercing female submission or (alternatively) female domination. Repeatedly (and creatively) explaining to couples, families, and congregations about the risks and benefits of marriage and potential for early skills training (Stanley, 2001) may gradually change attitudes toward marriage and pre-marriage relationships. As noted above, attitudes and role models of parents and other adults are the most powerful incentives and correctives for young people seeking to understand relationships for the first time (Hair, Jager, & Garrett, 2002). Several web sites listed in the appendices include awareness or marketing messages for marriage preparation.

2. Build support among youth, parents, and leaders. Marriage and family happiness is the highest priority of adolescents and young adults for adulthood (Whitehead & Popenoe, 1999, 2001), and relationship skills training is positively valued by teens (Silliman, 1996). Young people can provide relevant insights on topics and methods for programming, and can be effective interpreters of initiatives to peers (Eccles & Gootman, 2001; Hair, Jager, & Garrett, 2002). Parents and youth leaders can also be valued interpreters to church boards and other adults on the importance of relationship issues. Assessments such as the Church Census (Garland, 1999) can provide data to indicate concerns and priorities across a congregation.

3. Prepare and resource a step-by-step plan. Covey's (1990) adage "Begin with the end in mind" should help advocates of teen relationship skills balance long-range goals (e.g., reducing divorce, applying faith) and short-term goals (e.g., increasing teen skills or board support), selecting strategies and focusing resources as appropriate. The size of a program is not as important as its quality, consistency, and intensity. Long-range planning efforts may be aided by use of the community readiness model developed to guide drug-prevention efforts (National Institute on Drug Abuse, 1997) as well as the learning organization model (Senge, et al, 1999). Programs for youth at different levels of risk should be informed by the Institute of Medicine's (1994) guidelines for prevention programming: (a) universal prevention, with risk-prevention and competence building efforts addressed to all the target groups; (b) indicated prevention, with more specific training targeted to individuals with several risk factors (e.g., children of divorce or violence); and (c) selected prevention, with more intensive training targeted to those with personal risk factors (e.g., violence or conflict history, depression, sexual harassment).

4. Equip leaders for success. Increasing the number and competence of trainers and mentors is critical to strategies at the microsystem level, as discussed above. Several options can aid in preparation of youth and adult leaders including: (a) self-directed print or web-based resources; (b) training workshops in youth development or relationship issues; and (c) certification programs from organizations such as PREP, Inc., PREPARE/ENRICH, Christian Marriage Education, Association of Couples in Marriage Enrichment (ACME), and Marriage Savers (see Appendix B). In addition to religious education or youth ministry training, faith-based communities can also collaborate with community-based prevention organizations whose projects teach life skills, abstinence, health, and related topics. Whatever the activity, youth and adults who teach or support marriage and couples activities will be most effective and ethical if they receive training matched to their level of involvement with youth and families (e.g., information, education, therapy) (Doherty, 1995).

5. Document and communicate progress. Members and leaders of faith-based organizations, as well as community partners and financial underwriters, are more likely to support marriage and couples education with teens when they see its effects. Periodic measures (group surveys, behavioral observations, and success stories) of activity outcomes (e.g., changes in knowledge, attitudes, skills, or aspirations) provide evidence of program benefits for participants and sponsors, as well as feedback for program improvement to guide program growth and change (Harvard Family Research Project, 2002).

Targeting Communities to Reduce Risks and Build Relationship Competencies

Community norms and supports, like social climates in organizations, influence teen behaviors and capacities of families and mesosystems to promote healthy relationships. Movements in youth development, such as Search Institute's asset-building initiative (Benson, 1997), and marriage education, such as community marriage policies (U.S. DHHS, 2002a), give evidence that collaboration among faith-based and civic organizations can dramatically enhance resources and outcomes across entire

communities. Community-wide efforts also enable small organizations to contribute to and benefit from activities beyond the scope of their own programming capacity. Effective operating models are evident in several innovative marriage-promotion coalitions (see Appendix A). In general, coalitions succeed to the extent that they focus on broad shared goals, with particularistic goals and strategies left to member groups.

