Does Marriage Stand A Prayer?:
An Examination of a Research & Practice Model

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Presentation Overview

- Effectiveness and Efficacy
- Description of ProSAAM
- Pre-post Findings
- Directions in Future Research
- Engaging Couples and Communities
- Innovative Strategies in Engagement
- Questions and Comments
Acknowledgements

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“Properly understood and applied, [prayer] is the most potent instrument of action.”
Mahatma Gandhi
Goals in Developing ProSAAM

- Create an effective marriage education program for African American couples, and document this effectiveness.

- Demonstrate that couples do better because of their attendance in a program.

- Show that the change among couples is greater than that of couples who did not participate in the program.
We Need to Attend to Effectiveness and Efficacy

- Effectiveness refers to overall impact – how many couples will we reach and how useful will we be?
- Efficacy refers to how much of an effect one gets for those who will try the approach
- I will be focusing on the efficacy of an intervention format that includes prayer
How Can Guided Prayer Be Helpful?

- Prayer can help spouses:
  - Communicate more effectively with each other
  - See their Spouse’s viewpoint
  - Increase Marital Satisfaction
  - Promote Positive Feelings about the Relationship
Prayer May Also Take us to New Places

- Highlight the View of an Important “Other”
- Tap New Sources of Motivation
- Prime “caretaking” motives
- These can all be seen as “Changing Motivation” in addition to “Changing Skills”
How Can Prayer Add to Skills?

- **Skills**
- **Motivation**

Prayer for partner can change motivation to use skills and so change outcomes.
Guided Prayer Can be Powerful

To Be Most Effective:

1) Prayer should focus on affirmation of core values such as love, compassion, and understanding

2) Prayer should be practiced regularly

3) Prayer should be used in the immediate context or aftermath of relationship conflict, as well as when things are going well.
Purpose

The Program for Strong African American Marriages (ProSAAM)’s purpose was to find the best ways for African American couples to keep their relationships strong and to reach the goals they have set for themselves.
Eligibility Requirements

- An African American adult at least 21 years of age who:
  - Had a mate (of any age or any race) who was also willing to participate
  - Was legally married and living with the mate or engaged to be married within 12 months
  - Was willing to pray and have others pray for their relationship
  - Was willing to spend 3 Saturday mornings in an educational program.
Benefits

- Learned how to support each other to enrich marriage
- Developed new understandings about each other
- Discussed issues that were important to them as African Americans
- Met other couples that were equally committed to their relationships
-Reflected on their life experiences, beliefs, and values
In-home Interviews

- Couples participated in four in-home interviews over period of 12-months (baseline, post-test, 6-month, 12-month)

- Interviews focused on communication, problem-solving, health, parenting, and daily routines
Educational Program

- Modified Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program (PREP)
  - Couples participating in the Prayer Condition
    - Received Directions about incorporating prayer into their marital enhancement activities along with facilitator-led instruction, 3 Saturday mornings
    - These couples were contrasted with couples who received instructional materials for in-home study
Sample Description

- Age: Husbands (40.5); Wives (38.3)
- Years together: Husbands (11.5); Wives (12.2)
- Number of children: 1.8
- Education: For both husbands and wives – the mean was “Some college” the range was “less than high school/GED to advanced degree”
Significant Pre-post Change?

- Communication: Yes.
- Perception of Mate’s Communication: Yes
- Marital Satisfaction: Yes
- Positive Feelings about the Marriage: Yes
- Intentions to do good things for the Partner: Yes
Comparison to a Strong Control Group

Significantly Better Pre-Post Change?

- Communication: Yes.
- Mate’s Communication: Yes
- Marital Satisfaction: Yes
- Positive Feelings about the Marriage: Yes
- Intentions to do good things for the Partner: Yes
What are the Statistics?

- Significantly different change between groups?
- Communication: \( F(1,129)=5.71, \ p<.05 \)
- Mate’s Communication: \( F(1,129)=4.92, \ p<.05 \)
- Marital Satisfaction: \( F(1,129)=5.34, \ p<.05 \)
- Positive Feelings about the Marriage: \( F(1,129)=7.05, \ p<.01 \)
- Intentions to do good things for the Partner: \( F(1,129)=8.38, \ p<.01 \)
Is there evidence of maintenance?

Six-month follow-up data

- Communication: Yes.
- Perception of Mate’s Communication: Yes
- Marital Satisfaction: Yes
- Positive Feelings about the Marriage: Yes
- Intentions to do good things for the Partner: Yes
What does the change over time look like: Marital Satisfaction?

Wives

Husbands
What does the change over time look like: Intentions?

Wives

Husbands
Can a Prayer infused approach to marital enhancement work?

Definitely.

This intervention was very well received and generated a sense of excitement. And, it was associated with an initial good response and initial evidence of maintenance over time.
Future Research: Does Adding Prayer Enhance Efficacy?

- Maybe. We saw changes in intentions. This was the element of marital change that we believed needed the help of prayer.

- However, we will need to wait to see the follow-up data to know for sure if this difference is maintained over time and to what extent it enhances the effects of standard intervention.

