

KEY TO REDUCING POVERTY AMONG AFRICAN AMERICANS: REVIVE
MARRIAGE IN BLACK AMERICA

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KEY TO REDUCING POVERTY AMONG AFRICAN AMERICANS: REVIVE
MARRIAGE IN BLACK AMERICA

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Abstract

KEY TO REDUCING POVERTY AMONG AFRICAN AMERICANS: REVIVE
MARRIAGE IN BLACK AMERICA

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Under the Supervision of Dr. Richard Rogers

This paper is an opportunity to address poverty among African-Americans. The literature reviewed for this research all focused on the breakdown of the Black family as the source of poverty. Areas concerning obstacles to marriage, benefits of marriage, health of spouses, infidelity, and religion are documented.

Marriage is an obtainable goal and a program is demonstrated in this paper. Support and mentoring is provided to young couples with children and expectant parents in a program named "Marriage First." This program and other resources are recognized as the imperative steps needed to move a generation to responsible, self sustaining, and healthy families.

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Chapter I

Introduction

The decline of marriage, especially in many low-income black communities, is cracking the foundation of the black nuclear family and worsening poverty and child welfare. National statistics show from 2007 that 70 percent of African-American children are born out of wedlock and up to 85 percent of African-American children will spend some or all of their childhood in a single-parent home.

This is important because the emotional and economic security of children is greatly reduced in single-parent homes. There are some exceptions to the rule, but children from two-parent homes have shown to fare better. Single parenthood among African Americans is not just accepted, but now has become the norm rather than the exception.

Milwaukee, Wisconsin is ranked second in the nation for African-Americans who have never been married. Racine, Wisconsin follows closely behind Milwaukee in its rate of African Americans who have never married. Racine has 38% of its households headed by a single parent and 58% of those households are headed by an African American female. Using statistics from Milwaukee and the surrounding community of Racine as a study group, this study will provide awareness into the causes, effects and workable solutions to address the African American marriage crisis.

The goal of this project is to help African-American couples to move toward more prosperous lives. This is accomplished by providing education that increases their understanding of the strong link between marriages and better financial and social

outcomes. This can equip African Americans with the skills to make critical life decisions about having children and healthy relationships with their spouse.

Problem Statement/Needs Assessment

Racine, Wisconsin and the nearby county of Milwaukee were used as a model for examination and analysis of the marriage crisis and its link to poverty. Interviews with new unmarried African Americans parents and expectant parents increased awareness into the causes and effects of the marriage crisis among African Americans and workable solutions to respond to this crisis. Participants of the Women, Infant, and Children Nutrition (WIC) program will be the subjects of the project. WIC participants are eligible for the program based upon their household income. The income guidelines are not as low as the Federal poverty guidelines, which allow low-income parents to qualify for this program if not other programs, such as food stamps. Many of the WIC participants are young and unmarried.

Project Strategy and Goals

Unmarried parents were interviewed to determine some causes for their current marital status and the effect this status has on the parent financially, emotionally, and socially.

The goal of this project is to identify the barriers preventing marriage and develop a program that promotes and assists couples with weddings and pre-marriage counseling.

Delimitations of the Study

This research is limited to Racine County Women, Infant, and Children (WIC) Nutrition program and their surrounding communities as subjects.

Methods and Procedures

This project was based on a comprehensive survey of literature related to the problem of the Black marriage crisis in America and its link to poverty. This research has helped to establish a project in the African American community to strengthen the family. The theory is that once the family rebounds and becomes stronger problems plaguing Black America such as drug abuse, incarceration, and domestic violence will be reduced.

To begin the project WIC participants received invitations to attend a family strengthening program. The family strengthening program consisted of 6 sessions with a focus each session addressing the barriers preventing marriage. The program finalized with an opportunity for couples to receive a low cost wedding and pre-marriage counseling. The program was voluntary for participants.

The team implementing the program consisted of a married couple, a family support partner, a certified counselor, and child care staff. This team modeled behavior and directed families in group discussion and group activities. The program displayed a safe environment to ask questions and discuss topics regarding barriers to marriage, pre-marriage counseling, wedding preparation, and the benefits and challenges of marriage.

