



National Poverty Center Working Paper Series

#08-11

July 2008

**Implementation of 'Within My Reach:'
Providing a Relationship Awareness and Communications Skills
Program
to TANF Recipients in Oklahoma**

Anne Sparks, Ohio University

This paper is available online at the National Poverty Center Working Paper Series index at:
http://www.npc.umich.edu/publications/working_papers/

Any opinions, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this material are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the view of the National Poverty Center or any sponsoring agency.

Implementation of 'Within My Reach:'
Providing a Relationship Awareness and Communications Skills Program
to TANF Recipients in Oklahoma

Anne Sparks

Ohio University
Department of Social Work
Morton 416
Athens, OH 45701
740-597-1636
sparksa@ohio.edu

This work has been supported (in part) by a grant from the National Poverty Center at the University of Michigan. Any opinions expressed are those of the author.

Abstract

Through the Oklahoma Marriage Initiative and Oklahoma's Department of Human Services, a relationship education program called Within My Reach is included in a week of orientation activities for new TANF (public assistance) clients. An implementation study was conducted with the aims: 1) of providing an in-depth description of the program based on the researcher's observations; 2) of assessing, through in-depth interviews, the fit between the curriculum and the TANF clients' actual relationship situations and concerns; and 3) of assessing, through repeated interviews, the degree to which participants utilize skills taught in the program. The researcher observed Within My Reach classes in three Department of Human Services centers in the greater Oklahoma City area and interviewed twenty-two TANF clients who participated in the Within My Reach program. Analysis of interviews and field notes from observation of classes found that a good fit existed between topics covered in the curriculum and the TANF clients' actual relationship situations and concerns. Analysis of post-completion interviews with eleven participants revealed that all eleven found at least one concept in the program valuable; nine of the eleven described one or more ways in which they had utilized awareness or skill they had gained from the program. The findings suggest that Within My Reach successfully modifies and adapts core elements of PREP (an effective relationship education program for middle class engaged and married couples) in order to address issues experienced by low income single parents.

Keywords: relationship education; single parents; TANF; healthy marriage initiative

Implementation of 'Within My Reach:'
Providing a Relationship Awareness and Communications Skills Program
to TANF Recipients in Oklahoma

The goals of PRWORA, the welfare reform legislation passed in 1996, included the family formation objectives of reducing the incidence of nonmarital pregnancies and encouraging the formation and maintenance of two-parent families. The Healthy Marriage Initiative supported efforts to accomplish these goals and emphasized inclusion of low income populations in funded programs (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2008). States have been experimenting with a variety of Healthy Marriage Initiative projects. The emphasis on low income populations brought the needs of economically disadvantaged unmarried parents to the attention of researchers and marriage and relationship education experts (Ooms & Wilson, 2004). Reports of ethnographic and survey research identified interest among low income adults in receiving services that would help them improve the quality of their relationships (Jarchow, 2003; Johnson, Stanley, Glenn, Amato, Nock, Markman, & Dion, 2002; Ooms & Wilson). This interest, in addition to research documenting advantages to children of growing up in a family with both parents present, provided the rationale for intervention.

To succeed, efforts to improve the quality and stability of low income parents' relationships must be based on an accurate understanding of the relationship problems and life circumstances of those intended to benefit from the programs. Research findings

indicated that in providing services to unmarried parents, the goal of building a foundation for marriage would not always be appropriate (Ooms & Wilson). Relationship educators developed a curriculum designed for low income single parents called Within My Reach which covers relationship awareness, relationship decision making, and communication skills. The Oklahoma Marriage Initiative fielded the program and has implemented it through the state's Department of Human Services as one component of orientation activities for new recipients of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). The curriculum teaches concepts and skills designed to enable participants to assess past and current intimate relationships in terms of safety, communication patterns, their children's well-being, and their personal goals. It consists of fifteen one-hour sessions utilizing lecture and discussion, audio-visual presentations, small group exercises, role play and individual workbooks.

Two of the three authors of the Within My Reach curriculum, Scott Stanley and Galena Kline (Rhoades), are marriage educators and researchers associated with PREP (Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program) who are also conducting a large, federally funded study on relationship development at the University of Denver; the third author is Marline Pearson, an expert in relationship and sexuality education for young adults and teens and instructor at Madison Area Technical College. The authors adapted key principles from PREP (a well established program for couples to prevent marital distress), expanded the scope of themes addressed to partner/mate selection and relationship decision making, utilized the expertise of consultants in the fields of domestic violence, poverty and low income families, and obtained feedback from pilot

programs in Oklahoma in developing the WMR curriculum. (See Description of the Within My Reach Curriculum in Appendix.)

This paper presents findings from a process study of the ongoing implementation of WMR as a component of orientation activities for new TANF recipients in respective Department of Human Services (DHS) Centers in the Oklahoma City area. The purposes of the study are to describe the delivery of the program in the setting of the DHS centers; to assess the fit between the content of WMR and the participating TANF clients' actual relationship situations and concerns; and to ascertain the degree to which participants use concepts and skills taught in the program after completing WMR.

The expectation of effectiveness of Within My Reach is based on its derivation from PREP, an empirically based couple's relationship skills training program which has been evaluated within the context of white middle class married or engaged couples (Markman, H., Renick, M., Floyd, F., Stanley, S. & Clements, M., 1993). This study is a first step in evaluating Within My Reach, which modifies PREP's techniques for teaching communication and conflict resolution skills to couples (Markman, Stanley, Blumberg, Jenkins & Whitely, 2004) so that individuals who may or may not be in an ongoing relationship (or a relationship with future potential) may benefit from learning these skills (Pearson, Stanley & Kline, 2005). Though there are now a number of PREP adaptations for less advantaged populations, the effectiveness of the PREP model in settings outside those which serve middle class married or engaged couples has not yet been evaluated. This study examines the effectiveness of a PREP-based program for low income single parents who are TANF recipients. By including specifics as to how the program is actually delivered, the fit between the curriculum and the lives of participants,

and the extent to which participants apply the concepts and skills covered in the program, the study provides insight regarding logistic, instructional and client variables that may affect the program's impact.

Goals of Within My Reach and the Healthy Marriage Initiative

Most families that receive TANF in Oklahoma, as elsewhere, are headed by unmarried, divorced or separated mothers living in low income communities. Because many women in these situations live with an intimate partner or have a committed relationship with a non-cohabiting male partner, referring to them as "single mothers" is problematic (Seltzer, 2004). However, as the term is still commonly used, it is used here. Research shows that lack of stability and threats to physical safety and emotional well-being are often experienced by low income single mothers in their relationships with male partners (Sparks, 2004). One of the goals of the WMR Program is to instill in each participant the belief that she deserves to be treated with respect and be physically and emotionally safe in an intimate relationship. By heightening relationship awareness and encouraging use of decision making skills, the curriculum provides a foundation for women to recognize when a relationship is dangerous and to utilize resources that may be necessary in order to end such relationships safely. (The curriculum recommends that telephone numbers of domestic violence programs be given during the program.) The curriculum focuses on various other issues that help individuals evaluate whether or not a relationship is healthy and whether it is a "good fit." The curriculum content focused on improving communication skills is intended to enable women to strengthen safe relationships which they want to continue. The curriculum stresses recognizing and changing communication patterns that have a negative impact on the women and on their

children (which can include interactions with a current partner, with a former partner who is their child's biological parent, and with their child).

WMR's emphasis on personal decision making and its goal of helping women end abusive relationships and avoid them in the future may surprise some critics of the Healthy Marriage Initiative (HMI). Although the influence of political ideology is beyond the scope of this paper, some criticisms of the HMI and common misperceptions need to be briefly addressed. Critics of the Healthy Marriage Initiative (HMI) have claimed that its intention is to coerce people into marriage, that it ignores the danger to women of remaining in abusive relationships or marrying abusive partners, and that it stigmatizes unmarried mothers and their children.

Although the official intent and actual implementation of any social welfare program may vary, it is important to begin with information provided by the Administration for Children and Families (the agency within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services that administers the HMI): The mission of the initiative is "to help couples, who have chosen marriage for themselves, gain greater access to marriage education services, on a voluntary basis, where they can acquire the skills and knowledge necessary to form and sustain a healthy marriage" (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services [HHS], 2008, p. 2). The mission and goals of HMI state that its purpose is not to coerce anyone "to marry or remain in unhealthy relationships;" in addition, the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005 "requires that any entity receiving funding related to healthy marriage promotion make a commitment to consult experts in domestic violence or relevant community domestic violence coalitions in developing programs and activities" (HHS, p. 2). A paper co-authored by Anne Menard, Director of the National

Resource Center on Domestic Violence, provided an overview of HMI efforts to develop site-specific domestic violence protocols for funded programs. Menard and Williams (2006, pp. 14-15) concluded that funded sites were apparently “taking domestic violence issues and protocol development seriously,” and they suggested “opening up of the current ‘marriage promotion’ paradigm at the political, policy and program levels to include a more inclusive investment in *relationship* skills and *relationship* health” (authors’ italics).

An influential research brief from Child Trends identifies “lack of domestic violence” as a defining characteristic of healthy marriage and notes “that many of the elements of a healthy marriage are also appropriate to relationships other than marriage” (Moore, Jekielek, Bronte-Tinkew, Guzman, Ryan, and Redd, 2004, pp. 4-5). Ooms (2005) addressed assumptions about gender roles in her review of the evidence-based best practice marriage and relationship education programs widely adopted by programs receiving HMI funding. She states that “‘best practice’ curricula do not promote a particular model of how family roles and tasks should be divided,” but have in common the assumption that “men and women need to respect each other as equal partners and share in decision making” (Ooms, pp. 5-6).

Fears that the movement to strengthen marriage may stigmatize single mothers possibly derive from the fact that before the availability and acceptance of birth control, belief in the immorality of sexual relations outside marriage went hand in hand with efforts to discourage nonmarital pregnancies. However, current arguments supporting social policy efforts to reconnect childbearing with marriage are not framed in moral terms but in terms of personal and social well-being, citing, for example, the association

of mental and physical health with marital stability and the increased likelihood of school success and financial independence in adulthood for children raised by married parents (Jarchow, 2003). The eligibility of faith-based organizations for Healthy Marriage Initiative funding may raise concern that in some marriage and relationship education programs, strict religious beliefs about gender roles and the immorality of sexual relations outside marriage and prohibitions against divorce could take precedence over the funding agency's definition of healthy marriage and its non-coercive mission (Pyles, 2007). The writer is not aware of any systematic screening in this regard; however, guidance is regularly provided to grantees concerning the required separation of inherently religious activities from grant-funded activities (National Healthy Marriage Resource Center, 2007).