- Theoretically, enhanced intentions should predict greater generalization and maintenance of positive gains over time.
Engaging
Couples and Communities
Quote

“We are not a problem people; we are a people with problems. We have historic strengths; we have survived because of family.”

Dr. Dorothy I. Height
Role of Religion in African American Communities

- Religious involvement as a survival strategy.
- Strong religious orientation is an important aspect of family values.
- Relationship with a higher being is the ultimate source of inspiration and guidance (McAdoo, 1983; Taylor & Chatters, 1991).

  - Passed down to younger generations
  - Part of the fabric of African American culture
Social Context of Religious Practices Among African Americans

- Source of affirmation and support during slavery to present

- Church has consistently impacted lives of African Americans: socially, economically, politically (Taylor, Thornton, & Chatters, 1987)
Unique Role of Black Church

- Religious involvement is greater among:
  - Women
  - Married people
  - Rural residents
  - Southerners
  - Older people
  - People with higher SES and education

(Taylor et al., 1987)
Innovative Strategies For
Working with
African American Couples &
Communities
Responses from Focus Group Participants

- Focus group with 12 African American husbands and fiancés
- Obtained feedback on ways to promote and encourage African American men to enroll and remain engaged in ProSAAM
Feedback

- Topic 1: Full Saturday and one Saturday morning program format.
  - Response: Too much time.
  - Solution: 3 Saturday mornings.
Feedback

- Topic 2: How do we make this program attractive for you?
  - Response: Recognize the African American male experience and the need for mentors.
  - Solution: At end of each session, husbands and fiancés “travel” to the next room for private time to discuss and bond.
Responses from Focus Group Participants

- Topic 3: How do we get the information to you?
  - Response: Publicize the program through the church.
  - Solution: Work more closely with church officials to advertise the program.
Responses from Focus Group Participants

- “Marriage is very personal, it’s a covenant between two people. The church is a place where marriage has always been discussed and where marriage takes place, so maybe you can run it through the church. That would probably make it better for the couples.”
Responses from Focus Group Participants

- “You’ve got to work with the churches. The churches are key. That’s where it all begins for most married people, ya’know, in the church. That’s where we not only begin our marriages, but it’s where we come to learn more about how to stay married and be husbands and wives.”
The Hook!

- How do we get you to take part in the program?
  - Response: Program must be endorsed by someone with credibility and respect (e.g., pastor, celebrity).
  - “Bottom line, it’s a real incentive to us if the pastor endorses it…”
  - “You’re going to need someone to endorse the program because marriages are so personal.”
  - Solution: Get pastors to endorse the program.
Response from Pastors and Church Officials (“Church Link”)

- Ways of connecting with 150+ church officials:
  - Focus group for area pastors, first ladies, and church officials
  - Attending meetings, bible studies, church services, and other events to meet, network with, and inform pastors
  - Word of mouth
  - Mail information to pastors and church congregations
  - Goal: Develop partnerships with pastors
More About the Church Link

- Evening of P.R.A.I.S.E. events
  - P.R.A.I.S.E. = Prayer, Recruitment, Advertisement, Information, Sponsorship, and Endorsement
More About the Church Link

- Evening of P.R.A.I.S.E. events
  - Purpose: Bring together church leaders to introduce them to ProSAAM, address any questions or concerns, and develop partnerships
    - Church packet approach – unsuccessful.
More About the Church Link

- Evening of P.R.A.I.S.E. events
  - Outcome: received useful information to make ProSAAM more appealing to church officials (i.e., increase in age, ways to work with pastors, development of Spirit of ProSAAM)
Wonderful Success with Church Link

- Pastors note that strong churches begin with strong families.
- Pastors desire to see marital bonds within the African American community strengthened, and are excited about the role of prayer in building better marriages.
- ProSAAM serves as a springboard for pastors who desire to have a marriage ministry or want to offer a skill-based alternative for couples within their congregations to strengthen relationship.
Ambassador Program

- Provide accurate and factual information about the research process
- Communicate with hesitant men about the true nature of the experience
- Co-present at recruitment meeting and church services to provide male presence
Other Ways to Recruit

- Advertisements—mass media, radio, news stories
- Website
- Word of mouth—enrolled couples
  - Provide couples with postcards to mail a special note to their family and friends about the program
  - Offer brochures to couples
  - Respond to requests to deliver presentations and information to churches and groups
Reasons for Enrolling In Program

- Enrolled couples:
  - Excited about the opportunity to build stronger bonds and focus on communication skills to better handle challenges
  - Learn something new about one another
  - Time out from normal family responsibilities
  - Opportunity to meet other couples within their community who are serious about their relationships
Overcoming Barriers to Disseminating the Program

- Services:
  - Provide child care
  - Offer transportation
  - Feed couples and children
  - Pay incentive for couples that attend session together
  - Offer educational programs on weekend days
  - Online scheduling - BizLink Management Systems
Winning Combination

- Provide services that couples need
- Engage with community stakeholders and pastors to gain their trust and obtain their endorsement
- Win support of key community stakeholders and develop long-term partnerships
- Solicit feedback from couples
- Utilize respondents to help us recruit and attract new couples
For More Information

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Questions and Comments?