Objectives for the program included the amount of couples that complete the program in its entirety. Another objective was the amount of participants that possessed the knowledge to reduce barriers preventing marriage and also participants that reduced at least one barrier by the end of the program. The main objective is the amount of participants that decided to enter into marriage.

Unmarried new parents and expectant parents were encouraged to attend. To ensure both fathers and mothers attend, issues identified from interviews that affect low-income parents such as government assistance, child support, traffic violations, and employment were discussed. Children attended and met in their own group while parents were in their own discussion group. The parent group reviewed scenario cards with situations that occur in marriage and problem solve in the group. The discussions reduced isolation for parents and helped reduce the risk of domestic violence, drug use, and miscommunication. The sessions promoted healthy communication among couples and promoted healthy relationships. Each week a household won a gift basket that is appropriate for each family member.

The family strengthening program collaborated with a banquet facility and chapel to provide a wedding for interested participants. Sponsors of the program assisted in securing invitations and bridal apparel for the wedding. Catering services were available for a low cost with the use of a banquet facility. Photography and music were also made available at a low cost.

This project targeted unmarried expectant/new mothers and fathers as a way to address the marriage crisis and the problem of out-of-wedlock births and the unacceptable number of single-parent, predominantly African-American households, most of which do not have a father present. Most unwed mothers are young, poorly educated (often dropping out of school when pregnant), and are unlikely to have a steady work history; consequently, a large percentage of this group ends up on welfare.

This project committed to and implemented educational initiatives to prevent future generations from falling into the cycle of poverty by encouraging marriage.

Chapter II

Literature Review

Facts About Poverty in Wisconsin

Literature reviewed for this study was primarily focused on poverty issues in Wisconsin. The Center of Wisconsin conducted a study in 2004 addressing the issue of poverty in Wisconsin. The study looked at facts about poverty in Wisconsin, causes of poverty in the state, and the complex contributing factors causing poverty.

Facts found that related to this study's subject matter are listed below:

- During 2003-04, 11% of Wisconsin's residents lived below the federal poverty threshold, up from 9.2% in 2002-03 and 8.3% in 2001-02. (U.S. Census, 2005)
- Poverty and near-poverty in Wisconsin are rural, suburban, and inner city problems. 33% of children in rural Wisconsin live in households at or below 200% of the federal poverty threshold. 17% of children in suburban areas and 51% in urban areas fall under this income. (National Center for Children in Poverty, and U.S. Census. Figures are the averages for 2001-2003.)
- Racial minorities suffer from disproportionately high rates of poverty. The poverty rate for black children in Wisconsin is 6 times that for white kids: *the worst disparity in the U.S.*
- The 2000 Census reported poverty rates in Wisconsin for whites 6.3%, American Indians 21.7%, Hispanic/Latinos 21.7%, Asian Americans 19.8%, and African Americans 31.8%.

Causes of Poverty

The literature, *The Self-Sufficiency Standard for Wisconsin*, stated that there were many complex causes of poverty, but there were contributing factors that prevent families from moving away from poverty. One primary factor stated was family structure. The study on poverty in Wisconsin stated that, “Poverty trends are correlated with changes in family structure—higher divorce rates and growth in the number of single-parent families are related to higher poverty rates, especially for women and children. Births to young, unwed mothers who are not emotionally or financially ready are a major problem, especially when the father is absent or not active in the household.”

- 21% of white women and 25% of black women working in Wisconsin held poverty-wage jobs in 2003.

Recessions have a measurable impact on unemployment and job loss, which in turn raise the poverty rate. The recession has hit people of color disproportionately hard:

- 41% of all manufacturing jobs in Milwaukee, Racine, and Kenosha counties disappeared between 1979 and 2000. These areas have the majority of black residents in the state.
- Households headed by female single parents have a high risk of living in poverty. Racine has 38% of its households headed by a single parent and 58% of those households are headed by an African American female.

The Self Sufficiency Standard for Wisconsin is a report which determines how much money it takes for families to live and work without public or private assistance or subsidies. Each state with this type of report has a breakdown of facts made available for each county and family makeup See table for the two types of families in Racine County.

