

Let's Get Real: Individual-Focused Work

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Four Reasons to Work in Individual-Focused Contexts

(1) People are not in committed relationships (esp. marriage) until later ages.

(2) Most of our existing contact points are with individuals, not with couples.

(3) We have a new generation of *individuals* who are shaky about their odds in relationships and marriage.

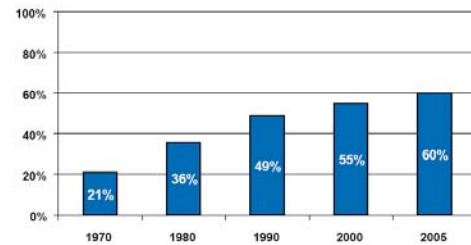
(4) You can get at things with individuals that are much harder to "touch" with couples.

Reasons for Working with Individuals

(1) People are marrying later.

Source: William Galston, 2008
"The Changing Twenties"

Figure 9: Never Married at Age 25 (%)^o



Reasons for Working with Individuals

(1) People are marrying later.

This has lowered the risk of divorce, somewhat.

This leaves a long period of time where individuals can mess up their lives in the context of relationships with low commitment.

"Your love life is not neutral."

Marline Pearson
Co-author of *Within My Reach*
Author of *Love U2*

The risky new paradigm of relationship formation:

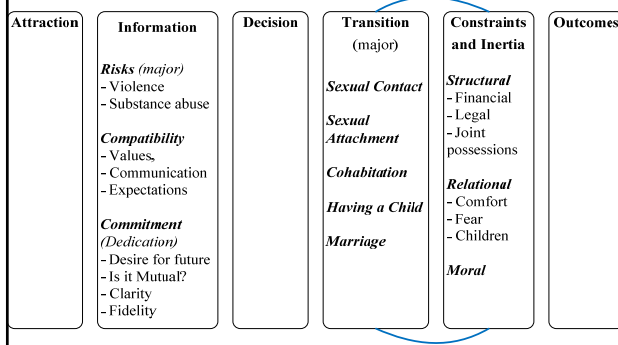
Sliding vs. Deciding™

Sliding vs. Deciding™ (Stanley, Rhoades, & Markman, 2006)

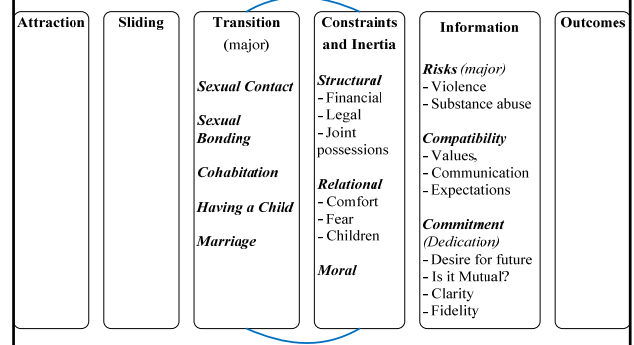
- Our work emphasizes in the way transitions occur (e.g., sex, cohabitation, pregnancy).
- Clear commitments are **decisions**—the choice to give up other choices. Decisions fuel motivation to follow-through.
- Wendy Manning and Pam Smock have found that people **slide** into cohabitation. Not deliberative.

Stanley, S. M., Rhoades, G. K., & Markman, H. J. (2006). Sliding vs. Deciding: Inertia and the premarital cohabitation effect. *Family Relations*, 55, 499 - 509.

A Lower Risk Sequence (A Theoretical Model)



A Higher Risk Sequence (A Theoretical Model)



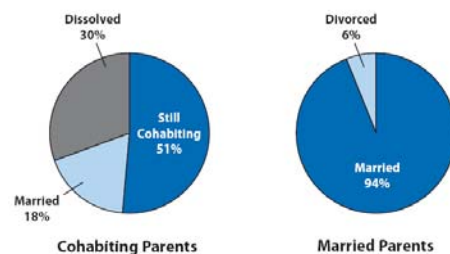
Children are affected.

- For example:

The odds of a couple being together two years after the birth of a child are 6 times greater in marriage than cohabitation.

Source: William Galston, 2008 The Changing Twenties

Figure 15: Status of Couples When Baby is Age 2, by Status at Birth²¹



Access to Assets

- William Galston is the same public policy expert who concluded that, to avoid poverty in America, you need to do three things:
 - 1) Finish high school.
 - 2) Don't have kids until you marry.
 - 3) Wait until you are at least 20 to marry.

Wellbeing is affected.

Hooking up: "an event in which two people are physically intimate outside of a committed relationship without the expectation of future encounters."

Owen, J., Rhoades, G. K., Stanley, S. M., & Fincham, F. (in press). "Hooking up" among college students: Demographic and psychosocial correlates. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*

Emotional Reactions by Sex

- Women
 - 26.4% reported a positive reaction
 - 48.7% reported a negative reaction
- Men
 - 50.4% reported a positive reaction
 - 26.0% reported a negative reaction

Reasons for Working with Individuals

(2) Most existing contact points are with individuals.

- Tracks and Trains
- Lots of tracks are already laid down that go right to where individuals are hanging out.

Individual Oriented Tracks

- High Schools
- College, community college, and vo-tech school settings
- Fatherhood programs
- Government systems serving single, disadvantaged parents (e.g., TANF, Head Start)
- Youth ministries
- Correctional settings
- And so on, and so on, and so on . . .

Reasons for Working with Individuals

(3) We have a new generation of individuals who are shaky about relationships and marriage.

The Perfect Storm

- Societal conditions are generating high numbers of people with:
 - insecurities about attachment and
 - low confidence about relationships and marriage . . .
- . . . at a time when we've been dismantling protective structures

- For example:

- Experiencing parental divorce is associated with lower confidence in, and commitment to, **the institution of marriage**.
(Amato & DeBoer, 2001; Glenn & Kramer, 1987)
- Experiencing parental divorce is associated with lower confidence in, and commitment to, **one's own marriage and spouse** as an adult (particularly for women).
(Whitton, Stanley, & Markman, in press)

Reasons for Working with Individuals

(4) You can get at some things more directly with individuals.

For example:

- Personal Safety/DV
- "What ifs" in marginally committed or unhealthy relationships
- Pre-Commitments
- Mate/partner selection

Attention to Selection

Where can a person learn about choosing a partner, wisely?

Examples

- **Within My Reach**
 - (PREP's experiential curriculum for individuals)
- **Love U2**
 - (Marline Pearson's program for teens)
- **Airman to Airman**
 - (Natalie Jenkins and colleagues; U.S. Air Force)
- **P.I.C.K. A Partner**
 - (John Van Epp and colleagues)

Who to Focus on?
The Individual or the Couple

from the Documentary
"Focus on Forever"

PBS Special

The American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers

2006

Focus On Forever

Would you rather work with this couple, as a couple, . . .

OR

Work with the individuals as individuals?

Best Target Periods

- Couples: **During times of transition**
- Individuals: **Prior to transitions** into potentially risky or ill-fitting relationships
 - a more purely preventive strategy because you go much further upstream

Combating Fear with Strategies
that Can Work

www.PREPinC.com