Dr. Wilcox provided an overview of his research related to religion and faith in urban America. He began by informing the audience that African Americans are by far the most religious people in America. But the African American church does not focus on relationships, especially marriage. Many predominately African American churches seem to focus more on racial uplifting and fostering a code of decency.

Dr. Wilcox’s research shows that church attendance is associated with relationship quality, but not with non-marital sex and child bearing. He stated that the church is a bulwark on marriage but religion is less powerful in shaping sexual attitudes and behaviors.

“Positive psychology” is the new concept in healthy relationships, especially among African Americans, according to Dr. Jason Carthen. He discussed the factors of positive psychology, which include: hope, optimism, resilience, self-efficacy, beliefs, consequences, and emotional intelligence. He sees communication as a huge obstacle for many couples. Another obstacle couples face is the lack of disclosure. Men in particular have to be willing to open up and express themselves.

Dr. Jamesena Carthen discussed how important it is to give people tools that help them with their relationships. And, to improve a relationship, each partner must be willing and able to deal with behavioral consequences. She also stated that we, as professionals and service providers, have to be authentic when working with couples. If couples know that we are being real, then they are likely to share more information during sessions. Dr. Carthen also said it’s important to let couples know that all marriages have some areas that need improving.