Table 1

Two Types of Families in Racine County

Monthly Costs	Adult Infant + Preschooler	2 Adults Infant + Preschooler
Housing	609	609
Child Care	1416	1416
Food	358	515
Transportation	219	452
Health care	213	254
Miscellaneous	281	346
Taxes	777	796
Earned Income Credit	0	0
Childcare Tax Credit	-100	-100
Child Tax Credit	-167	-167
Self Sufficiency Wage		
- Hourly		
- Monthly	\$20.49	\$11.55(per adult)
- Yearly	\$3,606.00	\$4,066.00
	\$43,275.00	\$48,796.00

Income Needs

The *The Self-Sufficiency Standard for Wisconsin*, states the hourly wage needed for a single parent is nearly double to the hourly wage needed by each person in a two parent household. The income, based on the chart, needed to sustain a single parent household in Racine is often out of reach based upon the hourly wages single parents actually earn. The high unemployment rate among African Americans in Racine and the education level of many young single parents would not permit them to earn the wages necessary to sustain their family. The wages needed for a two parent household in Racine is within reach for many of these families. The burden of earning wages to take care of basic expenses needs to be spread between two people based upon the study found by the *The Self-Sufficiency Standard for Wisconsin*.

Consequences of Marriage in the African-American Community

Reducing poverty is one result of a two parent, married household. Many other benefits occur as well. In August 2003, the African American Healthy Marriage Initiative sponsored a roundtable discussion to evaluate “Why Marriage Matters.” The report identified four questions to address. The questions are listed below from the report:

1. What needs to be done to educate the Black community on the numerous benefits of marriage?
2. What needs to be done to help the Black community reconnect marriage and childbearing by reducing divorce and out of wedlock birth rates as well as increasing the marriage rate?

3. How should the federal government address the high divorce and out of wedlock birth rates and low marriage rates in the Black community?
4. How can we build effective coalitions in communities to foster healthy marriages?

Upon reviewing the facts on poverty in Wisconsin, sufficiency standards to raise a family in Wisconsin, and attitudes among blacks about marriage, it was now time to look at the affects of marriage. The 2005 literature review from the University of Chicago analyzed the consequences/results of marriage for African Americans. The review indentified four questions to address in the review regarding marriage and African Americans:

1. What are the economic, psychosocial, and health-related consequences of marriage for African American men, women, and children?
2. Do the consequences of marriage differ for Blacks and Whites?
3. If racial differences exist, what explains these differences?
4. What are the policy implications of these findings?

There were ten major findings discovered with this literature review. The findings proved that the issue of marriage is complex, but overall marriage is beneficial to African-Americans and to our culture as a whole. Marriage also benefited children, especially boys.

"When African-American boys live with their father in the home -- particularly their married father -- they typically receive substantially more parental support," the report said. As a result, black boys of married parents tend to do better in school and markedly are less likely to become delinquent.

Health

The literature review *The Consequences of Marriage for African Americans* provided an insight in the health benefits of marriage. Marriage has many benefits for African-Americans economically, but there is an area where marriage has not fared as well. And that is in the area of health. Why is health important when discussing marriage? Health concerns for African Americans is a top priority due to higher mortality rate among black men and women compared to their white counterparts. A columnist from the Washington Post discussed the value of good health among African American marriages in a column on family on October 25, 2005. The article concluded that, marriage benefits black families and can even make a difference in whether a family with children lives in poverty, but has little or no impact on a couple's health. Good health is not always evenly distributed within the black family. It appears that men and children -- especially boys -- are helped more from marriage than women, said Linda Malone-Colon, co-author of "The Consequences of Marriage for African Americans." (need citation)

While both husbands and wives report more satisfaction with their lives, compared with singles, husbands register far greater satisfaction with family life than wives. "A lot more research needs to be done" on these and other issues, said Mrs. Malone-Colon, who is the director of the new National Healthy Marriage Resource Center, a clearinghouse for marriage information supported by the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and private funders. Mrs. Malone-Colon further concluded where marriage usually brings strong benefits to African American

couples, data available was meager and inconclusive. Mrs. Malone-Colon and her co-authors Lorraine Blackman of Indiana University, Obie Clayton of Morehouse College, Norval Glenn of the University of Texas at Austin and Alex Roberts of IAV found that their research revealed that marriage brings small health benefits to black men and none to black women. This finding by the researchers regarding little to no health benefit to black women has been hypothesized by the researchers to reflect the probability that this is more to do with the quality of marriage.