Impacting Macrosystems: Strategies for Community Capacity-building

Most of the strategies by which organizations can promote healthy dating and marriage relationships are implicit in prior recommendations for faith-based organizations. The additional resources and collaboration of community-wide initiatives recommends expansion of these strategies, as summarized below:

1. Make a case for relationship and marriage education. Broad-based coalitions must make a case on shared values (e.g., health and social benefits of marriage) yet help participating organizations express and support that mission in their own values and programs. Community-wide media coverage and targeted campaigns have been shown to increase support for youth health behaviors (National Youth Anti-Drug Media Campaign, 1999; Shanahan, P., Elliott, B., & Dahlgren, N., 2002) and are expected to be part of the Strengthening Marriage Initiative (U.S. House of Representatives, 2003).

2. Build support across all sectors of the community. Community marriage policy coalitions have successfully engaged business, education, government, civic, as well as faith-based organizations to recognize the broader impacts of divorce and healthy marriage and promote policies and opportunities that support strong marriages in all sectors (McManus, 1993). Within such broader coalitions, faith communities have an important role in speaking to the economic and social conditions (e.g., poverty, injustice, promiscuity, consumerism) that promote unhealthy relationships or threaten fragile families. In many states, coalitions have already begun marriage promotion efforts (U.S. DHHS, 2002a). Oklahoma state government, using federal funding from TANF (welfare reform) to promote marriage, has brought about unprecedented civic collaboration and prevention programming, including efforts to teach relationship skills in high schools and empower faith based organizations to build stronger marriages. Early indicators show wide support and improved quality in local marriage education efforts (Johnson, Stanley, Glenn, Amato, Nock, Markman, & Dion, 2001). Community and statewide efforts are also more likely to access a broader range of resources that promote capacity-building for local consortia or statewide connectional networks in (a) large-scale and long-range planning, (b) systematic training of professionals and volunteers, and (c) research on needs and program effectiveness.

Scholars and practitioners are quick to note that legal and policy changes are "blunt instruments" in changing social behavior (Ooms, 2001). Efforts such as toughening divorce laws, requiring marriage preparation, or creating financial disincentives for teen pregnancy and single parenting can produce responses opposite those intended. As in the case of most prevention programs (Zaff, Calkins, Bridges, Marge, 2002; SAMHSA, 2003), a combination of (a) legal restrictions (e.g., reducing advertising and sales to

minors), (b) incentives and education (e.g., training, mentoring, and alternative activities), and (c) gradual changes in social norms (e.g., peer attitudes, parent monitoring, community standards) is most likely to produce a climate that supports stronger marriages for all (not just affluent middle-class couples), with education and support throughout childhood and adolescence

CONCLUSIONS

Today's adolescents face personal and social conditions that place them at risk for dating and marital problems and offer little incentive or assistance in developing healthy relationships. Faith-based organizations are well-positioned to reverse this trend through a variety of membership and outreach strategies. Efforts to increase congregational awareness and educational outreach can significantly enhance effects of education and support efforts directed to teens. Leadership in community collaboration, public policy, and social justice can further enhance the climate for healthy, stable marriages. Strategies to promote strong marriages, beginning early in childhood and adolescence, and extending to youth most at risk for relationship problems, are already being implemented. However, efforts are typically short-term, isolated, and not intensive enough to make a difference. Faith communities that develop viable strategies at multiple levels are most likely to empower and support couples for the challenges of coming generations.

Divorce and marital conflict trends point to a need for more effective education on "how to" live out one's faith in practical settings. While much progress has been made, and while many families and faith-based groups are addressing this daunting challenge, current efforts in marriage education are isolated and fragmented. Nevertheless, much progress has been made in faith-based outreach and scholarly research over the past two decades. The quality of resources and training has never been better and looks to be improving yearly. Much of the effort is concentrated at marriage preparation, enrichment, and therapeutic divorce prevention and recovery. Greater emphasis is needed in building healthy relationship skills among youth, beginning with related friendship and dating competencies. An ecological approach, incorporating life skills training for individuals and couples at its core, is needed to build effective programs. Within such a model, support for family and peer networks extends the lessons of training workshops to everyday practice. Organizational and community-wide networks can contribute to teen marriage education through heightened public awareness and collaboration on training and programming. Long-term and in-depth collaborative efforts might address underlying problems such as poverty and abuse that affect marriages and family life. Practitioners and organizational leaders can build upon exemplary efforts in youth development, youth ministry and Christian education, and marriage education with adults, to create, test, disseminate, and evaluate a wide range of complementary strategies for strengthening marriage, beginning with the teen years.

