The P.I.C.K. a Partner Educational Program

(*Premarital Interpersonal Choices & Knowledge*)

Partner-Selection Education

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INTRODUCTION

A. The Importance of Stability in Marriages

One of the most important decisions in life is choosing a marriage partner. The consequences of a poor choice and marital dissatisfaction or disruption are far-reaching. Marital distress is a major risk factor for many forms of dysfunction and psychopathology according to a recent National Institute of Mental Health report on prevention (Coie, Watt, West, Hawkins, Asarnow, Markman, Ramey, Shure, Long, 1993). Marital and family discord, for example, has been correlated with higher rates of depression (Coyne, Kahn, & Gotlib, 1987), lowered physical health (Kiecolt-Glaser, Malarkey, Chee, Newton, Cacioppo, Mao, & Glaser, 1993), and poor worker production (Markman, Forthofer, Cox, Stanley, & Kessler, 1995).

In addition, socio-economic stability is greatly altered by marital failure and out-of-wedlock births. For example, ninety-seven percent of black and ninety-nine percent of white families' poverty experiences are due to a change in family structure (Kneisner, 1988). Close to fifty percent (44%) of women face poverty following divorce (Heath & Kiker, 1992), and about 20% of women who are first time welfare applicants do so because of divorce, and one out of four of them are still on welfare 5 years later (Boisjoly, Harris, & Duncan, 1998).

Children are 50% more likely to develop health problems following divorce (Mauldon, 1990). Ten percent more children in mother-only or remarried families than those in intact families repeat a grade, and about fifteen percent more children in these family structures are suspended or expelled (Zill, 1994). Teenagers and young women whose parents are divorced are three times more likely to have an out-of-wedlock child as those whose parents stay married (Cherlin, 1995).

B. The Changing Culture of Dating and Marriage

The generation of the fifties and sixties declared war on social norms, and made it a norm to have no norms, and taboo to have taboos. But in doing so, the next generation lacked social guidance in the areas of love, sex and marriage. The result has been a rapidly increasing divorce rate and confusion about the values of marriage and family.

Norval Glenn and Elizabeth Marquardt (2001) wrote *Hooking Up, Hanging Out, and Hoping for Mr. Right*, a report in the Institute for American Values. This report was based on telephone interviews with a nationally representative sample of one thousand college women, and in-depth conversations with sixty-two women on eleven campuses over eighteen months. They found that women were confused about the dating-mating game on campus. The two most common practices were casual sex with no emotional involvement or constant togetherness, which the study referred to as "joined at the hip." Commitment seemed to come in only two doses- too little or too much. Neither approach was very successful because the couples in both types usually did not last. And yet, sixty-three percent of the college women expected to meet their future husband on campus.

Marquardt contended that there were few rituals today that let women know where they stand. Traditional dating has been replaced by "hanging out." Only fifty percent of senior women had been asked out on six or more dates in their four years at college. A common complaint was that college men rarely acknowledge being part of a couple.

The sexual freedoms fought for and won by the women of the sixties are now the battlefields of their daughters. The lack of values and social guidance has created a need for education and intervention. The report affirmed this in its conclusion, "The virtual disappearance of adult participation in, or even awareness of, how today's young people find and marry one another should be seen as a major social problem and should end" (pp. 20).

The present day mating culture seems more oriented to men's sexual interests, according to the women in the National Marriage Project's yearly study in 2000 titled, *Sex Without Strings, Relationships Without Rings* (Whitehead, B.D. & Popenoe, D., 2000). The report warned against the emotional baggage that is produced by this culture. "A prolonged period of sexually active singlehood exposes young women to the risks of multiple failed relationships and breakups… and these breakups seem to have a cumulative negative impact on subsequent relationships" (pp. 15).

The pessimism about marriage is also fueled by the divorce rate of the parents of this generation. Although eighty percent of teens indicated that it is important that they get married, the belief that their marriage will last a lifetime has declined over the decades. Another large study cited in Paul Amato and Alan Booth's 1997 book, A Generation At Risk, found that children whose parents divorced were seventy-six percent more likely to divorce themselves.

The rising increase in premarital cohabitation is yet another indicator of the apprehension about marriage and mate choice. The percentage of couples that cohabitated prior to marriage between 1974 and 1994 increased from ten percent to fifty-six percent. Cohabitation is favored by more than fifty percent of single men and women according to studies. One national sample reported that almost sixty percent of high school seniors agreed with the statement, "It is usually a good idea for a couple to live

together before getting married in order to find out whether they really get along" (Larsen, 2001, pp. 8).