Marital Infidelity

W. Bradford Wilcox of the University of Virginia completed a study on Sexual Infidelity and African American Marriage. His findings produced the following regarding cheating on a spouse:

- 43% African American men
- 24% white men
- 17% African American women
- 15% white women

Infidelity is most common among poor African American men **and** wealthy African American men.

African American men and women are significantly more likely to have children by more than one partner. The following statistics demonstrate the amount of families with children by multiple partners, data provided by study done by the Fragile Families Study of Urban Parents. (Carlson & Furstenburg, 2006):

- 86% of black fathers
- 40% of white mothers

- 78% of black mother
- 46% of white mothers

Wilcox concluded marital infidelity and multiple partner fertility is a key contributor to the health and satisfaction levels in African American marriages. These factors also contribute to poverty in the African American community. Infidelity and children by multiple partners contributes to the white-black gap in marriage rates, lower levels of marital happiness and sexual satisfaction among African American women, and elevated levels of divorce in the African American community.

Religion and Marriage

Author W. Bradford Wilcox gave a power point presentation at the Brookings Institute on Church Attendance and African American Marriage. The presentation was a study on religion and marriage among African Americans. The study was part of the *The Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study* under the African American Healthy Marriage Initiative.

In the presentation Wilcox compared the status of African Americans and their church attendance. Wilcox studied African American mothers from 1998 to 2000 in several urban areas. Compared to African American mothers who attend church infrequently, to churchgoing African American women are seventy-three percent more likely to be married at the birth of their child. Churchgoing African American married mothers are thirty-one percent more likely to report that they have excellent relationships with their husbands. Compared to African American unmarried mother who attend church infrequently churchgoing African American unmarried mothers

are one hundred-forty-eight times more likely to marry after the non-marital birth. Churchgoing African American unmarried mothers are sixty-two percent more likely to rate their relationships with the fathers of their children as very good/excellent. The presenter, Wilcox, also explained the religious effects on African American Marriage. He explained the effects in part by relationship-related behaviors and norms:

Support/sacrifice – Father is more affectionate, understanding

Sexual fidelity – Couple has less conflict over sexual infidelity

Marriage Norms – Mothers more likely to value marriage

Attendance also linked to:

Social support and prayer – Buffer against stresses of poverty, racism, community distress

Rejecting quote The Street unquote – Turn to God and church family rather than drugs, alcohol, violence

Responsible Fatherhood and African American Marriage

The Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families (ACF) sponsored “Framing the Future: A Fatherhood and Healthy Marriage Forum” during May 10-12, 2005. The forum examined the important role of men as fathers and husbands in the healthy development of children and explored the challenges and opportunities for building strong partnerships that would result in stronger children, families, and communities. The forum looked at the benefits of the father and dedicated the forum to examining the effects of fatherhood and marriage. The following is from a report from the ACF, from the forum. “Researchers highlighted evidence that fathers make unique and irreplaceable contributions to the development of their children, yet far

too many children are growing up without a father in the home. Research tells us that both boys and girls benefit from the emotional and social support of their fathers. When children grow up with committed, responsible fathers, they do better on a host of child well-being indicators. Research further suggests that, all things being equal, children who grow up in healthy married, two-parent families do better on a host of outcomes and are less likely to engage in criminal activity or abuse drugs and alcohol than those who don't.”

The 1999 Statement from the African-American Fathers project by the Morehouse Research Institute, *Turning the Corner on Father Absence in Black America*, marked a significant developmental milestone in this nation's social policy relating to families. The Statement highlighted an American problem that crosses racial, ethnic and class lines. While the Morehouse report affirmed the importance of responsible fatherhood, it also unequivocally affirmed the importance of healthy marriages in the African-American community. “We believe that a key goal of the fatherhood movement within the African-American community must be strengthened relationships between mothers and fathers that lead, where-ever possible, to strong, healthy marriages.”