The Oklahoma Marriage Initiative and Oklahoma's TANF Population

The Oklahoma Marriage Initiative (OMI) began in 1999 when government officials became publicly committed to lowering the state's divorce rate (which exceeded the national average), in keeping with the family formation goals of PRWORA. The state has used some of its TANF funds and (more recently) HMI funding, to develop, implement and evaluate various strategies to accomplish this goal (Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation [ASPE] 2006). OMI remains unique as a centrally organized state-wide effort relying upon collaborative planning and implementation among a range of institutions, including the state's Department of Health and Human Services (DHS) and Public Strategies, Inc. (PSI), which is a private, for-profit consulting firm, and state and national experts on social welfare policy, relationship and marriage education, family structure, and low income families. OMI chose the Prevention and

Relationship Enhancement Program (PREP) as the primary curriculum to be available to couples seeking to strengthen their relationship. Use of the same program throughout the state has facilitated communication among various projects, since a “common language” is used across service delivery settings (ASPE, 2006). At the same time, the PREP curriculum can be modified, as it has been through development of Within My Reach, and there can be ongoing dialogue about strategies for effectively using the curriculum and adapting it for specific populations. The direction of adaptation for Within My Reach resulted in a curriculum that is quite different from the couple-focused PREP. The focus is not exclusively on a specific current relationship; the emphasis is on the fact that whatever one’s status is regarding romantic relationships, these relationships affect all other major spheres of functioning. In fact, the developers have argued that individually oriented relationship education provides opportunities to explore important topics that cannot be covered as fully in couple focused curricula (Stanley, Pearson, & Kline, 2005).

Generally, rates of poverty in Oklahoma are slightly higher than national rates. Oklahoma County, where the study was conducted, reflects some of the state’s demographic characteristics and differs in others. In 2005, the state’s rate of poverty among children under the age of five, which was 27.5%, exceeded the national rate of 21.3% (Child Welfare League of America [CWLA], 2007). In 2006, the state’s poverty rate was 55.5% for families in the category of “female householder, no husband present with related children under 5 years old,” and Oklahoma County’s rate for the same type of family was 45.6% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2006). The state’s rate of unemployment in 2006 was 6% (U.S. Census Bureau).

In 2006, Oklahoma ranked fourth in the country in percentage of families with welfare receipt, with 3.7% of households receiving cash public assistance (U.S. Census Bureau, 2006). Oklahoma's average monthly payment per TANF case in January, 2007, was \$197.24 (Oklahoma Department of Human Services [OKDHS], 2008). In January of 2007, the state of Oklahoma had 3,670 open TANF cases with adults; 1,514 (41%) of these were in Oklahoma County (OKDHS). In that month, 1,016 cases were opened, and 1,184 cases were closed. Of the opened cases, 246 were previous cases being reopened. The largest group of cases closed, 406, were in the category "failed or refused to meet TANF work requirements" (OKDHS). In the state of Oklahoma in January of 2007, 50% of adults receiving TANF were between the ages of 20 and 29, and 9% of the adult recipients were male (OKDHS).

Representation of racial/ethnic groups in TANF caseloads varies across states and within the state of Oklahoma. Nationally, 32.1% of families receiving TANF in 2005 were classified as White, 37.1% were African American, 25.5% were Hispanic, and 1.4% were Native American (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services [HHS], 2007). In Oklahoma in 2005, 44.4% of families receiving TANF were classified as White, 34.6% were African American, 8.1% were Hispanic, and 12.5% were Native American (HHS). In Oklahoma County, the percentage of adults receiving TANF in 2006 who were classified as White was 33%, the percentage who were Black was 53%, the percentage who were Hispanic was 7%, and the percentage classified as Native American was 6% (OKDHS, 2008). The percentage of White TANF-receiving families in Oklahoma is greater than in the U.S. overall; however, the percentage of adult TANF recipients in Oklahoma County who are White matches the national profile of approximately one third

(OKDHS; HHS). Approximately one half of Oklahoma County recipients are Black (OKDHS). Less than 10% of Oklahoma State and Oklahoma County TANF families are considered Hispanic (compared with 25.5% in the national profile), while the percentages of families/adults receiving TANF who are Native American in Oklahoma (12.5%) and in Oklahoma County (6%) are significantly greater than the national percentage of 1.4% (OKDHS; HHS).

Review of the Literature

Relationships of Low Income Unmarried Parents

WMR incorporates findings from recent and burgeoning research on “fragile family relationships” (relationships of low income unmarried parents), from research in the field of relationship violence prevention and intervention (Pearson, et al., 2005), and from many specialized areas within the field of family studies. The literature on low income parents’ intimate and co-parenting relationships and its relevance to WMR is briefly reviewed here. Gibson-Davis (with Edin & McLanahan, 2005) examined the puzzling discrepancy between the number of low income unmarried parents who, at the time of their child’s birth, reported that their chances of marriage to each other were good or even better, and the much smaller number that had actually married, or even remained together, at the time of the child’s first birthday. Their in-depth qualitative interviews with unmarried parents led them to the tentative conclusion that three major barriers to the goal of marriage which the romantically involved parents face are “financial concerns, relationship quality, and the fear of divorce” (Gibson-Davis et al., p. 1310).

Policy recommendations based on findings from the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study emphasize the association between financial challenges and relationship

stability: “Programs that prepare parents for good jobs with better earnings capacity” may be critical in efforts to help unmarried parents stabilize their relationship (Center for Research on Child Wellbeing [CRCW], 2002, p. 3). The recommendations do acknowledge that policies that improve the emotional quality of unmarried parents’ relationships could also, to a moderate degree, “encourage the maintenance of romantic or cohabitation unions and the movement to marriage” (CRCW, 2003, p. 3). Although a relationship skills program cannot directly improve a couple’s financial stability, the exercises presented in WMR on clarifying goals and making plans and taking steps to reach those goals are relevant to overcoming financial obstacles to marriage (Pearson, et al., 2005; Gibson-Davis, 2007). Relationship quality and partner mistrust, which may be factors in fear of divorce, are directly addressed in WMR’s content on developing awareness of expectations, assessing compatibility and constructively addressing sources of conflict (including infidelity) in relationships (Pearson, et al.). It is important that over 90% of unmarried mothers in the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study, including some who were no longer romantically involved with their child’s father, wanted the father to be involved in raising their child (CRCW, 2000). This supports the content in WMR which applies the communication and conflict resolution skills taught in the program to helping single parents carry out their co-parent role with former partners (Pearson, et al.).

One relevant area specifically addressed in the WMR curriculum is the danger of increased mistrust in an ongoing cohabitation relationship (Stanley, Rhoades & Markman, 2006). Heightening women’s awareness of the emotional risks involved in remaining in a relationship that lacks a clear commitment from each partner is one

objective of the training (Pearson, et al., 2005). Drawing on theory and research on cohabitation (Stanley, et al.), WMR uses the concept of “sliding versus deciding” to explain the importance of clarifying personal goals, communicating about them with one’s partner, and making them the basis for decisions (Pearson, et al.). The emphasis on this concept reflects the assumption that some single parents may have never been encouraged to engage in future-oriented planning or had the opportunity to develop efficacy, the lack of which, according to England and Edin (2007, p. 15), is a “possible explanation for lower quality and less stable relationships among low-income individuals.”

Infidelity is one of the threats to relationships that low income unmarried mothers worry about most, according to an analysis of in-depth interviews with 162 women in the Philadelphia area (Edin and Kefalas, 2005). The other threats mentioned, domestic violence, substance abuse and criminal activity on the part of male partners, involve actual and potential harm to the physical and social well-being of the women, and serious risks to their children, as well. WMR straightforwardly addresses physical safety, encourages women to think about and carefully assess their safety in relationships, and includes a component that helps link women to national and local domestic violence resources (Pearson, et al., 2005). WMR does not give focused attention to the issues of partners’ substance abuse and criminal activity, but incorporates examples of each problem in scenarios discussed in small groups and in workbook exercises. Based on findings from a qualitative, longitudinal study of tensions in the relationships of unmarried parents, Waller (2008) recommends that programs focused on relationship skills for low income couples give special attention to their social context within poor

communities and to the link between women's distrust and traumatic experiences such as sexual and physical abuse (Cherlin, Burton, Hurt & Purvin, 2004). Issues that low income couples have difficulty communicating about which could be addressed in such programs include "chronic unemployment, incarceration, housing problems, multipartner fertility and substance use" (Waller, p. 141). The trajectories of unstable unions and dissolution of some relationships described by Waller suggest that offering a relationship and communication skills program designed for individuals rather than couples, as WMR does, may be especially valuable for those who do not have a current partner, want to end a relationship or have a relationship with an uncertain future.

Influence of TANF on Personal Behavior and Family Dynamics

It is important to note that programs offered through TANF have traditionally not addressed the needs of couples. While political conservatives have criticized public assistance provision for single mothers and their children on grounds that it discouraged marriage, feminists and others argue that public assistance has allowed women to avoid, leave or at least buffer the effects of abusive and unstable relationships with men. An intriguing aspect of Within My Reach is that it addresses both concerns, providing relationship strengthening skills for women who plan to continue their current relationship and those who hope to marry, and providing safety assessment and steps for ending relationships for those whose relationships are dangerous or unhealthy in other ways.

Provisions within PRWORA are intended to instill new attitudes and behaviors, especially among those who rely on receipt of government aid, regarding fertility, family formation and child well-being, in addition to work (Corbett & Lennon, 2003). Decision-

making concerning use of TANF funds is now centered at the state rather than federal level, which has led to many variations in design and delivery of services (Blum, 2003). As recent policy initiatives result in development of programs with new goals, those responsible for carrying out the programs need clarity regarding those goals, and potential obstacles need to be identified. Interest in the types of programs being utilized and the fact that expected outcomes include more complex changes in attitudes and behavior than can be captured by traditional outcome variables (such as employment, earnings, receipt of welfare) have generated a demand for research that provides detailed descriptions of actual program implementation (Holcomb & Nightingale, 2003). In-depth qualitative research is particularly useful in this domain, as a means of understanding how clients interpret and interact with new programs and how various aspects of clients' lives may affect their responses (Edin, 2003).

Methodology

The research design is a process study of the implementation of the Within My Reach curriculum as a component of the orientation program for new TANF clients in Oklahoma's Department of Human Services centers. Collection of qualitative data took place through interviews with TANF recipients prior to, during and following their participation in the WMR sessions and through observation of the actual WMR sessions. Recruitment of sites took into consideration the importance of minimizing any distracting or inhibiting impact that the presence of the researcher might have on the WMR sessions. WMR instructors at DHS Centers in the greater Oklahoma City area were given information about the purpose of the study and asked if they would be willing to volunteer their site for the study. Four sites volunteered, and the three that held the

orientation on an every-week basis were selected. The researcher attended a training for instructors of Within My Reach (who were mainly but not exclusively DHS employees), given in Oklahoma City in April, 2006, by PREP and Public Strategies. In addition to experiencing the training given to WMR instructors first-hand, the researcher was able to establish contacts that were valuable in making arrangements to conduct the study.

Because of the personal nature of the individual interviews and of information likely to be elicited in the WMR sessions, it was important for the researcher/interviewer to have qualifications that would establish her sensitivity and trustworthiness. She has over 15 years of professional experience as a social worker providing clinical and advocacy services to women and in previous qualitative research developed a typology of low income single mothers' relationships with their children's fathers (Sparks, 2004).