The irony of this "premarital test" is that it has only led to higher divorce rates and lower satisfaction rates in marriage (Waite, L. & Gallagher, M., 2000). Cohabitators who married are as much as forty-six percent more likely to divorce than those who married without first cohabitating. And in another comparison, cohabitators were less likely to say they enjoyed sex. It seems that marriage adds the essential ingredients of commitment and security, which was reflected in the higher satisfaction ratings of the married respondents.

These numerous studies clearly indicated a large gap between the aspiration for a successful marriage and the understanding of how to achieve it. Popenoe and Dafoe Whitehead concluded their report by asking this crucial question: "Are there ways to encourage" our present society towards "a mating culture more oriented to successful mate selection" (Whitehead, B.D. & Popenoe, D., 2000, pp. 19).

C. The Need for Mate Selection Education for Singles

The answer is a resounding, "YES!" I believe we are in need of a new social revolution: Mate-Selection Education. The momentum of this educational tidal wave will be a systematic approach to dating and mate selection that can be taught by parents, schools and religious institutions. Definitions need to be given to the universal but mysterious concepts of love, trust, commitment, intimacy and attachment. This movement needs to provide ways for individuals to pace the emotional and sexual closeness in their growing relationships. It should reach the masses of singles and singles-again of every age.

Programs for couples have been the primary area of emphasis in the premarital preparation movement to this point. Couples do need help in their relationships in preparation for marriage. However, it makes sense to provide materials for singles *before* they become engaged. The problem is that there is little information about the premarital relationship and the marital decision-making process for singles and educators of singles to use.

The fact that singles are intrigued about this area is evidenced by the popularity of the new dating and marriage television shows- *The Bachelor, The Bachelorette, Joe Millionaire, Love Connection*, *The Fifth Wheel*, *Change of Heart*, *Elimidate*, *The Dating Story* and *The Wedding Story,* to name a few. Singles are craving for direction and guidance. Yet, for the most part, families and educators have abandoned this substantial segment of society.

The single population has grown radically over the last four decades. Almost fifty percent of the United States population over the age of fifteen is single! This is about twenty percent higher than it was in 1960. The number of current divorcees among the total population was only 1.8 percent for males and 2.6 percent for females in 1960.

However, by 1998 this percentage had more than quadrupled. The majority of these divorced singles will remarry- but their chances of success in marriage are significantly lower than they were in their first marriage (The Institute for American Values, 2000).

Although research has been conducted on the universal experience of marriage (Gottman, 1994, Fowers & Olson, 1986, Larsen & Olson, 1989, Fowers, Montel, & Olson, 1994), there is a lack of integration between the predictors of marital stability and satisfaction with the research on romantic love and attachment in adult relationships. For example, research on relationship skills (communication, problem solving, conflict resolution, etc.) is prolific. Granted, these skills are indispensable in a healthy relationship. However, a relationship is much more dynamic than the mechanical use of skills.

A twenty-year-old study exemplified this fact. Researchers evaluated the use of relationship skills by a group of married couples that were instructed to discuss a specific area of conflict. The couples were then separated and paired off with a different partner of the opposite sex. This new pair had to discuss a similar area of conflict. However, when their relationship skills were measured, it was found that they scored significantly higher than when they were with their own marriage partner. The researchers concluded that the *use* of relationship skills was greatly affected by the *dynamics* of the relationship.

In other words, you may be a great communicator at work, but inept with your partner. Or, a patient listener with a friend, but an intolerant, defensive listener with the one you loves the most.

What makes the difference? It is the dynamics of the relationship- your roles, your background, your conscience, your trust, and your previous patterns of relating, and others- that mediate your use of skills. Therefore, an exceptionally skilled person *may not use* their skills with his or her partner. The point is training for relationship skills is only part of the need of our day. There is more to love than just practicing good skills. The plethora of research on the mysterious subject of love and attachment needs to be combined with the other areas of research on topics of premarital predictors of marital satisfaction and stability in order to develop an effective mate selection training program for singles.

The **P.I.C.K. a Partner Training Program** (*Premarital Interpersonal Choices & Knowledge*) presents a practical, easy-to-understand, and comprehensive overview of the crucial areas to explore in a dating relationship within the framework of a conceptual model of the bonding forces that produce the feelings of love and attachment. This model of adult attachment provides an overarching structure for understanding how to pace the growing closeness in a premarital relationship while exploring the strongest, premarital predictors of postmarital attitudes, behaviors, and satisfaction.

The goals of this marital selection program fall into two major categories.

1. Explore the crucial areas that predict marital satisfaction

a) To describe the major areas of a potential mate that should be considered and explored during the dating relationship;

b) To provide a format to identify and correct unrealistic expectations and potentially damaging dynamics prior to marriage;

c) To improve marital adjustment and satisfaction.