Chapter III

Findings

Ten major findings were discovered in the research from the literature review of the *Consequences of Marriage for African Americans* from the Institute of American Values.

1. *Marriage clearly appears to promote the economic, social, familial, and psychological well-being of African American men and women.* Even when studies control for a wide range of variables, they consistently find that married Black adults, compared to those who are unmarried, have more income, are less likely to face poverty, and are more likely to be happy. Marriage also appears to promote better family functioning for African Americans. At the same time, the evidence generally suggests that Black adults derive little benefit from marriage in terms of physical health.

2. *While both Black men and Black women receive a marriage premium, this premium in most cases appears to be larger for men.* Put a bit differently, Black women overall seem to receive less benefit from marriage than do Black men. This gender gap is especially pronounced in the areas of family life and physical health. In fact, married Black women actually report *poorer* health than do unmarried Black women. The one exception to this pattern is in the economic domain, where Black men and women appear to benefit comparably from marriage.

3. *Economically, marriage appears to benefit Blacks more than Whites.* In part because marriage often means an additional wage earner for the family, and in part because marriage typically increases the income and the economic productivity of

individuals, married-couple Black families have far more income, and are far less likely to live in poverty, than other Black families. This economic premium stemming from marriage is comparably larger for Blacks than for Whites. In general, marriage appears to contribute greatly to the economic well-being of African American families.

4. Overall, Black women appear to benefit from marriage substantially less than do White women. By contrast, the differences in the benefit from marriage between Black men and White men appear in most cases to be minimal.

5. Black-White differences in marital quality seem to constitute an important reason why Black adults, and particularly Black women, typically benefit less from marriage than do Whites. On average, the marriages of Whites appear to be marked by more happiness and less conflict than those of African Americans. The lower average quality of African American marriages, in turn, seems to reduce the benefits to adults that those marriages might otherwise yield. In our analysis of data from the General Social Surveys, we find that controlling for marital quality significantly reduces the Black-White gap in the estimated benefits of marriage.

6. Parental marriage produces important benefits for African American children. Black children of married parents typically receive better parenting, are less delinquent, have fewer behavioral problems, have higher self-esteem, are more likely to delay sexual activity, and have moderately better educational outcomes. Because many of the relevant studies on child outcomes employ comprehensive controls, there is strong reason to believe that these findings reflect more than mere correlations. *Marriage itself* appears to be generating strong positive results for African American

children. At the same time, marriage may have little or no impact on school dropout and drug use among Black adolescents.

7. *Parental marriage appears to be especially important for the well-being of young African American males.* In areas including parental support, delinquency, self-esteem, and school performance, having one's father in the home, and particularly one's *married* father, appears to be a crucial determinant of better outcomes for young Black males. When viewed alongside our other finding regarding the larger marriage premium for Black men, as compared to Black women, this finding suggests that marriage is particularly important for African American males at all stages of the life cycle.

8. *In some areas, Black children seem to benefit more from parental marriage than do White children, whereas in other areas, the reverse is true.* Regarding both levels of parental support and the risks of delinquency, African American children seem to benefit more from parental marriage than do White children. Yet regarding educational performance, early sexual activity, substance use, and possibly high school completion, White children appear to derive greater benefits from parental marriage than do their African American peers.

9. *The reasons for some apparent racial differences in the consequences of marriage for children are not clear, and further research in this area is needed.* One possibility is that studies need more carefully to distinguish the effects of parental non-marriage on Black sons as compared to Black daughters, since the impact on boys appears to be greater than the impact on girls. Another, related possibility is that the institutional contexts and cultural norms affecting African

American children are in some respects distinctive, thus making it harder for researchers to tease out the specific effects of marriage and non-marriage when it comes to Black-White differences in child outcomes.