Data Collection

Semi-structured, in-depth life history interviews were conducted with 22 TANF clients; 17 were interviewed before or during their participation in the Within My Reach program, and 6 of these also had repeated interviews two to three months after completing WMR. Five TANF recipients were interviewed only after completion of WMR; two of these had attended a cycle of WMR given after the one observed by the researcher at that DHS site, and three had attended WMR through their GED program after their TANF orientation. The researcher observed two complete cycles and one partial cycle of WMR classes in Oklahoma County DHS centers and took field notes describing the instruction and the interaction of the 17 respondents attending these sessions who were participating in the study. Although the researcher had not anticipated

participation of male subjects, two males did volunteer to participate and were included. Because the majority of participants are women, female pronouns are used.

Both the initial and repeated in-depth interviews elicited information about the participant's current relationship status and relationship concerns and asked her to describe specific interactions with a romantic partner or in any ongoing co-parenting relationship with a past partner, or in any other relationship, in which she has not been satisfied with the communication. Participants were asked specific questions in the repeated interview about their most recent interactions in those relationships that they had mentioned in the first interview. They were also asked about any concepts and skills they remembered from the program, about any situations in which they applied concepts and skills from WMR, and whether they had any suggestions for improving WMR. (See Interview Schedules in Appendix.)

Human Subjects

TANF clients were given verbal and written information about the study by the Oklahoma Department of Human Services staff at the DHS sites and by the GED instructors at the GED Program sites. Women and men who agreed to meet with the researcher were then scheduled for an interview held in a vacant office of the DHS center. Interviews with participants in GED programs were held in empty classrooms at the GED centers. One repeated interview was held in the respondent's home, one was held in a private area of a hotel lobby, and four were held in vacant classrooms or offices of programs respondents attended. Before beginning each interview, the researcher explained the purpose of the study, provided her contact information, and obtained the

respondent's written consent to participate. Respondents received \$20 at the completion of each interview.

The study received approval from the Institutional Review Board of Ohio University in April, 2006.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

- 1) How is the WMR program implemented in the DHS centers? What are the distinguishing features of the environments, instructors, and instructional methods?
- 2) What is the degree of fit between the relationship status and concerns of TANF clients and the concepts and skills covered by the WMR curriculum?
- 3) How do client characteristics including relationship histories, current social and financial circumstances and general cognitive functioning (capacity to benefit from classroom-type instruction) affect receptivity to the program?
- 4) Do participants utilize the concepts and skills covered in the program after completing it, and if so, how and to what degree?
- 5) How do participants assess the value or lack of value of the program to them after completing it?

Methods of Analysis

The data consists of audiotapes of the initial, repeated and GED-participant interviews and field notes based on observations of the training sessions and informal conversations with the participants and instructors during breaks and immediately following the WMR sessions. Interviews were transcribed and the content was then organized into a profile for each participant including the following domains:

demographic information; family of origin; childhood and adolescent experiences; current family relationships; parenting concerns; past relationships with intimate/romantic partners; current or most recent relationship with intimate/romantic partner; current relationship and communication issues (including intimate/romantic partners, children, other family members and non-family members); and family and life goals. Open and closed coding of transcripts initially done using Atlas.ti established classifications for current relationship status, patterns in relationships with intimate/romantic partners, current parenting and relationship issues, and examples of unsatisfactory communication. The content in these four categories and the individual profiles were then analyzed to assess the fit between the relationship status and concerns of clients and the topics and skills covered by the curriculum. Repeated interviews were coded to identify recent interaction with a current or former male partner or a potential romantic partner and interactions in any relationships in which the respondent had reported dissatisfaction with communication in the initial interviews. Descriptions of interactions in the repeated interviews were compared with descriptions given in the initial interview and analyzed for indications of influence from the Within My Reach program.

Field notes taken during and after observation of WMR sessions were annotated and analyzed to determine amounts of time spent on specific curriculum content and in order to provide descriptive accounts of the environment of the DHS center and the classroom, the rapport between instructors and clients, the instructor's style and adherence to the curriculum (as organized in the instructor's manual), and evidence of clients' engagement with the class activities and content presented.

Description of Sample

The 20 female participants ranged in age from 19 to 47 with the average age of 27.8. Twelve women (60%) were between the ages of 20 and 29. There were two male participants, aged 34 and 39. Twelve (60%) of the women had not completed high school, but one of these had received a GED. Five women had high school diplomas and three had some college. One of the men had not completed high school; the other had a bachelor's degree. Seven (35%) of the women had been married. Two of the women remained legally married although they had left their husbands, and five were divorced.. One man was divorced; the other had never married. The ages of the women at the time of their first birth range from 13 to 28, with the average age of 19.9. (The pregnancy of the participant who gave birth at age 13 resulted from rape.) Ten of the women (50%) had their first child between the ages of 20 and 24. The men had first become fathers at the ages of 21 and 32 respectively. The number of children each woman had had ranged from one to four; the average number was two. Ages of the women's children ranged from under a year (12.5%) to age 20 and older (7.5%), with 25% between the ages of 1 and 4, 35% between the ages of 5 and 12, and 15% between the ages of 13 and 19. (Two children were deceased). The unmarried man had 2 year old twins, and the divorced man had sons ages 6 and 10.

Both African American and White TANF recipients participated at each DHS site. Nine of the 20 women considered themselves African American or Black, and a few of these also acknowledged some White or Indian (Native American) ancestry. Ten of the women considered themselves White, and one woman described herself as multi-racial,

acknowledging Asian ancestry. One of the male participants was African American, and one was White.

Findings

The environment of the DHS centers, the instructors' personalities and style, their adherence to the WMR curriculum, and the composition of the class could be identified from field notes as factors having an impact on the atmosphere in the classroom and on the degree to which participants focused on the material and seemed to be able to integrate the concepts and acquire the skills presented.

The lead instructor for Site #1 was a former DHS trainer who now volunteers; the TANF staff person in charge of orientation assisted intermittently. The volunteer had originally been involved in modifying PREP materials for TANF participants and emphasized that participants can't control the actions of others but have control over their own reactions and choices. The volunteer used many examples from her own family life to illustrate concepts and skills of WMR. Participants at this site showed their interest in these examples through questions and comments, and several spontaneously disclosed details of their own family and relationship situations.

The only instructor for Site #2 was the DHS staff member in charge of orientation. She had taken the three-day training to become a WMR instructor six months previously and explained that she was still making the transition from use of materials she had previously developed for the orientation to use of the WMR curriculum. She also shared personal information with the participants that encouraged trust and rapport. This instructor made it apparent that she was following a clear "lesson plan." At this site some

participants spontaneously began taking notes from the transparencies shown on the overhead projector.

The lead instructor for Site #3 was the DHS staff member in charge of orientation, and her group of 15 participants was twice the size of the groups at Sites #1 and #2 . She had taken the first three-day training provided to OKDHS staff members to become WMR instructors the previous year, and a more recently trained co-worker assisted her when she had a group this large. She shared with the class that she was a single mother and had many of the same challenges the clients did. She and her co-worker consulted with each other or checked the instructor's manual briefly at times but generally moved very smoothly from one unit of the curriculum to the next. This instructor emphasized to participants that the concepts and skills of WMR were relevant to their ability to succeed in the TANF program.

WMR classes were given as part of the orientation week for new TANF clients, which also included general information sessions and various types of individual assessment activities mainly geared towards determining what school or work requirements would be appropriate for the client. At the three sites, WMR sessions were scheduled for a maximum of twelve hours, six one day and six another, which included breaks and lunch. This necessitated covering some units in less than the 55 minutes allotted by the manual. The instructors determined what was covered and the depth of coverage, while external factors and individual characteristics of participants affected the participants' concentration. At sites #1 and #2 clients were scheduled for evaluations or other appointments for which they were excused from WMR, causing distracting entrances and exits, and not everyone was present for all units. At all three sites a

computerized assessment activity had just been introduced, and clients were pulled out of WMR sessions in pairs for that activity throughout part of one day; at one site instructors were reorganizing the schedule of WMR topics so that in future weeks, the key communication skill (Speaker-Listener Technique) would not be taught during the “pull out” time. These are other examples of fluctuations in concentration: one client said that the first day of WMR was “awesome” but she couldn’t concentrate the second day; a pregnant participant complained of being uncomfortable sitting and then stood and walked around in order to be more comfortable; the classroom with 15 attendees was slightly crowded, and during a period when the ventilation stopped working, some participants spoke irritably about how stuffy the room was.

Relevance and Usefulness of WMR to Participants

The following outline of the main topics in the WMR curriculum is based on analysis of the WMR Instructor’s Manual and field notes taken during observation of WMR sessions:

- I. Healthy Relationships (defining and increasing chances of having healthy relationships; recognizing and leaving or avoiding unsafe, unhealthy relationships)
- II. Assessing and Improving Communication (identifying unhealthy communication patterns; identifying sources and effects of conflict; using skills to deal constructively with conflict)
- III. Impact of Parents’ Intimate Relationships, Co-Parenting, Communication Patterns, and Family Structure on Children (managing relationships, making decisions, and communicating in ways that benefit children)

IV. Having Goals and Taking Steps to Reach Them (making decisions about relationships, formulating goals, carrying out steps to accomplish goals)

The WMR curriculum was designed to deliver information to participants, provide opportunities for personal reflection, and generally increase competence in the above areas through acquisition of concepts and skills. Five general assumptions seem to be explicitly or implicitly made about the intended participants:

- 1) Many participants' families of origin failed to provide them with stable, nurturing home environments and healthy models of marriage and parenting;
- 2) As children and adolescents many participants experienced neglect, physical abuse, exposure to domestic violence, and disruptive household transitions;
- 3) There have been undesirable or challenging developments in participants' intimate relationships which may affect their own and their children's well-being; they may benefit from learning concepts and skills developed by experts on low income families, formation and trajectories of intimate relationships, domestic violence, conflict in relationships, communication patterns, and child well-being;
- 4) They have rarely been encouraged to reflect on how relationships in their lives have affected them, on relationship and communication patterns that they might want to change, and on their goals for the future, and they may benefit from a structured opportunity to do so;
- 5) They may benefit from the opportunity to assess relationships with romantic partners (former, current and potential) and living arrangements in terms of

what is safe and healthy for them and their children, and to learn specific ways to take steps towards accomplishing their goals.

The findings presented in following sections refer to the above WMR topics and assumptions about participants. First, a summary of the life experiences and relationship situations of participants in this study shows that characteristics of the sample are similar to those of the population for which WMR is intended. The next section provides examples of curriculum content with descriptions of participants' actual engagement with the material, including their responses to the experiential exercises, opportunities offered for reflection and skill development. Then findings are presented from the analysis of interviews conducted with eleven participants who were interviewed two to three months after completing WMR, eliciting what they recalled from the program, whether or not they considered it useful, and whether they had applied any of the skills in their relationships.