2. Pace a growing attachment

a) To provide a comprehensive yet easy-to-understand model of the attaching forces which create feelings of closeness and cohesion in a relationship;

b) To explain the inter-relationship and necessary balance of these bonding forces;

c) To use this model to pace a growing attachment by determining the placement of boundaries in a relationship.

I. "HEAD" KNOWLEDGE: MAJOR PREDICTORS FOR MARITAL SATISFACTION

From an extensive review of research literature, the *P.I.C.K. a Partner Training Program* (*Premarital Interpersonal Choices & Knowledge*) identified five areas that are crucial to get to know in a premarital relationship that strongly predict what a person will be like as a spouse in a marriage. Therefore, the better one knows and understands a partner in these five areas, the better he/she will be able to predict what this partner will be like in marriage. These five areas are: 1) the dynamics of childhood/family experiences; 2) the maturity of the conscience; 3) the scope of compatibility potential; 4) the developed relationship skills; 5) the previous relationship patterns.

A. Dynamics of Childhood and Family of Origin Experiences

"The apple doesn't fall far from the tree"

Research has supported Lewis and Spanier's (1979) proposition that the higher the marital quality in the parent's marriage, the higher the marital quality in the adult children's marriages (Glenn & Kramer, 1987; Greenberg & Nay, 1982; McLanahan, 1988; McLanahan & Bumpass, 1988). The research of both McLanahan and Bumpass (1988) and Glenn and Kramer (1987) have supported the finding that Caucasian women who spend part of their childhoods in single-parent families are more likely to have their own marriages break up. Glenn and Kramer found similar results with Caucasian males and African-American males and females. In addition, they demonstrated that children of divorced parents tend to marry at an unusually early age, and also have lower commitment levels to marriage.

Holman, Larson, and Harmer (1994) have produced longitudinal studies that demonstrate that a composite measure of premarital family/home qualities (i.e., quality of parent's marriage, quality of parent-child relationships, and quality of family environment) predicted early marital stability and satisfaction.

This research supports Vaillant's (1978) and Kelly and Conley's (1987) findings on long-term marriages from cohorts married in the 1930's that showed that family-of-origin factors such as family environment play a part in marital stability and happiness for the adult children. For instance, Kelly and Conley found that women who divorced within the first twenty years of marriage came from tense, less close and unstable families than women who did not divorce in this timeframe.

Wamboldt and Reiss (1989) found that expressiveness in the family of origin also predicted higher relationship quality in the marriages of the children. Their research supported the findings that conflict in the family of origin predicted lower marital quality (see also Whyte, 1990).

Vaillant (1978) strongly suggested that the continuing relationship with parents after marriage can also affect the quality and stability of the children's marriages. This is supported by Lewis and Spanier's (1979) findings that parental and in-law support of the relationship prior to marriage enhances marital quality and stability. Whyte (1990) found something similar with parental opposition being positively correlated to marital problems and divorce possibility.

B. Maturity of Conscience

"Let your conscience be your guide"

Kelly and Conley (1987) made a case for a personality perspective in the understanding of marital quality and satisfaction. They state that "many of the disrupted patterns of communication and behavior exchange that recent researchers have noted in disturbed couples may be seen as the outgrowths of the personality characteristics of the partner" (p.36).

Lewis and Spanier's (1979) review of research identified particular personality factors as predictive of marital instability. Several of the characteristics are related to the concept of the conscience (e.g. impulsivity, neuroticism, and unconventionality).

Empathy is an important ingredient in relationships. The conscience is regarded as the cognitive faculty that produces moral and empathetic thought processes. Although the skill of empathetic listening can be taught, the consistent practice of empathy in relationships is moderated by the maturity of the conscience (Stilwell, B.M., Galvin, M. & Kopta, S.M., 1991).

Characteristics of a mature character and conscience are highly predictive traits in the Vaillant and Vaillant (1981) longitudinal research on adolescents. They found that

the "overall behavioral adaptive functioning in adolescence is the single best predictor of overall mental health, assessed some 30 years later" (Beardslee, W.R., Powers, S., Hauser, S.T., Houlihan, J., Jacobson, A.M., Noam, G.G., Macias, E., and Hopfenbeck, J., 1990). Some of the traits included in the behavioral adaptive functioning were "relatedness" (flexible, warm and understanding in relationships), "self-knowledge" (ability to understand and reflect about self, to see self from another's perspective), and "inner synthetic ego functions" (more stable perceptions of others and the world, control over impulses and aggression). These characteristics are intrinsic to concept of the conscience.