APPENDIX A: Web-based Summaries of Best Practices in Youth Programs

MARRIAGE EDUCATION PROGRAMS

SmartMarriages. A compendium of news, summaries of popular programs and training events, discussion on research and practice issues. http://www.smartmarriages.com

Association of Couples in Marriage Enrichment. A voluntary association of lay couples trained to facilitate marriage growth and support processes. http://www.bettermarriages.org

Marriage Savers. An organization focused on training to foster education and mentoring activities within and between congregations. http://www.marriagesavers.org

COMMUNITY MARRIAGE COALITIONS

Families Northwest. An organization focused on training, community awareness and collaboration to improve quality of life in the Pacific Northwest. http://www.familiesnorthwest.org

FirstThingsFirst. A coalition of business, community, and religious organizations focused on promoting marriage, abstinence, and family strengths in Chattanooga, TN. http://www.firstthings.org Healthy Marriage Grand Rapids. A coalition of community leaders collaborating on awareness and organizational support for marriage education. http:://www.grmarriagepolicy.org

YOUTH PROGRAMS

Centers for Disease Control-Dating Violence Prevention. Features descriptions of research-tested approaches to preventing dating violence. http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc/dvp/youth/datviol.htm

Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence, University of Colorado. Provides extensive discussion of curricula to prevent youth violence and other risks. http://www.colorado.edu/cspv

Promising Practices Network. Summarizes research issues and research-evaluated programs that serve children, youth, and families. http://www.promisingpractices.net

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). The Center for Substance Abuse Prevention provides extensive descriptions of research-based and/or evaluated programs across a diversity of life skills and risk prevention areas. http://modelprograms.samhsa.gov

REFERENCES

Amato, PR. (2000). The consequences of divorce for adults and children. Journal of Marriage and the Family, 62(4), 12691287. Anderson, H. (1984). The family and pastoral care. Philadelphia: Fortress Press. Cited in R.S. Anderson. (2001). The shape of practical theology. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

Barna Research Group. (2002). Research Archives: Teenagers. Accessed at wwwbarna.org on 8-27-02.

Barna Research Group. (2001a). Born Again Adults Less Likely to Co-Habit, just as likely to Divorce, August 6, 2001 Accessed at www.barna.org on 8-27-02.

Barna Research Group. (20016). News Release: Practical Outcomes Replace Biblical Principles As the Moral Standard, September 10, 2001. Accessed at www.barna.org on 8-27-02.

Bearman, P.S., & Bruckner, H. (2001). Virginity pledges and first intercourse. American Journal of Sociology, 106(4), 859-912.

Benson, P. (1997) All kids are our kids. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Berger, R., & Hannah, M.T. (Eds.). (1999). Preventive approaches in couples' therapy. Philadelphia: Brunner-Mazel.

Bradbury, TN, Fincham, ED., & Beach, S.R.H. (2000). Research on the nature and determinants of marital satisfaction: A decade in review. Journal of Marriage and the Family, 62(4), 964-980.

Bridges, L.J, & Moore, K.A. (2002). Religious involvement and children's well-being: What research tells us (and what it doesn't). Washington, DC: Child Trends.

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). The ecology of human development. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Browning, D.S., Miller-McLemore, B.J., Couture, P.D., Lyon, K.B., & Franklin, R.M. (1997). From culture wars to common ground: Religion and the American family debate. Louisville, KY: Westminster.

Center for Marriage and Family. (1995). Marriage preparation in the Catholic Church: Getting it right. Omaha, NE: Center for Marriage and Family, University College, Creighton University.

Covey, S.R. (1990). Seven habits of highly effective people. New York: Simon & Shuster.

Doherty, W. J. (1995). Boundaries between parent and family education and family therapy. Family Relations, 44, 353-358.

Eccles, J. & Gootman, J.A. (2002). Community program to promote youth development. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.

Foshee, V.A., Bauman, K.E., Arriaga, X.B., Helms, R.W., Koch, G.G., & Fletcher-Linder, G. (1998). An evaluation of Safe Dates, an adolescent dating violence prevention program. American Journal of Public Health, 88(l),45-50.

Fournier, D. G.; & Olson, D.H. (1986). Programs for premarital and newlywed couples. In R.F. Levant. (Ed.). Psychoeducational Approaches to Family Therapy and Counseling., pp. 194-237, Springer Publishing Co.