Participant Life Experiences

Most of the 22 participants described very unstable family lives during childhood, as anticipated by the authors of WMR. Although the parents of more than fifty per cent of participants had been married to each other, few participants had both their biological parents present in the home through childhood and adolescence. Many of their mothers and fathers had a partner who was not their biological parent during the participants' childhoods, but few participants had positive relationships with stepparents. Several participants witnessed domestic violence in the home; some were physically abused, and four female participants were sexually abused by their biological father or their mother's boyfriend. The participants who experienced the most neglect and disruption in childhood

were those whose single mothers had many boyfriends, whose parents abused drugs or alcohol, and whose parents spent time in prison.

Some participants were homeless at points during childhood; some lived temporarily with various relatives, and in adolescence some lived with friends or boyfriends. The fact that more than half the participants did not graduate from high school is not surprising, given the degree of neglect and disruption they experienced during adolescence. A few participants reported that currently, as adults, they received emotional support or concrete assistance from family members; however, several described dysfunctional behavior on the part of siblings and parents that continued to affect them negatively. For example, Sylvia, a nineteen year old with a four month old baby, had just become homeless due to her mother's impulsive decision to leave the apartment they had been sharing and move to another state with her boyfriend.

Those who train instructors to present the WMR curriculum acknowledge the disruptive impact of poverty on the lives of TANF recipients. Thus, a WMR participant whose application for assistance was precipitated by a crisis might be "in survival mode" (S. Roby, personal communication, August 7, 2006) which could limit her ability to focus on topics other than those related to meeting immediate needs. Among the 17 participants interviewed during TANF orientation, four had infants less than one year old, and three of these did not have stable housing. Besides housing and finding satisfactory childcare, issues clients mentioned as priorities were arranging for transportation and getting to medical appointments.

Participants' Intimate Relationships

As anticipated by the authors of WMR, many of the participants' intimate relationships have not provided them with stability or support. Few of the partners with whom they had a child were helping them raise that child. Negative experiences that participants reported in intimate relationships included very serious situations of domestic violence. Three participants, including two who had been married at the time, had literally fled from their partners because of domestic violence. One woman's abusive husband and another participant's former partner (who had physically assaulted her) were in prison at the time of WMR. Some biological fathers of other participants' children were in prison, or had been in prison, as well. Three women maintained contact with their child's imprisoned biological father for the sake of the father-child relationship, or allowed their child to have contact, but none of the participants maintained a romantic involvement with someone in prison.

As expected, participants' previous relationships varied in level of commitment and duration. None of the women or men at the time of the study had a stable romantic involvement with the parent of his or her first child. Some of the women and one of the men had not had a serious romantic involvement with the other biological parent of their first child. Others had been married to that partner or committed to that relationship at the time. A few women described complicated parenting issues regarding a child's relationships with, or knowledge of, his or her biological father and interaction with another father figure. For example, the biological father of Rachel's four year old son had never become involved as a parent; her former husband (the father of her two older children) did develop a relationship with the boy but had then distanced himself.

About half the participants were involved in romantic relationships at the time of WMR. Three women had recently ended or were in the process of ending a relationship with their child's biological father. Several women currently had a serious relationship with a male partner with whom they had not had a child, and two women who each had a child from a previous relationship were currently pregnant with a more recent partner. Some women expressed interest in marrying or establishing a more permanent commitment with their current partner. Tamika, who referred to her cohabiting boyfriend as her fiancé, said she would like to stay with him and have another child, but couldn't "count on it." (She had a child before they became involved, then had a stillborn baby with him.) Two participants reported feeling pressure from their partner to change the status of their relationship. Theresa's boyfriend wanted them to live together, and Ronetta said that her boyfriend, with whom she was having a child, wanted them to get married, but neither woman thought that her partner was financially stable enough to take that step.

One of the male participants was dating two women at the time of the initial interview. One woman said she would be interested in dating but thought her opportunities were very limited. Five of the women and one of the male participants (over one fourth of the sample) were not involved with or dating anyone and were comfortable with that status. Two women who did not have a current partner expressed a definite desire to marry.

Content in WMR addresses multiple aspects of the various relationship situations and histories of participants in the study as briefly described above. It has somewhat less relevance for the group that is not currently interested in having a relationship, but

assessing past relationships, challenges of single parenting and the effects of relationships and communication on children are of general interest. For example, the curriculum addresses co-parenting (as well as stepparenting) dilemmas and encourages the parent to allow the child to express feelings about the other biological parent, “even if it’s a parent he or she has never known” (Pearson, et al., 2005, p. 276).

General comments from participants in initial interviews acknowledged the importance of relationship issues in their lives. The interviewer did not directly ask what participants had been told about Within My Reach and what their reactions were to having the program as part of their TANF orientation. Interview transcripts and field notes do contain two critical comments from participants in the sessions observed: One participant stated that she thought the topics covered in WMR were too personal, and another commented that the time spent on WMR was not helping her get a job. (The second participant also alluded to discomfort with the topic being discussed due to current relationship difficulties).

Participant Engagement with WMR Content

This section provides examples of how WMR content was delivered at the three sites observed. Descriptions of participants’ interactions with instructors and with each other, and participants’ immediate responses to the presentations and activities of WMR sessions convey the significance of the material as well as the variations in instructor presentation and participant response. The examples from the curriculum focus mainly on the content areas of healthy relationships and improving communication.

Healthy Relationships

Unit One introduces the idea that currently in our country, “everyone is having trouble with relationships” (Pearson, et al., 2005, p. 35). Statistics and references to research are used to highlight changes in patterns in the last three decades: the increase in the rate of divorce, the increase in the number of couples who cohabit, and the increase in the percentage of births to unmarried mothers. The focus is on the impact of “troubled or unstable relationships” (Pearson, et al., p. 37) on the individuals in the relationships and on their children. The instructors followed the manual in noting that break-ups of parents living together are difficult for the children, just as divorce is, and growing up with parents in troubled relationships increases the risk to children of developing “social, behavioral, emotional, and school problems” (Pearson, et al., p. 37). The content includes statements that some risks are higher for children whose parents are not married. Information about high divorce rates and the negative impact of divorce on children is also presented, making it clear that marriage is not “risk-free.” (A topic in Unit Twelve is “ways that marriage seems to help children and things single parents can do to help their children, too,” Pearson, et al., p. 257.)

While “the good news” presented in Unit One is “that there are skills people can learn to make relationships work better and that there are ways to make good decisions in relationships” (Pearson, et al., 2005, p. 41), the necessity and desirability of ending some relationships is a theme reiterated throughout the curriculum. Instructors at all three sites emphasized that physical safety is the most important consideration in any relationship and that an abused person is not responsible for an abusive partner’s behavior or for trying to improve the abusive relationship. (Some activities that come later in the

curriculum include consideration of possibly wanting to end a relationship, particularly if it is not safe, and steps to take if one is ending a relationship.)

At one site, the presenter went beyond the material in the manual to say that long term committed relationships between people who are not married can be as successful as marriage. During a break at this site, Ronetta approached the instructor and told her she and her boyfriend, with whom she was pregnant, were arguing about whether they should get married: She stated that her boyfriend said they should get married but she did not think they were financially stable enough, and they were getting counseling from the pastor at her church. The instructor responded that it was wise that they were getting counseling and asked about the boyfriend's job situation and future plans. The instructor gave two recommendations: "Talk to your case manager about resources for him to get the same vocational testing you're getting, and look at the page on 'Making New Families Work' in your workbook together." (This page discusses the stepparent relationship, which was relevant as Ronetta had a child from a previous relationship; WMR does not include content for couples who are having a baby together.)

Units Two and Seven in the curriculum focus on the necessity for safety in relationships in order for them to be considered healthy and emphasize that participants in unsafe relationships should take special precautions not to discuss WMR or have materials from the program around their partner. It is recommended that anyone dealing with a domestic violence situation consider getting help from a domestic violence resource, and a sheet with emergency phone numbers, including the Domestic Violence Hotline number, is given to participants. Unit Seven includes information about barriers to leaving an abusive relationship. Participants at one site verbalized that they were aware

of the barriers, and two recounted domestic violence situations they had personally experienced in the past, while others described situations in which they had tried to help someone who was trying to leave an abusive relationship. Several of these women continued their discussion of people who were in or had been in domestic violence situations during their break. At another site, a participant approached the instructor following presentation of material on domestic violence to ask how she could find out when her former partner, to whom she was still legally married, would be released from prison, as she feared that upon release he would find her and attack her again. The instructor was not able to answer this question, but other participants who were listening mentioned the name of a program in Oklahoma City that provided some services related to domestic violence. The instructor said she thought it would be helpful to have a representative of a domestic violence program come to the session. (The WMR Instructor Manual recommends having a representative of a local domestic violence program come to the session, but this did not occur in the sessions I observed.)

Units Three and Four focus on awareness of how relationships begin and progress so that participants can assess the potential for developing a healthy relationship with a specific partner and can better weigh the possible consequences of relationship decisions (such as becoming sexually involved, living together, etc.). At one site, Monique, a woman who had recently ended her relationship with her baby's father, made statements indicating that she agreed with the principles listed on the transparency (displayed by overhead projector) titled "Seven Principles of Smart Love." (Two of the principles are: "Choose a real partner, not a 'makeover' project" and "Have a bottom line.") Continuing with this topic, the instructor stated that it's good to get as much knowledge as possible

about a person before getting involved, because “if a marriage or relationship breaks up, you’re dadgum sad and the children are hurt.” Monique, indicating that this statement ‘hit home,’ asked the instructor in a semi-joking manner, “Where were you five years ago?”

The concept of “sliding vs. deciding” presented in Unit 3 is a major theme of the curriculum. “Sliding” is explained as drifting into deeper involvement by doing things like having sex with someone or moving in with someone without thinking about what that step means and making a clear decision about it. In explaining the risk of “sliding,” the instructor refers back to a demonstration given in Unit One that uses green marbles to represent people who would be good partners and red to represent those who would have a negative effect on your life if they became your partner. The instructor demonstrates that having a greater proportion of green marbles in a bowl makes it more likely that someone who can’t see the color will pick a green marble rather than a red one. The instructor explains that learning how to make good decisions in relationships instead of “letting things just happen” is like “getting rid of the red and adding the green” (Pearson, et al., 2005, p. 49). Participants’ comments during this demonstration indicated that they were interested in knowing how to find the “green marbles.” During a later unit, when an instructor used the first person to describe a relationship in which trust had been broken (the topic was when to try to restore a relationship), a participant’s comment showed use of WMR terminology, “You slid into the bowl and got a red marble.”

Unit Five, which focuses on “Knowing Yourself First” includes two exercises which are good examples of the experiential aspects of the curriculum. The unit begins by describing personality styles and explaining the potential for personality clashes when people see things differently and do things differently, but neither person is right or

wrong. Participants then complete their own personality test, using a professionally printed handout, The Personality Color Wheel. Participants said they enjoyed this activity, and they spontaneously shared their results with each other, discussing the differences between the “colors” (personality types). Then the instructor discussed family background, the influence of patterns from family of origin and “childhood hurts” such as abuse and neglect. Participants completed an exercise in their workbooks on patterns in their family backgrounds. This exercise is “private,” and participants do not share their responses as they have with other workbook activities. The exercise asks them to think about what was good and bad in their childhood family patterns, to decide what they want to leave behind and what they want to keep, and to list qualities they believe are important for a healthy family and patterns that they believe are destructive for families.