C. Compatibility Potential

"Opposites attract"- but, "united we stand, divided we fall"

Compatibility had been the dominant focus of theory and research on the subject of courtship in the past. Compatibility models were forged by sociologists in the 1940's and early 1950's. Burchinal (1964), Kerckhoff (1974) and Undry (1974) reviewed the literature and found that persons similar on a variety of characteristics (e.g. age, social class, religion, attitudes and values) were likely to marry.

Kerckhoff and Davis (1962) proposed a three-filter theory of compatibility in mate selection. According to their theory, couples compare themselves first in term of social characteristics; then, they move to looking at their similarity of values; finally, as they continue progress towards marriage they compare themselves on the complementarity of needs.

The research on marital satisfaction from homogamy, the tendency to choose a mate similar to oneself, has been been scarce since the 1970's. The results of what research has been conducted are mixed. There is some support to higher marital quality for couples who are similar in racial, socioeconomic, religious denominational affiliations, intelligence, age, and absolute status (Antill, 1983; Birtchnell & Kennard, 1984; Kurdek, 1991).

In addition, positive marital quality was related to small spousal discrepancies in age, education, income, value autonomy, and external motives for being marriage (Kurdek, 1991, 1993). Fowers and Olson (1986) and Larsen and Olson (1989) also found that couple consensus on attitudes, values and beliefs was highly predictive of marital stability and, to some extent, marital quality 2-3 years after marriage. Conversely, Kurdek (1993) indicated that spouses with large differences in attitudes, values and beliefs may experience difficulties in marriage because they appraise events from incompatible frames of reference.

D. Relationship Skills

"Practice makes perfect"

Some researchers have examined the potential prevention of marital distress through communication and conflict management training (Renick, Blumberg, & Markman, 1992; Gottman, 1994; Markman, Floyd, Stanley, and Storaasli, 1988; Markman, 1981; Markman, Renick, Floyd, Stanley, and Clements, 1993; Olson & Fowers, 1993). They have found that these two relationship skills are strong predictors of marital satisfaction.

Other studies have further examined the correlation between the premarital development of effective communication skills and later marital quality. Markman (1979, 1981; Markman, Duncan, Storaasli, and Howe, 1987) found in 1, 2 ½, and 5 year followup studies that higher positive ratings of premarital communication were correlated with higher relationship satisfaction. Wamboldt and Reiss (1989) expanded the study of communication and conflict resolution to include the processes through which couples reach agreement and build a consensus. They found that couples who had developed a shared view of their relationship ground rules and agreed on each other's family-of-origin atmosphere had high relationship quality.

Premarital skill-training programs such as Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program (PREP; Markman, et. al., 1993), Relationship Enhancement (Guerney, 1977), and Couples Communication (Miller, Wackman, and Nunnally, 1983) have consistently demonstrated positive results in marital quality from 6 months to five years after training.

E. Previous Relationship Patterns

"History repeats itself"

Conventional wisdom suggests that the way someone acts in one relationship is likely to be repeated in subsequent relationships. This has been borne out in the previously cited research that those who engage in premarital sex are significantly more likely to have extramarital sex (Newcomb and Bentler, 1981).

Studies conducted on the styles of attachment have consistently supported the view that, although some people change their style of attachment when they enter into a different relationship, most replicate the same style of attachment in spite of being in a relationship with different personality types Hazan & Shaver, 1987). This would support the view that most people follow the same relationship script even when there are new characters on the stage.

Summary

One of the basic tenets of education is the belief that knowledge empowers people to live life more productively. In other words, if you can change the thinking of people, you can alter their destinies. Those who have worked with couples in marital preparation or counseling programs are well aware of the frustrations involved with attempting to help couples address areas of concern when their love momentum blinds them to any problems.

The positive impact of education has been evident in other arenas such as drug prevention, sexual abstinence, parenting, and marriage skills. It is proposed that singles also will be benefited by an educational program describing the important predictors of marital satisfaction while providing them with practical ways to manage a developing attachment.

II. "HEART" KNOWLEDGE: THE RELATIONSHIP ATTACHMENT MODEL - R.A.M.

A. Overview of Attachment Theory

Attachment theory is one of the most exciting and promising areas of research and intervention in premarital and marital relationships (Jacobson and Gurman, 1995; Hazan and Shaver, 1994). Much of the past research has investigated Bowlby's "types" or "styles" of human attachment (Bowlby, 1969, 1973, 1980; Ainsworth, 1982; Hazan and Shaver, 1994). This landmark three-volume exploration of attachment, separation and loss by Bowlby (1969, 1973, 1980) provided an in-depth understanding of the varying styles of unidirectional attachment which occur from the infant to the mother. Subsequent studies expanded this individual, object-relations theoretical orientation to include more systemic and transactional concepts. These in-depth descriptions of how infant-mother affectional bonds are formed and broken spawned a massive amount of research in infant, adolescent and adult attachments (see a review of research in Weiss, 1982 and Ainsworth, 1982), and specifically, the development of love and romance (Hazan and Shaver, 1987; 1994).