10. *For policy makers who care about Black America, marriage matters.* Public and private sector policies aimed at increasing marriage rates among African Americans, and particularly policies aimed at increasing the number and proportion of high quality Black marriages, are important strategies for improving the well-being of African Americans and for strengthening civil society.

Chapter IV

Summary and Conclusion

From roundtable discussions, grassroots organizations have created projects to address the issue of encouraging marriage in the Black community. Based on the research reviewed for this seminar paper, a project is proposed for a marriage initiative in Racine Wisconsin. This project is called “Marriage First”. The goal of the project would be to improve the well-being of African American children by increasing the number of children living in healthy, two-parent married households.

The project will be a six week program (See Appendix A). Each week will focus on a barrier preventing young unwed couples from making a commitment in marriage. Research has shown many government assistance programs inhibit unwed parents to marry. Government policies ranging from denial of welfare benefits if the man was in the home, housing and property ownership, incarceration/sentencing, restrictions of social security benefits in support of marriage, and income tax policies were all cited as negatively impacting marriage. These issues with government assistance programs will consist of the majority of the weekly sessions. Each week the seminars will show appropriate ways to maintain benefits and become married. The sessions will conclude with a commitment from the participants to publicly disclose their value of the institution of marriage. The project will empower unwed parents to believe that a healthy marriage is in the best interest of their children, of the couples, and of their communities.

Parents have the option in entering into pre-marriage counseling provided free by the local interfaith coalition and a low-cost wedding.

Marriage First will have a weekly agenda promoting healthy and nurturing relationships (See Appendix A). Each session will begin with couples along with their children sitting at their designated family table. Each family will introduce themselves to the group and the family will receive a welcoming hello. After introductions each family will have their family dinner together as a unit. Families are encouraged to communicate with members of their own family unit. Communication between family tables is discouraged so that parents and children can focus on each other. The main entrée is provided by a winning family from the previous week. The marriage initiative team provides the remaining items in the meal. These remaining meal items are healthy food items, such as vegetables, salads, and fruits. The meal time is to model to the young families healthy food choices and good fellowship in the family.

Following mealtime parents and children split into their respective groups. Parents attend a parent group and children attend an activity time or daycare. Following the separate groups parents are reunited with their children to have one on one time with their kids. The purpose of this time is to have an uninterrupted time with their child to reconnect after a busy day and to nurture the relationship with the child. Following the special time with child the entire family meets together and joins the remaining families and end the session in a large circle. In the circle, families share announcements, birthdays, special events with their community of supportive families. This closing session removes the isolation many parents feel as single or unwed parents. Each week a “winning” family is designated to win a family “basket”. This basket has a gift for each member of the family and a gift card for the

family to purchase ingredients to make the main entrée for the next weekly session. The principle of reciprocity is demonstrated to show families and couples the belief of give and take, because marriage is “give and take.”

During parent group, unwed parents have the opportunity to have a one to one time in the first ten minutes of the session. This time allows the couple to speak to each other without the pressures or distractions of children, paternal or maternal grandparents, or work. The program recognizes that conflicts may arise; the marriage initiative team is close by and will intervene when necessary to prevent any domestic abuse. The team is close by to coach couples to learn to communicate with each other in a healthy manner. Parents are later placed in teams and discuss scenarios that have topics regarding relationships with maternal or paternal grandparents, issues with government assistance, or parenting. Parents work together to find a solution to the topic. Participants once isolated now can open up and communicate with others and share ideas to resolve situations that once seemed impossible. Exercises such as these reduce verbal and physical abuse because it shows couples how to resolve conflicts.

After six weeks the program ends with a graduation program with couples standing proudly with their children and proclaiming their commitment to family. Families meet again once a month for the next twelve months as a “get together” in order to stay in touch and support each other in their marriages/relationships.

Couples are given the option to enter into pre-marriage counseling after the six week Marriage First program. A wedding planner is assigned to the couple and the planner uses the resources provided to the program from donations of product and

services provided by local business and organizations. Couples have the option between a church or non-church wedding and a banquet with catering.