In the initial interview with 22 year old Gail, which took place after Unit Five had been covered, the researcher asked her how doing the family background exercise had been for her. As a child, Gail had been sexually abused by men her mother brought home, and her first pregnancy had resulted from rape. The interview provided an opportunity to learn how the recalling of harmful events experienced while growing up affected a participant whose history included childhood neglect and sexual abuse and rape as an adolescent. When asked how doing the workbook activity about family background had affected her, Gail responded,

Um, it don't really affect me now, but I try to block it out and don't talk about it or anything because it's... like the kids and everybody was talking about rape in the room, and I got all teary-eyed.

She explained, “They were talking about their kids being raped at the age of eleven, and it’s pretty hard.” In response to the interviewer’s comment that it sounded like people in the class were talking about pretty serious things, Gail responded,

Actually, I think it’s pretty good to get it off your chest, and [it helps with] self esteem, because I haven’t really talked about it, so. Um, me I basically don’t talk about things..., and to hear everybody’s else’s situation, it helps me come more out, I guess that’s what I’m trying to say.

Gail’s comments indicated that the theme of making decisions about what she wanted to change from the past was meaningful to her. She stated that her mother “always chose men over me,” and added, “That’s why I’m trying to find a stable environment for my kids, because I don’t want them hating me when they get older.”

Improving Communication

Units Seven through Ten focus on conflict in relationships: recognizing destructive communication patterns and the issues that cause conflict, and learning techniques to deal with conflict in a constructive way and improve communication. In Unit Eight the negative effects that exposure to destructive conflict between adults has on children are discussed. Most of the content focuses on communication between partners in a couple relationship. However, the curriculum emphasizes that participants can apply their understanding of constructive ways of handling conflict and “issues that trigger fights” to other types of relationships (for example with parents, co-workers, and children). At both sites where the researcher observed sessions covering this material, participants did describe conflicts with family members and with their children when

asked to give examples of communication problems, and the workbook exercises also include such examples.

At the beginning of Unit Eight, participants are asked to brainstorm about what things trigger arguments. At one site, the instructor asked for a volunteer to list the group's responses on the blackboard. The list started with "money" and "sex" and had some tweaking: one suggestion that sounded like "recognition" was changed to "validation" by the volunteer, and the suggestion of "cursing" was changed to "values" by the instructor. Camaraderie had developed among the six participants, and when one participant suggested "jealousy," others responded, "oh, yes," and proceeded to help the volunteer at the blackboard with the spelling of the word. After the blackboard exercise, when the instructor talked about unexpected things that may "erupt" (using an illustration in the workbook to get at the topic of "hidden issues"), Tamika said, "You're supposed to hand all that up to God." The instructor responded, "I agree, but I can't discuss religion." (Most references to religion in WMR materials concern sources of support and couples with religious differences.) The group then became involved in doing the workbook exercise on "My Hidden Issues," and all were still quietly writing after ten minutes had passed. One participant asked what two terms used in the exercise meant: "Recognition" and "Integrity."

At one of the two sites where the units on conflict and communication were observed, the curriculum was followed closely, and participants were told that they would learn skills to help them avoid or change negative communication patterns. The class watched video clips of two couples having arguments that showed negative ways of dealing with conflict. One clip showed a couple in which negative communication

escalated: each partner began speaking more loudly, the woman made more and more critical generalizations about the man, and the man became more physically agitated. The instructor used the escalation as an example of when the “Time-Out” technique would be useful and gave these guidelines for the technique: Use “I” or “we” when calling for a time-out rather than telling the other person, “you need to calm down”; set a specific time at least 30 minutes but not more than one day later to come back to the discussion; and use the time in between to calm yourself. The instructor explained that a couple might have an agreement ahead of time that they will use time-outs, and participants can introduce the idea to the person they want to be able to use it with, but they can also use it themselves when the other person in the situation isn’t familiar with it. The instructor gave a personal example of using the time-out successfully.

The second video clip showed a couple having an argument that they have clearly had before, and again not resolving it but ending the discussion with one partner expressing frustration and the other one withdrawing. The instructor explained that when couples “spin their wheels” like this, it’s a sign that there’s a hidden issue. After additional material was covered, another clip of the same couple was shown in which they used the Speaker- Listener Technique to discuss the same conflict (with the help of a communication coach), and it became clear that the source of the argument involved deeper feelings than they had previously realized, but they were able to talk about the feelings without arguing. The Speaker-Listener Technique (SLT) is more involved than the Time-Out technique. The guidelines for it are in the workbook, and each participant also receives a colorful card with the guidelines on it, and refers to this when practicing the technique in class. The speaker’s rules are to express himself or herself, to remember

not to analyze or “mind read” the other person, to stop to let the listener paraphrase what the speaker has said, and then to let the listener know whether the paraphrase is accurate. The listener’s rule is to repeat back to the speaker what he or she heard (paraphrase), to make sure he or she understands what the speaker meant. The speaker “keeps the floor” while the listener paraphrases, then when it is clear that the listener has understood, the speaker “shares the floor” by letting the listener become the speaker.

After the class reviewed these steps, the instructor and a participant who volunteered left the room briefly to prepare a role play. They returned and presented a conflict between a couple about housekeeping responsibilities showing how the couple would use SLT. Gina interrupted them to tell the participant in the role play, “You’re the listener – you forgot to paraphrase.” (In her follow up interview two months later, Gina reported that she had successfully used SLT in communicating with her cohabiting boyfriend.) The instructor then had the group practice SLT in dyads or groups of three (with one person as “coach”), discussing expectations in a relationship. The researcher observed a dyad in which the role play was about a couple in which the woman objected to the man’s contact with his former partner when he visited his children at their mother’s (his former partner’s) home. The participants continued the role play to get to the “hidden issues” of trust and faithfulness. After the role plays, the instructor told the class, “Don’t use this in a dangerous relationship,” and Nicole asked, “What if it’s not physical abuse, but [verbal] ‘put downs’?” The instructor responded, “Be very careful.” Holly, who had recently moved in with her boyfriend, asked whether there were classes available for couples to learn to use SLT together, and the instructor replied that there were.

At another site, the video clips of couples were not shown, but the instructor gave examples throughout the sessions of how SLT and time-outs could be used in problematic relationship situations that participants described. When the actual rules for speaker-listener technique were introduced, Marilyn asked how they would apply in her situation. She explained that her boyfriend sat down with her and her three children and used “passing the broom” as a way of allowing everyone to speak in turn, instead of speaking all at once. Marilyn said, “It was hard for me – I wanted to interrupt my daughter because she was being smarty and rude. Is she allowed to be smarty and rude? Shouldn’t I break in?” The instructor responded, “When it’s your turn, tell her how you feel about the way she’s talking; say ‘I feel’ not ‘you shouldn’t;’ come back with a reasonable tone of voice as a role model [for your daughter].”

At one site, after SLT was presented and participants had a chance to practice it with each other in dyads or groups of three, the issue of infidelity and its effects on relationships was introduced (Unit Eleven). One participant admitted that she had seriously considered cheating on her partner, and two mentioned their objections to their partners’ going to strip clubs. Tamika, who had previously talked about arguments with her cohabiting boyfriend, said that he did not have any reason to see his “ex” (former girlfriend) because they did not have children together. When the instructor asked, “So you get jealous?” Tamika responded, “No, I hurt him.” After a few other comments from participants, the instructor concluded this discussion with the statement, “You have to have a bottom line,” and moved on to the next topic in the unit, “Are You Playin’ or Stayin’?” The instructor showed two transparencies on this topic, using the overhead projector, and as she read the eight questions and points listed on them, two participants

who had taken notes periodically began taking notes on the transparencies. They asked the instructor to keep the transparencies up until they were finished taking their notes, and another participant suggested that the instructor give them the transparency they were working on while she put up the next one, which she did. The instructor commented to the researcher, "I've never had anyone in the class take notes before."

The instructor at this site followed the curriculum closely, and after a fifteen minute break in the afternoon of the second day of WMR, the class still had two topics to cover in Unit Eleven: forgiveness and whether it is wise or unwise to restore a relationship after trust has been broken. The instructor acknowledged the fact that the class would have to skim through some of the remaining material in order to finish it that afternoon. Some transparencies for Units Twelve through Fifteen were shown, and the participants were given time to complete their workbook exercises, but discussion of these topics was limited. The instructor asked the class for feedback on WMR before handing out the written evaluation for them to complete. One participant commented that there was a lot to cover and she thought they needed more time, and no one expressed disagreement. Later the instructor commented to the researcher that she thought the clients needed more time to assimilate what was covered, and she would like to have three to four more hours for WMR and spread the sessions over three days instead of two.

Participants' Assessment and Application of WMR to Their Lives

This section presents the findings regarding participants' recall, assessment and use of WMR two to three months after the class ended. Significant themes from individual interviews with six participants whose WMR sessions were observed are presented, conveying their assessment of the program and ways in which they had

applied, or their thoughts about applying, WMR concepts and skills in their lives.

Findings from analysis of the interviews with five WMR participants whose classes had not been observed are presented also.

Following is an excerpt from the repeated interview with Monique, a never-married 24 year old with one child, a one year old daughter. Monique had quit her job at McDonald's and applied for TANF so she could complete her GED and get a better job. She had only attended one day of WMR, and since completing the TANF Orientation, more than three months ago, she had briefly moved to another state. Monique did not initially recall WMR when she met with the researcher for her repeated interview but became engaged in looking through the new workbook. (Her class had used the earlier, plainer version.)

Interviewer: So what, what do you remember from that day [of WMR]?

Monique: Really, nothing. It's been so long ago. My mind has gone here, there and everywhere since then.

Interviewer: Okay. Well, let me show you this [showing new WMR workbook]. These are some things that we did. Some of these were on overheads, you might remember some of the ideas.

Monique: Yeah, I remember this, the pyramid.

Interviewer: Okay, so I'm just going to say for the tape recorder that you're looking at the pyramid that was "sliding." It has sex as the base and then everything else is kind of unstable on top of it.

Monique: Yeah, hmm-huh.

Interviewer: This is, these are some things about living together, and was that your situation with your boyfriend? Were you living together for a while?

Monique: For a while, yeah. He just couldn't, well, my whole problem was that he was [not] the kind of person that I wanted to be with. He just wasn't financially stable for me. You know you can love somebody, but you still have to pay the bills.

Interviewer: Okay, this was the idea of waiting and not starting out with changes when you first get involved because you're emotionally...

R: Vulnerable?

Interviewer: Yeah, and also caught up in the new relationship, yeah. This is the Smart Love Principles.

Monique: I get one of these books?

Interviewer: I'll give you this one.

Monique: Okay [continues looking through workbook]. I think I should have had this book when I first started coming up and started getting in relationships, because I've had some just... I think I have a big sign that's on my head saying 'I will take care of anybody,' because everyone expects for me to take care of them.... No, I already have one child, I don't need another one. I should have had this a long time ago.