Fowers, B.J., Veingrad, M.R., & Dominicis, C. (2002). The unbearable lightness of positive illusions: Engaged individuals' explanations of unrealistically positive illusions. Journal of Marriage and the Family, 64(2),450-460.

Fraser, M. (Ed.). (1997). Risk and resilience in childhood: An ecological perspective. Washington, DC: National Assembly of Social Workers.

Garbarino, J. (1992). Children and Families in the Social Environment. Second Edition. New York, NY: Aldine deGruyter.

Gardner, S. (2000). Effectiveness of Connections relationship skills program with high school students. Presentation at SmartMarriages conference, Coalition for Marriage, Family, and Couples Education. June 20, 2000, Denver, CO.

Garland, D.R. (1999). Family ministry. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

Glenn, N,D. (1991). The recent trend in marital success in the United States. Journal of Marriage and the Family, 53, (2), 261-270.

Gottman, J.M., & Notarius, C.I. (2000). Decade review: Observing marital interaction. Journal of Marriage and the Family, 62(4),927-947.

Greeley, A. (1991). Faithful Attraction: Discovering Intimacy, Love, and Fidelity in American Marriage. New York: Tor Books.

Hair, E.C., Jager, J., & Garrett, S.B. (2002). Helping teens develop healthy social skills and relationships: What research says about navigating adolescence. Washington, DC: Child Trends.

Harvard Family Research Project. (2002). Evaluation of 21st Century Community Learning Center Programs. Cambridge: Harvard Family Research Project Newsletter, April 2002.

Hatch, R.C., James, D.E., & Schumm, W.R. (1986). Spiritual intimacy and marital satisfaction. Family Relations, 35(4),539-545.

Hawkins, J.D.; Catalano, R.F.; Kosterman, R.; Abbott, R. & Hill, K.G. (1999). Preventing adolescent health-risk behaviors by strengthening protection during childhood. Archives of Pediatric Adolescent Medicine, 1,53,226-234.

Healthy Marriages Grand Rapids. (2002). Web site of the Grand Rapids Community Marriage Policy. Online at http://www.GGR-Cmarriagepolicy.org/ Heitland, W. (1986). An experimental communication program for premarital dating couples. The School Counselor, 57-61.

Hunt, R.A., Hof, L., & Demaria, R. (1998). Marriage enrichment: Preparation, mentoring, and outreach. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Huston, T L. (2000). The social ecology of marriage and other intimate unions. Journal of Marriage and the Family, 62(2), 298-321.

Institute of Medicine. (1994). Reducing risks for mental health disorders: Frontiers for preventive intervention research. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.

Johnson, C., Stanley, S., Glenn, N., Amato, P., Nock, S, Markman, H., & Dion, R. (2001). Marriage in Oklahoma: 2001 baseline statewide survey on marriage and divorce. (Available from the Publications Clearinghouse of the Oklahoma Department of Libraries).

Kaiser Family Foundation/Children Now. (1998). Talking with Kids About Drugs, A National Survey of Parents and Kids. Menlo Park, CA: Author.

Karney, B. (2001). Marriage in context: Interactions between chronic and acute stress. Presented at the National Council on Family Relations Annual Conference, Rochester, NY, November 20, 2001.

Karney B.R., & Bradbury, TN. (1995). The longitudinal course of marital quality and stability: A review of theory, method, and research. Psychological Bulletin, 118,3-34.

Kirby D. (2001). Emerging Answers: Research Findings on Programs to Reduce Teen Pregnancy. Washington, DC: National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy.

Larson, J.H., & Holman, TB. (1994). Premarital predictors of marital quality and stability. Family Relations, 43, 228-237.

Macgowan, M. J. (1997). An evaluation of a dating violence prevention program for middle school students. Violence and Victims, 12(3),223-235.

Mack, D. (2000). Hungry hearts: Evaluating the new curricula for teens on marriage and relationships. New York: Institute for American Values.

Markman, H.J., Stanley, S.M., & Blumberg, S. (2001). Fighting for your marriage. Second Edition. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

McCord, R. (1998). Strategies to strengthen marriage: Perspective of the Catholic Church in the U.S, pp. 73-81 In T. Ooms (Ed.). Strategies to strengthen marriage: What do we know? What do we need to know? Washington, DC: Family Impact Seminar.