The majority of this research has continued to use the three styles of attachment (secure, avoidant, and anxious-ambivalent) first proposed by Bowlby, and expanded by Bartholomew (1990) into a four-group model. Bartholomew portrayed attachment styles as reflections of the degree of positive (+) or negative (-) characteristics in the working models of the *self (S)* and the *attachment figure (O for other)*. These working models are broad, cognitive schemas of self and the other that are prototypically formed by the infant-caregiver interactions. Bartholomew's four styles are the: 1) Secure (+S, +O); 2) Dismissing (+S, -O); 3) Preoccupied (-S, +O); and 4) Fearful (-S, -O).

In the eighties, several researchers applied Bowlby's three styles of attachment to adult romantic relationships (Hazan, C. and Shaver, P., 1987) They found that there was continuity between the infant's early experience of attachment and the style of attachment

experienced in adult relationships. Their study supported and expanded the typology developed by Ainsworth and her colleagues.

In the nineties, attachment theory continued to attract more attention and predominance in the understanding of love and romance. In addition to hundreds of research articles, major volumes were written on this subject each year throughout the last decade (Bartholomew and Perlman, 1994; Socha and Stamp,1995; Goldberg, Muir, and Kerr, 1995; Feeney and Noller, 1996; Meins, 1997; Simpson and Rholes, 1998; Cassidy and Shaver, 1999).

The results of much of this research have found that a person's attachment style does not change. However, there has been a lack of utilitarian models of attachment that could be used to assist people in understanding and modifying their experience of intimacy and closeness in relationships. This may be due to the focus on the *style* of attachment and not on the *dynamic components* that comprise the different styles of attachment.

B. Bonding Processes in Adult Attachment

Attachment is the essence of all relationships, and a model that identifies and explains the bonding processes that produce attachment will provide the much needed, overarching structure for organizing and applying the many subjects in relationship research. Feeney and Noller (1996) stated that although they "know of no published empirical work integrating all three components of romantic bonds (attachment, caregiving, and sexuality), such work will undoubtedly be carried out. This integrative approach offers the promise of a comprehensive theory of romantic love." (p. 121). Attachment, then, is best conceptualized as a ***metarelationship*** concept which incorporates all the universal bonding forces that make up human love and closeness.

People marry because they feel an overwhelming *attachment of love*; communication and conflict styles *express and monitor attachment*; intimacy, commitment, sex, trust and reliance are *all components that produce attachment*.

Couples divorce because their experience of *attachment has deteriorated*; other couples reconcile because they *rekindle attachment*.

Therefore, a model of attachment is the best vehicle for presenting mate-selection education. Falling in love is much more than just knowing what to look for in a prospective mate, or developing the right skills for handling a relationship. Love is attachment, and an educational program that omits this intrinsic subject overlooks the core of mate selection in romantic-based cultures.

The need for a unifying, theoretical model of these dynamic components is challenging because of the lack of clarity in even defining the specific *inter-* and *intra-personal* components which comprise attachment. "Love," "trust," "commitment," "affection," "emotion," "dependence," "needs," and "intimacy" are among a few of the

terms which overlap the concept of attachment. And each of these terms are equally difficult to define (Moss & Schwebel, 1993; Fehr, 1987; Stede, Levita, McLand and Kelly, 1982).

It was proposed by Bowlby (1969, 1973, 1980) that sexuality and caregiving are independent behavioral systems. Romantic love, then, encompassed these three crucial components: attachment, caregiving, and sexuality. However, Shaver and Hazan (1988) have argued that previous conceptualizations of romantic love could actually be integrated within the attachment framework.

Carnelley, Pietromonaco, and Jaffe (cited in Feeney and Noller, 1996) and Kunce and Shaver (1994) have also provided support for the link between attachment styles and the caregiving components of romantic love. They found that caregiving was imbedded in the styles of attachment, although it was expressed differently by each.

In addition, evidence of the link between attachment and sexuality has also been forged by Brennan and Shaver (1995). They found that the avoidant style were more accepting of casual, noncommited sex than the other attachment styles. Hazan, Zeifman, and Middleton (1994) conducted a comprehensive study of the overlap between attachment style and sexual behaviors. They concluded there are three distinct sexual styles that correlate with the three attachment styles.