Gina, a 23 year old who had not graduated from high school, lived with her boyfriend of one year and her six year old daughter from a previous relationship. She had applied for TANF because her boyfriend had lost his job, which she described as a source of conflict between them in her initial interview. At the time of her repeated interview he was working again, which she said was one reason that they were getting along better,

but she spontaneously mentioned that she was using speaker-listener technique, and that helped also:

He, um I use the speaker and listener technique without him knowing it. Like we'll sit, and we'll be having a discussion with fighting or something, and like I'll repeat what he had said, "So what you're telling me is you feel like..." and he just looks at me like, "what are you talking about?" and usually ends it sooner....

Gina had also used the time-out technique, for herself, when she had become extremely resentful towards her mother. In her initial interview, Gina had expressed concern about recent angry outbursts from her daughter, Stacy, and untrue statements Stacy had made about spending time with her biological father. In the repeated interview, Gina reported that Stacy had recently stated to Gina's boyfriend, "My real dad left me; I don't have a dad; will you be my daddy?" Her boyfriend had responded that he would, and then he began asking Gina whether he was spending enough time with Stacy. Gina complained that in making an effort to develop a good relationship with Stacy, he had reversed some of Gina's decisions about what she was allowed to do. Gina suggested that ways of helping the new partner form a positive relationship with the child from a previous relationship would be good to include in WMR.

Linda, a 27 year old with a high school diploma, had two sons, a five year old whose father was in prison and a seven month old whose father provided childcare for both sons but with whom she was no longer romantically involved. Linda explained that she had received a seven year deferred sentence with probation for a felony offense. In her repeated interview, Linda reported that she was happy with the computer skills training that she was getting through TANF and wanted to focus on that, "and not even

think about having a relationship with anybody.” When asked whether she had thought about any ideas discussed in WMR, Linda stated that she had thought about “the deciding instead of sliding,” and added, “I’m going to think about something before I actually do it and the pros and cons.” When shown the WMR workbook and asked if anything in it stood out to her, Linda responded that she remembered “about speaking and listening, take turns.” When asked if she had used that idea, Linda said that she has,

because I used to have a real bad habit of interrupting people ... and so I’m trying to practice that...so I can, you know, instead of thinking, ‘oh, this is what this person is saying,’ and not even hearing it, now I’m listening to it.

Linda and Gregory, both participants at Site #3, reported that their general attitude had become more positive since completing the TANF Orientation. When asked what she thought was the biggest change for her since that experience, Linda responded, “My outlook on my future; I don’t feel hopeless anymore, or helpless; I feel like I can do something, and do something for myself and do something about my situation, and I’m working on it.” In his repeated interview, Gregory, a 34 year old college graduate and single father of two year old twins, said that WMR and the initial interview with the researcher had made him think: “I did have a lot of stuff to ponder on; I just, I just had to get my thoughts together, get my inner being together, that’s all.” A change that had taken place since the initial interview was Gregory’s decision to end his involvement with one of the two women he had been seeing. He said he felt good about “being straight forward, not lying, telling the truth; caring about that person’s feeling but yet, hey, this is something I have to do, and that’s all.”

Rachel, a 39 year old high school graduate, was divorced with two adult children from her marriage and a four year old son whose biological father had never been involved with him. She attended WMR at site #3 with Linda and Gregory and, at the time of her repeated interview, attended the same computer training program as Linda, but was not happy about having to leave her son with his child care provider. She did not expect to use the concepts or skills covered in WMR because she did not plan to have a relationship with a man in the foreseeable future. However, when looking through the workbook, she commented about the pyramid showing that a relationship based on sex is unstable,

Oh yeah, this was pretty good to think about.... Let's see, to get to know the person before you have sex and all that stuff. Yeah, that was really pretty helpful, because most of the time when you get involved with a guy, that's the first thing they want to do is have sex.

The interviewer asked Rachel if it would be helpful to have more discussion in WMR about dilemmas such as she had with her four year old son. He did not know anything about his biological father and had started referring to her former husband as "Dad." Recently, however, the former husband had abruptly stopped speaking to both Rachel and the four year old (although he still spoke to their adult children), and Rachel said she did not know what to tell her son when he asked to speak to "Dad." Rachel responded that she would rather not talk about this in a group. She commented, "Some women probably would like to talk about it, and some don't, and I'm the kind of person that don't want to talk about my, um, baby's dad."

Gail was a 22 year old mother of four children who each had a different father. (The pregnancy with the oldest had resulted from rape.) She maintained custody of the two youngest, and had moved with them to the Oklahoma City area to live with her grandmother while going back to school for her GED. In her repeated interview, Gail spontaneously recalled the experiential exercise in WMR of sculpting figures in clay to represent a relationship: "I just remember us making two hearts that were joined in the middle; that was fun." Looking through the workbook, Gail commented, "Deciding, that was good." When questioned as to whether this reminded her of anything that had happened, she said, "Yes, with my other baby's daddy," and added, "I think this class helps out a lot of people; I think it helped me out a lot, so." Gail maintained a long-distance relationship with a boyfriend of three years who assumed the role of father with her youngest son. Gail's response when she looked at the section on speaker-listener technique in the workbook was unexpected, "It's definitely what I need to do, oh, speaker." Regarding how she communicates with her boyfriend and in general, she said that she needs to speak up more.

Of the five participants whose WMR classes had not been observed, four were not dating or involved with anyone at the time of their interview, and only one of the four expressed interest in dating. Each of the four, however, discussed some aspect of WMR that he or she considered beneficial, and two gave examples of using speaker-listener technique with someone in their family. Two women who had attended WMR in their GED program had also had the WMR Program in their TANF orientation. One of these women, Darlene, spoke at length about what she found valuable in it. Darlene was 24 years old; she and her three year old son were living with her mother and stepfather while

she attended the GED program, but they had previously lived in an apartment paid for by her former boyfriend, her son's father, who was currently serving a long prison term for selling drugs. Looking at the page in the workbook on "sliding versus deciding," Darlene commented,

I mean I, you know, I slid first before deciding. I was just like, 'okay, I'm just going to go with the flow and see what happens,' you know. And, uh, a lot [of] things of this nature is real, because you need all this, you know, [reading from workbook illustration] "friendship, commitment, communication, responsible," you know, "common interest," and people, people don't think about that first.

They just want to jump right into it. I mean, so it's a lot of things that the book - you can look back and just say, 'I've been through that.' Nobody's relationship is perfect, even married people's relationship isn't perfect, but I'm pretty sure they can value each other more.

She added, "Kids need WMR in high school." Darlene had a close friend who had been killed by her boyfriend, and she thought that WMR could help teens avoid relationships with domestic violence. Darlene thought the reason that WMR was given again in the GED program was because in the TANF Orientation, "That's really not enough time, you know, because we had to do other things and take tests."

Vanessa had also had WMR in her TANF Orientation, but thought she benefited more from having it in the GED Program (where it was given in five weekly three-hour sessions). Vanessa was 24 years old and had a history of severe neglect and sexual abuse as a child. She lived with her boyfriend and her four children. The pregnancy with her oldest child had resulted from a coercive relationship when she was 16 years old. The two

fathers of her youngest children were now in prison. When asked what her reaction had been when she learned that she would have WMR again, Vanessa responded,

I was actually excited because the instructor [in the TANF Orientation] isn't actually, uh, you know, someone from Within My Reach, and so she's just kind of going by the book and skipping pages. I already knew my way around it, but I was looking forward to it, because there was a lot more, you know, that I could ask questions to someone that actually knew about the program and that's trained to, you know, versus the lady that's just doing her job at DHS.

Vanessa remembered the section of the workbook that asks about the participant's experiences growing up:

A lot stands out in the book, and there's a section where it's like, um, when you were growing up, um, family is very important or family wasn't very important at all. You know, you check, and I went down, and like every single thing in there is like negative that I checked on. Everything that I checked, you know, unless it was something like my siblings, that would be the only positive.... I'm like, "Okay, if one of my kids was filling out this book what, you know, what would I want my child to honestly be able to say about our family?"

Vanessa explained that she didn't want to forget the things that happened to her as a child. She indicated that having the WMR materials made her feel that she could provide the protection for her children that the adults in her life had not provided for her during childhood:

And I know I'm not going to be a perfect mother, but I know, you know, these things I can protect my kids against, and a lot of the things that happened in my

family were really big things that could have been prevented, that just nobody cared. And these are things that I know that I can prevent, and so I have both of my books, the yellow one [referring to the first WMR workbook], this one [points to the newer workbook brought by researcher], and both of these [indicates Primary Colors Personality Tool brought by the researcher].

Vanessa said that WMR “made me look at my relationship more, because this is a nice guy, and I’ve been lucky, you know, he’s going to work, and he’s not going to endanger me or my kids as far as gangs and drugs.” She felt comfortable with her relationship with her boyfriend, but wanted him to develop a better relationship with her children before she would consider marrying him.

Findings Regarding Relationship Goals

There was little discussion of participants’ goals regarding intimate relationships in the WMR sessions; they are not asked to share what they write in their workbook about their visions for the future and decisions they want to make about their relationships. However, participants were asked in individual interviews about future goals for relationships. Vanessa is one of the few participants who expressed definite interest in considering marriage to her current partner, and she clearly identified the change that would be necessary before she could take that step. Other participants mentioned that marriage was desirable in the future, but responsibilities to their children and goals with work or school were more important to focus on now. Gina explained that she had always said that she wouldn’t get married, and her experience with infidelity and violence in relationships made her very cautious. She added that seeing what she had written in the WMR workbook and “the idea that this [workbook] can help me...did give

me hope that, you know, like it will eventually work out...whether it's this relationship or, you know, like another one of them.”

Unfortunately there was only one initial interview with each of the two participants who discussed pressure from boyfriends to become more involved, one through living together and one through marriage. Although it was not possible to elicit their response after completing WMR, it is hypothesized that women in such dilemmas would find the “sliding versus deciding” concept and the attention to clarifying expectations, setting goals and taking steps towards goals useful in negotiating with partners before becoming economically interdependent or more deeply committed. Tamika also had only the initial interview, so it is not possible to know whether she used any of the WMR content on communication and constructive ways of addressing conflict in her relationship with her cohabiting partner.

Single parents' goals may not include having a relationship. Monique, when asked in her initial interview about interest in marriage, responded, “No, I think I like to be by myself,” confirming the salience of a theme in Unit 14 of WMR: “taking a break from relationships.” Monique explained,

When I was in a relationship with [my daughter's] father, all I could think about was being by myself. He would [say], “Well, it's because you want to be with somebody else.” No, it's because I haven't spent that much time by myself before I got into [my first] relationship, and then I was in this relationship for two years and didn't get out, and then I had a baby by the guy. And so, it's just like, okay, I have never really just been by myself with nobody.