McIntosh, D. N. & Spilka, B. (1995). Religion and the family. in B. R. Neff & D. Ratcliff (Eds.), Handbook of family religious education. Birmingham, AL: Religious Education press. McManus, M. (1993). Marriage Savers: Helping Your Friends and Family Avoid Divorce. Grand Rapids: Zondervan.

Mihalic, S., Irwin, K., Elliott, D., Fagan, A, & Hansen, D. (2001). Blueprints for violence prevention. Washington, DC: Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, Publication No. NCJ 187079.

Moore, K.A, & Zaff, J .E (2002). Building a better teenager: A summary of "what works" in adolescent development. Washington, DC: Child Trends. Publication #2002-57.

National Institute on Drug Abuse. (1997). Community Readiness for Drug Abuse Prevention: Issues, Tips and Tools, publication number PB# 97-209605. Washington, DC: NIDA. Available at http://www.secapt.org/science1crstrats.hmtl

National Youth Anti-Drug Media Campaign. (1999). Testing the Anti-Drug Message in 12 American Cities. National Youth Anti-Drug Media Campaign, Phase I (Report No. 2). March 1999, Washington, DC: Office of National Drug Control Policy.

Nigh, B. (2000). Baptists applaud Oklahoma governor in expanding fight against divorce. Nashville, TN: The Baptist News, March 24, 2000. Online at:http://www.baptist.org/Baptists&News/Divorce_010.htm

Olson, D.H. (1988). Presidential address, National Council on Family Relations, November 16, 1988, Philadelphia, PA.

Ooms, T. (1998). Strategies to strengthen marriage: What do we know, what do we need to know? Washington, DC: Family Impact Seminar.

Ooms, T (2001). Policy responses to couple conlict and domestic violence: A framework for discussion. In Booth, A., Crouter, A.C., & Clements, M. (Eds.), Couples in conflict (pp. 227-239). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum Associates.

Othner, D. (1990). The family in transition, pp.93-118. In D. Blankenhorn, S. Bayme, & J.B. Elshtain (Eds.). Rebuilding the nest: A new commitment to the American family. Milwaukee Family Service America.

Rector, R (2002). The effectiveness of abstinence education programs in reducing sexual activity among youth. Backgrounder No. 1533. Washington, DC: The Heritage Foundation.

Reese, L.E., Vera, E.M., Simon, T.R., & Ikeda, RM. (2000). The role of families and caregivers as risk and protective factors in preventing youth violence. Clinical Child and Family Psychology Review, 3(l),61-77.

Redd, Z., Brooks, J, & McGarvey, A.M. (2002). Educating America's youth: What makes a difference? Washington, DC: Child Trends.

Robinson, L.; & Blanton, P.W. (1993). Marital strengths in enduring marriages. Family Relations, 48, (1), 3845.

SAMHSA: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (20(13), Center for Substance Abuse Prevention model programs. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.Online at: http://www.samhsa.gov/centers/csap/csap.html

Sanchez, L., Nock, S.L., Wilson, J.L., & Wright, J.D. (2002). Is covenant marriage a policy that preaches to the choir? A comparison of covenant and standard newlywed couples in Louisiana. Bowling Green, OH: BGSU Center for Family and Demographic Research. Working Paper 02-06.

Search Institute. (1990). Effective Christian Education: A National Study of Protestant Congregations. Search Institute: Minneapolis, MN.

Senge, E, Kleiner, A., Roberts, C., Ross, R, Roth, G., & Smith, B. (1999). The dance of change: The challenges to sustaining momentum in learning organizations. New York: Doubleday/Currency.

Shanahan, P., Elliott, B, & Dahlgren, N. (2002). Review of public information campaigns addressing youth risk-taking: A report to the National Youth Affairs Research Scheme. Aus: Australian Clearinghouse for Youth Studies.

Silliman, B. (1996). Adolescents' Perceptions of Marriage Relationships and Enrichment Programs, Nov. 10. National Council on Family Relations Conference, Kansas City, MO.

Silliman, B., & Schumm, W.R. (2000). Marriage preparation programs: Literature review. The Family Journal, 8(2), 128-137.

Silliman, B., Schumm, W.R., & Jurich, A.P (1992). Young adults preferences for premarital preparation program designs. Contemporary Family Therapy, 14, 89-100.