In reviewing the research on connections and closeness in relationships, several constructs repeatedly emerge. Sternberg (1986) developed a triangular model of love that had three components: *intimacy*- feelings of bondedness, closeness, and connectedness; *passion*- the drives and motivations that lead to arousal; and *commitment*- the decision that one loves another and is committed to maintaining that love over time.

David Olson's Personal Assessment of Intimacy in Relationships (P.A.I.R.) found six factors which he identified as types of intimacy: emotional, social, sexual, intellectual, recreational, and conventionality (Schaefer, M.T. & Olson, D.H., 1981). Olson found that individuals desire varying amounts and combinations of the six types of intimacy. These findings are comparable with Kunce and Shaver's (1994) findings that an individual's attachment style is reflected in different preferences on constructs of intimacy and caregiving

Moss and Schwebel (1993) attempted to define intimacy in romantic relationships. They conducted an extensive review of the subject of intimacy in research and literature and found 61 unique definitions. Seven themes were identified in these definitions, and were reduced to five components. These components were: a) Commitment; b) Affective Intimacy; c) Cognitive Intimacy; d) Physical Intimacy; and e) Mutuality.

C. The Description of the Bonding Processes of the R.A.M.

In response to this need of a unifying theory for these components, I have developed a conceptual model of attachment: the ***Relationship Attachment Model*** or the ***R.A.M***. This model portrays the sequential development of the five bonding dynamics that emerge from the numerous studies on intimacy, love, caregiving, sex and attachment. These five dynamics are the ingredients of the glue of attachment. They embody and explain all of the characteristics of the experience of attachment in every relationship in life.

A basic proposition of the R.A.M. is that the five bonding processes are actually expressions of the five commonly accepted categories of a human. It is generally thought that there are five major aspects or *clusters of the self* every human possesses. These clusters of self are groupings of similar *inter*personal and *intra*personal functions in a person. They are 1) your *physical/sensory self*, 2) your *mental self*, 3) your *emotional self*, 4) your *relational self*, and 5) your *sexual self*. Each of these clusters functions interdependently, yet is distinct and separate from the other. They are interdependent because they cannot exist without each other, and the functioning of one affects the outcome of the whole. Yet, they are distinct because every one supplies a unique contribution to the overall human experience. This is particularly true in the formation and maintenance of attachment.

*Each of these five clusters produces a **bonding dynamic** that contributes to the overall experience of attachment*. They are *bonding* because they are forces of energy that create connections between people. They are *dynamic* because they have ranges of intensity that vary according to the experiences within a person and the exchanges between persons.

The five bonding dynamics, like the clusters that produce them, are both independent of and interactive with each other. They can be isolated and examined individually, although one never functions without the involvement of the others. If one is altered, there is an automatic effect on the others and the overall experience of attachment is altered.

The first bonding dynamic, generated from the sensory self, is the ability to ***know*** another and be known by that other. The sense of knowing and being known is frequently at the core of intimacy and is further delineated in information processing theories. Hinde (1978) illustrated this by defining intimacy as "the number of different facets of the personality which are revealed to the partner and to what depth" (p. 378). Research has supported that couples which are better acquainted before marriage have significantly higher rates of marital quality (Birtchnell and Kennard, 1984; Grover, Russell, Schumm and Paff-Bergen, 1985; Kurdek, 1991, 1993). In the case of couples who are less acquainted, Grover, et. al. (1985) has found that they experience greater problems when they face the inevitable difficulties of marriage.

There are three ingredients that contribute to this dynamic. The first is *mutual self-disclosure* (Derlega and Chaikin, 1975). It has been found that disclosing information considered highly intimate can result in physiological changes- increased blood pressure, heart rate and palmar sweating (Ashworth, Furman, Chaikin, and Derlega, 1976). The second ingredient that makes up this dynamic of knowing and being known is sharing *diverse experiences* together. Olson (Schaefer, M.T. & Olson, D.H., 1981) identified examples of this in the recreational intimacy factor in his P.AI.R.S. inventory. In Lauer and Lauer's (1986) study of 351 couples who were married a minimum of 15 years, it was found that friendship was one of the key elements of the enduring marriages. Sporakowski and Axelson (1984) also found enjoyment and fulfillment were present in enduring marriages. The bond of knowing and being known necessitates involvement in enjoyable, fulfilling, mutual friendship-type experiences. The third ingredient in this dynamic is *time*. In Robinson and Blanton's (1993) research on intimacy and enduring relationships they found that time alone was important for positive marital closeness. The accumulation of shared experiences created a deeper feeling of connection and attachment.