Summary

Analysis of observations of WMR sessions at three DHS centers during TANF Orientation indicate that the environment of the orientation itself, with its focus on various types of individual assessments which have significant consequences for clients in terms of referral to educational or employment programs, distracts participants' attention from the curriculum. However, the instructors observed were generally successful in shifting participants' focus from the assessments and the process through which they would be assigned to a specific program at the end of orientation to the more personal (relationship and family) aspects of their lives. Participants did become engaged with the WMR material and indicated that they were aware of its relevance. Variations in the intensity of engagement were noticeable and seemed related to the presentation by the instructor and participants' attention spans and interest level, as well as disruptive factors such as participants' being called out of class for a test or TANF related appointment. In all three locations, the researcher observed the development of rapport through spontaneous verbal interaction between instructors and participants.

Information given by participants in individual interviews confirmed that their life histories and past relationships had lacked stability, and that problems experienced in past or present relationships were a serious concern. Over one-fourth of the participants were not currently involved with a partner and were not seeking a relationship, a status that received less acknowledgement in WMR than other relationship profiles. However, nine of eleven participants who were interviewed after completing WMR, gave examples of at least one situation in which they had successfully applied a concept or skill from WMR; one person did not remember WMR but looking through the workbook reminded her of a valuable concept, and another person had found one concept valuable even

though she did not plan on having a future relationship. Several participants spontaneously mentioned that they found the concept of “sliding vs. deciding” useful and important, and some commented that they remembered the pyramid that illustrated the instability of a relationship based primarily on sex. Several mentioned using speaker-listener technique successfully, one with a cohabiting partner, two with their children and two with a parent. Others mentioned specific use of the time-out or generally managing to become less caught up in negative interactions. Two women referred to the exercise on families of origin in discussing things they wanted their children to have that they had not had as children; two others expressed similar goals, which they may have formulated prior to WMR, but which would have been reinforced by that content.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This paper describes the delivery of the WMR relationship awareness and communication skills curriculum, which was designed for low income single parents, as a component of orientation for new TANF clients in three DHS centers in Oklahoma County. The study found that the content and intent of the curriculum matched the family and relationship histories and current relationship issues reported by participants. Engagement of participants with concepts and skills presented during the sessions, and the reported use of some concepts and skills by the small sample of eleven interviewed two to three months after completing the program confirm that low income unmarried parents are receptive to and able to benefit from relationship education. The findings suggest that Within My Reach successfully modifies and adapts core elements of PREP, (an effective relationship education program for middle class engaged and married

couples) in order to address the relationship issues experienced by low income single parents.

The TANF orientation schedule required modifying the WMR curriculum in order to cover it in less than twelve hours, rather than the fifteen hours it is designed to take, and other orientation activities presented distractions and interruptions. Many factors which could not be studied in depth, such as the clients' reasons for applying for public assistance, may affect participants' receptivity to WMR, and factors beyond the scope of the study, such as staffing of DHS centers, affect the delivery of the program as part of the TANF orientation. The appreciation expressed by two participants for the opportunity to attend WMR a second time in their GED program, after having had it in the TANF orientation, suggests that dividing the full fifteen hours of the curriculum into a number of shorter sessions spread over a period of weeks may be most conducive to integration of the material. However, most TANF recipients probably would not have the opportunity to enroll in such a program, and the repeated interviews show that participants do benefit from the condensed two day WMR program given in the TANF orientation.

Strengths of the study include the wealth of observations in field notes covering two complete cycles and one partial cycle of the WMR program. The notes record details about interactions during WMR sessions which the researcher can, in many cases, connect to specific participants who were interviewed individually about their past and current family life and intimate/romantic relationships. Data from the in-depth interviews with 22 participants provide useful profiles of low income single parents, the challenges they face, and ways in which the Within My Reach curriculum engages them. However,

the sample is small and cannot be considered representative. Also, the fact that repeated interviews were only held with six participants restricted the researcher's ability to compare concerns about relationships and unsatisfactory communications described by participants in initial interviews with reports about interactions in the same relationships after completing WMR. Although an essential aspect of the recruitment strategy, the fact that the WMR instructors at the sites included had volunteered to participate in the study is a limitation, as these sites and instructors may have had more positive experiences with WMR than other DHS centers have had.

Further studies and use of triangulation are recommended to assess the delivery of WMR as a component of orientation activities for new TANF recipients. Further research is needed in order to understand more fully the needs of low income individuals and couples for relationship and communication education. Implementation studies such as this one will help to establish the benefits and limitations of new curricula as well as provide a basis for comparing the effectiveness of alternative ways to deliver such programs.

References

- Blum, B. (2003). Preface, in M. Lennon and R. Corbett (Eds.), *Policy into action: Implementation research and welfare reform*. Washington, DC: The Urban Institute Press.
- Center for Research on Child Wellbeing. (2000). Dispelling myths about unmarried fathers. *Fragile Families Research Brief*, Number 1. Retrieved April 23, 2008, from <http://www.fragilefamilies.princeton.edu/briefs/researchbrief1.pdf>
- Center for Research on Child Wellbeing. (2002). Is marriage a viable objective for fragile families? *Fragile Families Research Brief*, Number 9. Retrieved April 23, 2008, from <http://www.fragilefamilies.princeton.edu/briefs/ResearchBrief9.pdf>
- Center for Research on Child Wellbeing. (2003). Union formation and dissolution in fragile families. *Fragile Families Research Brief*, Number 14. Retrieved April 23, 2008, from <http://www.fragilefamilies.princeton.edu/briefs/ResearchBrief14.pdf>
- Cherlin, A., Burton, L., Hurt, T., & Purvin, D. (2004). The influence of physical and sexual abuse on marriage and cohabitation. *American Sociological Review*, 69, 768-789.
- Child Welfare League of America (CWLA). (2007). Oklahoma's children 2007. Retrieved April 23, 2008, from <http://www.cwla.org/advocacy/Statefactsheets/2007/oklahoma.pdf>
- Corbett, R. & Lennon, M. (2003). Implementation studies: From policy to action, in M. Lennon and R. Corbett (Eds.), *Policy into action: Implementation research and welfare reform*. Washington, DC: The Urban Institute Press.
- Edin, K. (2003). Client-based ethnographic research as a tool for implementation analysis, in M. Lennon and R. Corbett (Eds.), *Policy into action: Implementation research and welfare reform*. Washington, DC: The Urban Institute Press.
- Edin, K. & Kefalas, M. (2005). *Promises I can keep: Why poor women put motherhood before marriage*. Berkeley: University of California.
- England, P. & Edin, K. (2007). Unmarried couples with children: Hoping for love and the white picket fence. In P. England & K. Edin (Eds.), *Unmarried couples with children*, pp. 3-21. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.
- England, P. & Edin, K. (Eds.). (2007). *Unmarried couples with children*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

- Gibson-Davis, C. (2007). Expectations and the economic bar to marriage among low-income couples. In P. England & K. Edin (Eds.), *Unmarried couples with children*, pp. 84-103. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.
- Gibson-Davis, C., Edin, K. & McLanahan, S. (2005). High hopes but even higher expectations: The retreat from marriage among low-income couples. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 67, 1301-1312.
- Holcomb, P. & Nightingale, D. (2003). Conceptual underpinnings of implementation analysis, in M. Lennon and R. Corbett (Eds.), *Policy into action: Implementation research and welfare reform*. Washington, DC: The Urban Institute Press.
- Jarchow, C. (2003). Strengthening marriage and two-parent families. National Conference of State Legislatures, The Welfare Reform Series, February, 2003. Retrieved April 13, 2008, from <http://www.nydic.org/fspc/practice/documents/Brief12.pdf>
- Johnson, C. A., Stanley, S. M., Glenn, N. D., Amato, P. A., Nock, S. L., Markman, H. J., & Dion, M. R. (2002). Marriage in Oklahoma: 2001 baseline statewide survey on marriage and divorce (S02096 OKDHS). Oklahoma City, OK: Oklahoma Department of Human Services.
- Markman, H., Renick, M., Floyd, F., Stanley, S. & Clements, M. (1993). Preventing marital distress through communication and conflict management training: A four and five year follow-up. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 61, 70-77.
- Menard, A. & Williams, O. (2006). It's not healthy if it's not safe: Responding to domestic violence issues within healthy marriage programs. Paper presented at conference, Building Bridges: Marriage, Fatherhood, and Domestic Violence, sponsored by the Center for Law and Social Policy and the National Conference of State Legislatures (May, 2006). Retrieved May 10, 2008, from http://www.clasp.org/publications/marriage_dv.pdf
- Moore, K., Jekielek, S., Bronte-Tinkew, J., Guzman, L., Ryan, S. and Redd, Z. (2004). What is "healthy marriage"? Defining the concept. Retrieved April 13, 2008, from http://www.healthymarriageinfo.org/research_eval/evalhmprog.cfm
- National Healthy Marriage Resource Center. (2007). June 2007 Webinar "Staying Within the Boundaries: Understanding the Federal Faith-Based Boundaries" FAQ. Retrieved April 27, 2008, from <http://www.healthymarriageinfo.org/docs/june2007webinarfaq.pdf>

- Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation. (2006). The Oklahoma marriage initiative: An overview of the longest-running statewide marriage initiative in the U.S. Washington, DC: US Department of Health and Human Services. Retrieved June 30, 2007 from <http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/06/OMI/rb.pdf>
- Oklahoma Department of Human Services (OKDHS). (2008). Stronger Families grow brighter futures. Retrieved on April 23, 2008, from <http://www.okdhs.org/>
- Ooms, T. (2005). The new kid on the block: What is marriage education and does it work? Center for Law and Social Policy, Couples and Marriage Series, July 2005 Brief no. 7. Retrieved April 13, 2008, from http://www.clasp.org/publications/newkid_marr_ed_annotated.pdf
- Ooms, T. & Wilson, P. (2004). The challenges of offering relationship and marriage education to low-income populations. *Family Relations*, 53, 440-447.
- Pearson, M., Stanley, S. & Kline, G. (2005). *Within my reach instructor manual*. Greenwood Village, CO: PREP for Individuals, Inc.
- Pyles, L. (2007). The complexities of the religious response to domestic violence: Implications for faith-based initiatives. *Affilia: Journal of Women and Social Work*, 22, 281-291.
- Seltzer, J. (2004). Cohabitation in the United States and Britain: Demography, kinship, and the future. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 66, 921-928.
- Sparks, A. (2004). Low-income single mothers' relationships with male partners: Experiences and expectations. (Doctoral Dissertation, Rutgers The State University of New Jersey – New Brunswick.) *Dissertation Abstracts International*, 64, 4629.
- Stanley, S., Blumberg, S., Markman, H. (1999). Helping couples fight for their marriages: The PREP approach. In R. Berger & M. Hannah (Eds.), *Handbook of preventive approaches in couple therapy* (pp. 279-303). New York: Brunner/Mazel.
- Stanley, S. M., Pearson, M., & Kline, G. H. (2005, November). The development of relationship education for low income individuals: Lessons from research and experience. Paper presented at the meeting of the Association for Public Policy Analysis and Management, Washington, DC.
- Stanley, S., Rhoades, G., & Markman, H. (2006). Sliding versus deciding: Inertia and the premarital cohabitation effect. *Family Relations*, 55, 499-509.