The Key

Why is marriage the key to reducing poverty? History has shown the institution has been the foundation for families for centuries. In order for the African American to strengthen the family has to be preserved. This seminar paper shares the goals that the Marriage Initiative roundtable has established, which are:

- Improve the well-being of African American children by increasing the number of children living in healthy, two-parent married households.

- Improve the number of healthy marriages in the African American community.
- Improve the overall well-being of the African American community

- Develop and improve the capacity within the African American community to provide healthy marriage programs and services.

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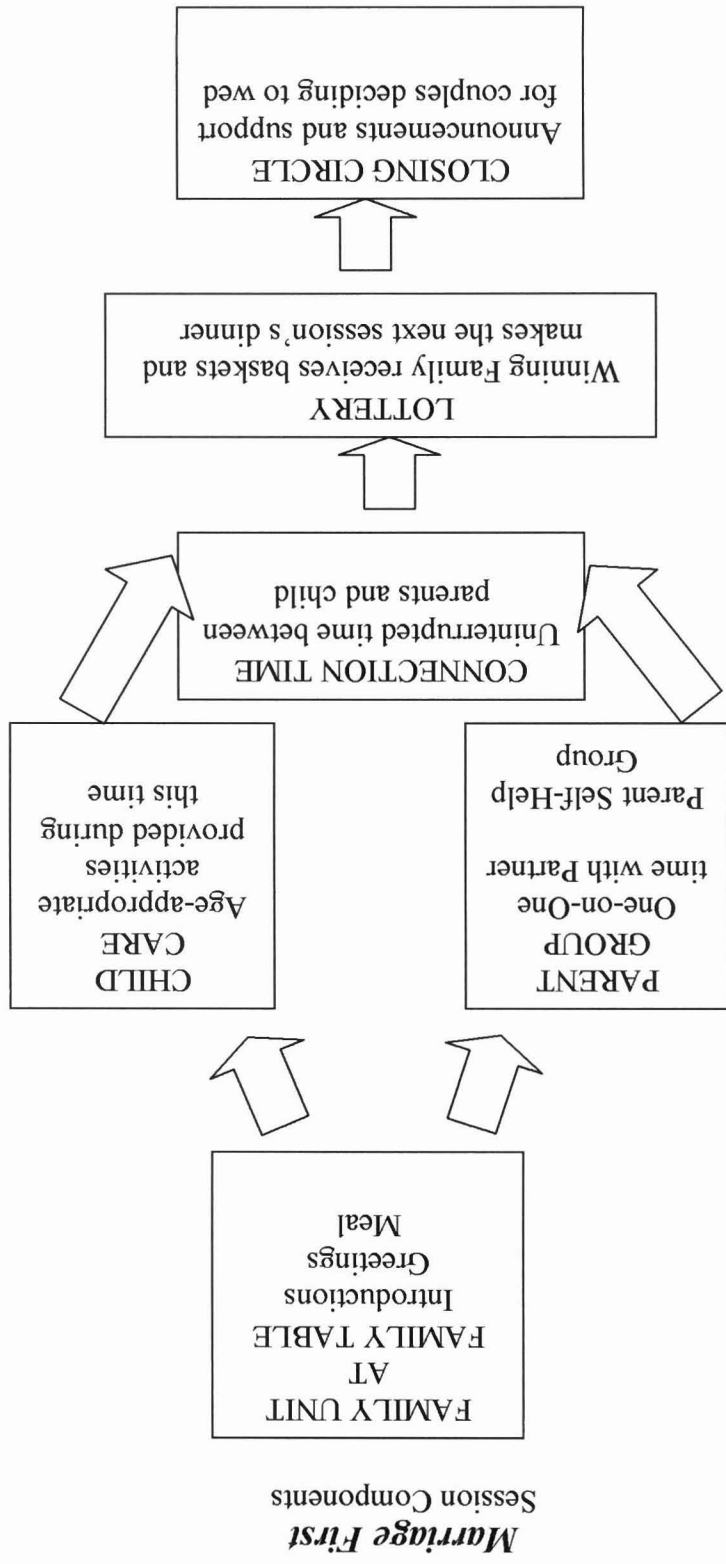
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APPENDIX A



Marriage First
Session Components