The second bonding dynamic, generated from the mental self, is the ability to *trust* another and be trusted by that other. This dynamic corresponds with the concept of internal working models in attachment theory, the development of object representations in object relations theory and cognitive schemas in cognitive theory. These working models are internal, mental representations of another. They are like maps that are used to determine one's expectations, feelings and interpretations of another. Collins and Read (1994) substantiate the complexities of internal representations and their corresponding emotional responses.

Trust, then, is defined as the degree of positive cognitive, affective attributions one holds in their mental representation of another. As a person gets to know another, he/she constructs a mental profile of that person. Initially, stereotypes, associations and ideals are used to "fill in the gaps" of what is assumed to be true about the person. But as time allows for more interactions and experiences, the mental profile is adjusted to reflect the deeper knowledge gained about the other person. Bretherton (1985) explained that inner working models organize previous experiences in a way to enable one to anticipate and manage new situations and relationships. He found, for example, that children with responsive caregivers are more likely to develop trust in their working models of others (see also Collins and Read, 1994).

The three styles of attachment reflect variations of trust in the mental model. A person who has a secure attachment style has a healthy trust capacity. However, someone who has either the avoidant style or the anxious-ambivalent attachment style has a damaged trust capacity in their working models of others. Altering one's attachment style may be influenced by facilitating cognitive shifts through teaching the concepts of these internal mental profiles and how they relate to the development of trust.

The third bonding dynamic, generated from the emotional self, is the ability to *rely* on another and be relied on by that other. This dynamic reflects what Clinebell and

Clinebell (1970) referred to as the most extensive and refined definition of intimacy…"a mutual need satisfaction." This dynamic allows for individual differences in needs. Attachment occurs as the specific needs of the individual are met. The reciprocity of need fulfillment results in a deeper experience of closeness and intimacy than unidirectional need fulfillment as described in detail in social-exchange theory.

Olson's P.A.I.R. inventory captures this construct in many of the factors (social needs, intellectual needs, sexual needs), but most in the conventionality scale (e.g. item 36 asks if all needs are being met by partner).

The fourth bonding dynamic, generated from the relational self, is the ability to *commit* to another and be committed to by that other. It, like the other bonding dynamics, is a natural expression of an innate structure of personality. People form commitments in relationships because of an innate need for a stable, secure sense of belonging to another while feeling that "my partner belongs to me." The concept that persons are in systems which have varying degrees of influence and interaction is at the heart of systems theory.

The concept of commitment is present in almost every study on intimacy, closeness, or love. Numerous studies have been conducted on love, romance, and commitment (Knox & Sporakowski, 1968; Simmons, Von Kolke, & Shimizu, 1986; Simmons, Wehner, & Kay, 1988; Brown, 1993; Stanley & Markman, 1992; Fehr, 1988; Hobart, 1958; Rubin, 1970; Rubin, 1973). These studies have attempted to define this abstract, dynamic process in a relationship. The degree of commitment is measured by the amount of personal investment someone places in another. This investment is often represented by a specific label or definition of the relationship. For instance, an "acquaintance" indicates a low level of investment, whereas a "best friend" suggests higher levels of personal investment. Consistently, research supports the importance of a strong commitment for positive love and romantic feelings and marital satisfaction.

Commitment, like the other relationship dynamics, contributes to the bond of a relationship. Beach and Tesser (1988) found that the more commitment a person feels toward another, the more he/she will focus cognitive and affective attention toward that individual. Tesser and Paulhus (1970) also found that the amount of time someone spends thinking about another he/she had dated was positively related to higher scores on the Rubin Love Scale (1970). In fact, it has been shown that a person thinks and feels more positively toward another once a decision to commit is made (Brehm and Cohen, 1962).

The fifth and final bonding dynamic, generated from the sexual self, is the ability to form *sexual* bonds with another and feel sexually desired by that other. Intimacy is often equated with sexual involvement in the literature- the greater the sexual involvement, the more intimacy. This dynamic involves everything from extended gazing to uninhibited sexual intercourse (Exline, 1972; Rosenfeld, Kartus, and Ray, 1976). It is correlated with the Sexual Intimacy scale in Olson's P.A.I.R. (Schaefer and Olson, 1981).

In the dating relationship the first bonding force, ***Knowledge***, is what you know about the person you are dating. When you spend time talking and doing things together, a deeper understanding of the person develops. This understanding, or knowledge, creates a growing feeling of closeness.

As you gather these pieces of understanding about a person, you arrange them to create a portrait of what you believe this person is like. This portrait is the second bonding force, your internal image of the person (or, your ***Trust Picture***). It is this mental picture which prompts your expectations and feelings of trust. Trust and attachment increases as your trust picture becomes more positive.