- U.S. Census Bureau. (2006). 2006 American Community Survey. American Fact Finder. Retrieved April 23, 2008, from <http://factfinder.census.gov>
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Administration. (2008). Healthy marriage initiative activities and accomplishments 2002-2005. Retrieved April 29, 2008, from <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/healthymarriage/pdf/community2006.pdf>
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Administration Office of Family Assistance (2007). Characteristics and financial circumstances of TANF recipients. Retrieved April 29, 2008, from www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ofa/character/FY2005/tab08.htm
- Waller, M. (2008). How do disadvantaged parents view tensions in their relationships? Insights for relationship longevity among at-risk couples. *Family Relations*, 57, 128-143.

Appendix

Description of the Within My Reach Curriculum

The following overview is taken from material sent by PREP, Inc. to people registered to attend a training for Within My Reach instructors given in April, 2006, in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. Each of the 15 Units of the curriculum listed below is designed to be covered in a 55 minute session. Each unit includes exercises and/or visual teaching aids to be used in conjunction with the instructor's presentation and discussion of the unit's concepts and/or skills. Each participant receives his or her own workbook. Group exercises are designed to facilitate discussion among participants. Some workbook exercises, which involve reflection on personal experiences and specific concerns, are for each participant to do on his or her own and not to share with the group.

Overview to *Within My Reach*TM

*Within My Reach*TM is a marriage and relationship education curriculum designed for improving the odds that participants will choose, remain in, or develop healthy relationships, and where possible, develop those relationships into sustainable and healthy marriages that benefit the individual and her or his children. This new curriculum from PREP is designed for individuals who are economically disadvantaged and at higher risk for negative relationship outcomes. The core audience for this curriculum will typically be low income women though the themes and lessons would be likewise appropriate for males. The curriculum will be useful for any who are working with disadvantaged, higher risk adults.

The curriculum you will be trained to present is built for the individual who may or may not currently be in a serious, romantic relationship at the time they take the course.

Within My Reach is a curriculum with a 15 hour core with additional ancillary modules. The core curriculum is built around the theme that: "Your romantic relationships will not be neutral in the effects on your children and your work success." In other words, the decisions one makes in romantic attachments will affect the possibility of success in every other aspect of life— especially child rearing and work productivity. The purpose of this curriculum is to help the participants to identify the significance of relationship success for themselves and their children, and to consider their future relationship goals, and whether and how their future goals would include marriage.

Units of Within My Reach Curriculum

- Unit 1 The State of Relationships Today
- Unit 2 Healthy Relationships: What They Are and What They Aren't
- Unit 3 Sliding versus Deciding

Unit 4	Smart Love
Unit 5	Knowing Yourself First
Unit 6	Making Your Own Decisions
Unit 7	Dangerous Patterns in Relationships
Unit 8	Where Conflict Begins
Unit 9	Smart Communication
Unit 10	The Speaker-Listener Technique
Unit 11	Infidelity, Distrust, and Forgiveness
Unit 12	Commitment: Why it Matters to Adults and Children
Unit 13	Stepfamilies and the Significance of Fathers
Unit 14	Making the Tough Decisions
Unit 15	Reaching Into Your Future

The core themes covered by the training of instructors for Within My Reach include:

1. Relationships and those who have very low incomes and/or who are in poverty. Overview of research on relationships of those in poverty, especially those who are recipients of government services. A focus on the aspirations of low income persons with regard to marriage and family, and a frank discussion of the obstacles and challenges they face.
2. Brief overview of content and structure of the program and the nature of welfare work-force development classes as presented in most states.
3. Children and work. Effects of adult relationship dynamics on health and growth of children and development of work and job success.
4. Models of healthy relationships and marriages. Unhealthy and dangerous relationships. Safety theory of healthy marriage and family relationships. Discussion of domestic violence. Steps to breaking up wisely and safely when warranted.
5. Compatibility and mate selection. Conceptual model and strategic tools. Marriageability.
6. Successful communication and conflict management. Productive ways to manage disagreements and conflicts with others, especially partner, co-workers, and case-workers.

Interview Schedules

Domains for Initial Interview**I. Demographic**

Age when interviewed:
 Highest level education completed:
 Marital Status:
 Parents legally married to each other?
 # children R. has had (live births):
 # children living:
 Gender and ages of children:
 Are any of R.'s children not living with her? If so, which ones, and their status:
 Age at first birth (or abortion, if younger):
 Type housing and adequacy:
 Members household (including gender & age of children):

II. Childhood & Family of Origin

Where R. born/grew up?
 Birth order of siblings & R.:
 Relationship between R.'s parents? (how long together, R.'s observations):
 Members/changes in household while growing up:
 Family's source(s) of income growing up?
 How was school for R.?
 Religious upbringing and religion in life now?
 Relationships with family members now?

III. First Sexual Partner, First Pregnancy

Social life, dating, parental strictness in teens?
 Age and circumstances of first sexual experience?
 Did R. want to have sex then, does she think she was she ready?
 Relationship with sexual partner when pregnant for the first time:
 Reactions of R., her parents, and sexual partner to pregnancy:
 Brief history of that pregnancy & that relationship:

IV. Current/All Serious Relationships

Describe relationship with partner:
 Married, lived together, child together?
 His race/ethnicity, education, employment:
 Length of relationship:
 Acceptance by each other's families:
 How are/were children involved (his, hers, theirs):
 Agreement between R. and partner about commitment to relationship?
 Agreement to not have other sexual partners?
 Is/was fidelity an issue in the relationship?
 Other relationships concerns (*physical threats, *violence, alcohol/substance abuse, criminal activities):
 What is/was happy or satisfied with?
 What disagreements/problems?
 How ended/current status:
 Does R. want to/plan to continue current relationship status or change? (explain)
 Bottom line - most important quality R. wants & what is unacceptable?
 What would want in a relationship "ideally" and what is likelihood of attaining?
 Want/plan to have more children?
 If not, using birth control & if so, what?

Communication: Please describe something that happened recently that gives an idea of something you think could be improved, or you wish could be improved, between you and (intimate partner). This could be a disagreement or something he said or did that upset you. [If currently not with a partner or doesn't think of example with partner, ask about example in any relationship where not happy with the communication.]

V. Children and Fathers/Father Involvement

(name, gender, age & Dad # in order of birth)

Child one:

Child two:

Child three:

Child four:

Race/ethnicity, brief history of relationship with R. and current situation (other relationship, employment, prison), known to have other children?

Relationship with R. at time of pregnancy, response to pregnancy/birth, his family's response & involvement; if not married, legal paternity?

History/quality of father/child relationships and R.'s satisfaction with current status:

Male partners' relationships with children who aren't their biological children:

VI. TANF Status

What was R.'s situation when most recently applied for TANF?

Employment history/training programs has attended or plans to attend?

Educational programs presently in or planning to enter?

Comments on her status and interactions with TANF:

VII. Marriage

Marriage in family of origin:

R. marriage history:

R. ever wanted to marry, considered it, or been proposed to but didn't marry, describe:

What is R.'s picture of marriage and where does it come from?

Current interest in marriage or plans to marry?

Miscellaneous comments about marriage:

VIII. Negative Events

Family/childhood (If yes, what was the situation?)

*Was there any physical abuse?

*Was anyone sexually abused?

Did anyone have a mental illness?

Did anyone have a problem with alcohol or drugs?

Was anyone the victim of a crime?

Was anyone ever in jail?

Were you ever homeless?

IX. Life Goals

*Interviewer will have relevant referral information and materials for appropriate counseling services

Domains for Repeated Interview

Ascertain whether there are changes in domains covered in Initial Interview:

I. Demographic

Type housing and adequacy:

Members household (including gender & age of children):

II. Childhood & Family of Origin

Religious upbringing and religion in life now?
Relationships with family members now?

III. Relationships with Men, First Sexual Partner, First Pregnancy

n/a

IV. Current/Most Recent Relationship

Describe changes in relationship with partner:
Or relationship with new partner (since initial interview)?

Communication: Ask R. about situation she described in initial interview when asked the following:

Please describe something that happened recently that gives me an idea of something you think could be improved, or you wish could be improved, between you and (intimate partner). This could be a disagreement or something he said or did that upset you. [If currently not with a partner or doesn't think of example with partner, ask about example in any relationship where not happy with the communication.] Explore to determine whether any concepts/skills from WMR have been used in this relationship situation.

V. Children and Fathers/Father Involvement

Change in pregnancy status?
Changes in fathers' situations?
Update on father/child relationships and R.'s satisfaction with current status; examples of recent interaction:
Male partners' relationships with children who aren't their biological children:
Childcare arrangements:
Special needs/issues regarding the children's relationships with and feelings towards their fathers:

VI. TANF Status

Update
Misc. comments about TANF

VII. Marriage

Update
Current interest in marriage or plans to marry?
Misc. comments about marriage:

VIII. Negative Events

*Update any serious family problems noted in initial interview
*Any recent personal or family problems?

Additional Domain for Repeated Interview:**IX. Impact of WMR**

A. Major concerns R. has about how things are going for her and her family right now?
B. Bring up reminders of the specific Within My Reach class, referring to when & where it took place & the instructors, and ask if anything in particular stands out when respondent thinks back to those sessions. Encourage respondent to mention any of the activities and points of WMR that she remembers best. Encourage her to recall as much as possible and to talk about whether the activities, suggestions made sense to her, whether she thought any of them fit with her situation or not.
C. Ask R. whether she would mind looking through the WMR workbook to see if any of the topics in it stand out to her now. Explore any relationships or types of interactions in which respondent has applied or thinks she might apply skills/concepts from WMR. Mention that some of the ideas in WMR could be applied to other relationships besides male partners, for example, with family members. Have you used any ideas from WMR in communicating with your child(ren) or any other family members? What about other types of situations, say with an employer, co-worker, customer, anyone you have to deal with in a school or job situation?

E. One of the things they talk about in Within My Reach is how things affect children. They asked you to think about how things in your family affected you when you were growing up. [Explore whether this might have been difficult if R. had abuse, neglect or other trauma in childhood.] They mentioned some things that would not be good for children growing up now. Did any of those things stand out to you? Did you get any ideas about things that might be affecting your children? [Explore any examples R. gives, anything she does differently or pays more attention to with children, and how it has been for her to think about this topic.]

F. Having a vision of your future

One topic in WMR was thinking about your vision for the future, was there anything you wanted to work on changing or accomplishing for yourself, your family, or in your relationships? If so, how is that going now?

Vision of future and goals now: what would R. like to change or accomplish in another year or another few years? Ask about relationship goals for future, with current partner or another partner or not looking for a relationship; ask about goals for her family and living situation (herself and children and partner if has committed relationship) and what she wants to have happen in terms of employment and/or education.

G. Thinking back, is there anything we haven't talked about yet, good or bad, that you want to tell me about Within My Reach? Do you have any suggestions for changing or improving WMR?

H. One thought behind the training was that things might come up during that short time that you might need more time to think about, or you might realize that there are *programs or services out there where you could talk to someone who is more of an expert. Do you remember getting any information like that? Have you thought about getting help or information about any personal issues since WMR? [If affirmative, probe as to whether she has acted on this or plans to act on it, or needs additional information.]

* Interviewer will bring relevant referral information and materials to the interview