Silliman, B., Stanley, S.M., Coffin, W., Markman, H.J., & Jordan, P. (2001). Preventive interventions for couples, pp. 123-146, In H. Liddle, D. Santisteban, R. Levant, &J. Bray (Eds.). Family Psychology Intervention Science. Washington, DC: APA Publications.

Smart Marriages. (2003). MFCE Directory of Youth and School Based Marriage Education Programs. http://www.smartmarriages.com/school.html, accessed February 8, 2003

SmartMarriages. (2002). Legislation related to promoting marriage and Community Marriage Policies. Accessed at http://www.smartmarriages.com on August 27, 2002.

Stanley, S.M. (2001). Making the case for premarital training. Family Relations, 50,272-280.

Stanley, S.M., & Markman, H.J. (1997). Marriage in the 90s: A nationwide random phone survey. Denver, CO: PREP, Inc.

Stanley, S.M., Markman, H.J., St. Peters, M., Leber, B.D. (1995). Strengthening marriages and preventing divorce: New directions in prevention research. Family Relations, 44(3), 392401

Stanley, S.M., Markman, H.J., Prado, L.M., Olmos-Gallo, P.A., Tonelli, L., St. Peters, M., Leber, B.D., Bobulinski, M., Cordova, A., & Whitton, S.W. (2001). Community-based premarital preparation: Clergy and lay leaders on the front lines. Family Relations, 50(1), 67-76.

Stanley, S.M., & Trathen, D. (1994). Christian PREP: An empirically based model for marital and premarital intervention. Journal of Psychology and Christianity, 13, 158-165.

Stanley, S.M., Trathen, D., McCain, S., Bryan, M. (1998). A lasting promise. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1999, No. 163, Marriages and Divorces-Number and Rate, by State. 1980 to 1996, p. 114.

Strommen, M.P., & Hardel, R.A. (2000). Passing on the faith: A radical new model. Winona, MN: St. Mary's Press.

Steinberg, L. (1999). Adolescence . Fifth Edition. McGraw-Hill.

Sullivan, K.T., & Bradbury, TN. (1997). Are premarital programs reaching couples at risk for marital dysfunction? Journal of Clinical and Consulting Psychology, 65, 24-30.

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2002a). State policies to promote marriage: Preliminary report. Washington, DC: DHHS March 2002. Online at. http://aspe.os.dhbs.gov/hsp/marriage02/ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2002b). Strengthening healthy marriages: A compendium of approaches. Washington, DC: DHHS Draft, August 2002.

U.S. House of Representatives. (2003). Personal Responsibility, Work, and Family Promotion Act of 2003 (Introduced as H.R. 4). Online at: http://www.congress.gov

Waite, L., & Gallagher, M. (2000). The case for marriage. New York: Doubleday.

Waite, L.J., Browning, D., Doherty, W.J., Gallagher, M., Luo, Y, & Stanley, S.M. (2002). Does Divorce Make People Happy? Findings from a Study of Unhappy Marriages. New York: Institute for American Values.

Whitehead, B.D., & Popenoe, D (2001). The state of our unions: The social health of marriage in America. New Brunswick, NJ: The National Marriage Project, Rutgers: The Stare University of New Jersey.

Whitehead, B.D., & Popenoe, D. (1999). Changes in teen attitudes toward marriage, cohabitation and children, 1975--1995. New Brunswick, NJ: The National Marriage Project, Rutgers: The State University of New Jersey.

Zaff, J., Calkins, J., Bridges, L.J., & Margie, N.G. (2002). Promoting positive mental and emotional health in teens: Some lessons from research. Washington, DC: Child Trends.

AUTHOR

SILLIMAN, BENJAMIN. Address: Department of 4-H Youth Development, North Carolina State University, Box 7606, Raleigh, NC 27695. Title: Associate Professor and Extension Specialist. Degrees: BA, Colorado State University; MDiv, Princeton Theological Seminary; MS, PhD, Kansas State University. Specializations: Youth development, marriage education, adolescent risk and resiliency.

Correspondence concerning this article may be addressed to Benjamin Silliman, PhD, Department of 4-H Youth Development, North Carolina State University, Box 7606, Raleigh, NC 27695. Email: ben_silliman@ncsu.edutudes

BENJAMIN SILLIMAN

North Carolina State University