Based on your level of trust, you form a dependency upon this person to meet more and more of your needs. This third bonding force, ***Reliance***, is a natural outcome of your trust in the other person. To the extent that the person meets your expectations, you alter your mental picture in positive ways, becoming more confident of *your* reliance and *their* dependability. Your attachment continues to increase with this process.

Your growing trust and reliance produce a deeper definition of your relationship. This fourth bonding force is the degree of commitment which develops as the other three processes occur. This ***Commitment*** produces feelings of security, safety, connection and closeness.

The closeness in the relationship becomes expressed in physical touch. This fifth bonding force, ***Sex***, includes the expression of sexual touch and the experience of a sexual chemistry. The extent of the physical/sexual expressions produces a corresponding attachment and closeness.

D. The Dynamic Quality of the Bonding Processes of the R.A.M.

The interrelationship between these bonding processes can be conceptualized as five, rheostat control-slides, similar to a graphic equalizer on your stereo. Each control-slide functions independent of the other, but they all affect the overall sound. In a similar way, each bonding process can be viewed individually. They have a similar low-to-high range, just like the control slides on the mixing board. You can increase the intensity of any one of them without increasing the others. And every bonding process contributes a unique aspect of the relationship connection. However, it is only by their mix that the complex feeling of attachment in a relationship is produced.
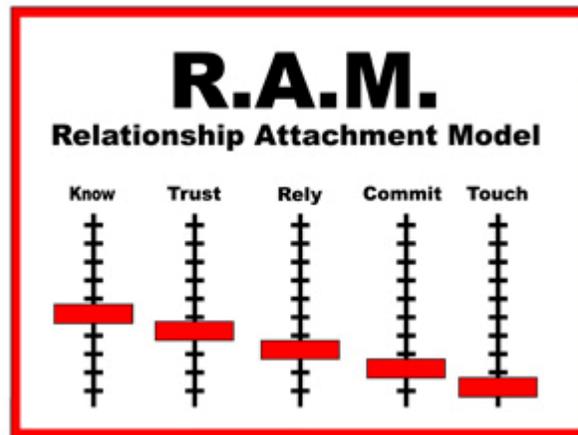
E. The Definitions of Healthy and Unhealthy Attachment from the R.A.M.

The five bonding processes are in a hierarchical order and the combinations of their levels express healthy and unhealthy relationship attachment. In other words, the balance of the levels of the five bonding dynamics portrays the healthiness of the attachment in a relationship. They have an inter-relationship with each other. A feature of these five bonding dynamics is that they are inseparably linked even though they are distinct. This is evidenced by the interaction between them. As one's commitment increases, then the trust and feeling of reliance tends to increase (Beach and Tesser, 1988). As trust increases, then the feeling of reliance on the other also grows.

The level of each bonding process, however, must be kept in balance with the others in order to insure a healthy attachment. This balance is maintained by a simple rule:

THE LEVEL OF ONE BONDING PROCESS SHOULD NEVER EXCEED THE LEVEL OF THE PREVIOUS.

However, when imbalance does occur in a relationship, then the result is increased vulnerabilities, overattachment and minimization of problems. Therefore, the level at which one knows his/her partner establishes the ***maximum*** level of <u>earned</u> trust, which establishes the maximum level of <u>safe</u> reliance, which establishes the maximum

level of <u>healthy</u> commitment, which establishes the maximum level of <u>appropriate</u> sexual involvement. In other words, the degree of sexual involvement should not exceed the degree of commitment, which should not exceed the degree of reliance, which should not exceed the degree of development in your trust picture, which should not exceed the degree of what you accurately know about the partner.

An example of this is the recent research that supports the conclusion that premarital sexual intercourse is related to subsequent marital dissatisfaction and divorce (Kelly and Conley, 1987). The extensive study by Janus and Janus (1993) established that divorced men and women reported more premarital sexual experience than the still-married individuals. One explanation of this is the imbalance between the extent of sexual involvement and the extent of commitment during the premarital relationship. The frequency of sex outside of marriage may have a weakening effect upon a person's commitment level in marriage (Thomson and Collela, 1992; White, 1990). This is consistent with the repeated finding that premarital sex is predictive of extramarital sex, which frequently disrupts marriages and leads to divorce (Newcomb and Bentler, 1981).

Another example of this same imbalance between the extent of sexual involvement and commitment is cohabitation. Even though many would think that cohabitation would serve as a good test of marital compatibility, there is strong evidence that the later marriages of cohabitors are less stable and satisfactory than those who did not cohabitate prior to marriage (Bennett, Blac, and Bloom, 1988; DeMaris and Leslie, 1984; Janus and Janus, 1993; Trussell and Rao, 1989). In fact, it was found that the risk of marital dissolutionment was 50% higher for cohabitors than noncohabitors (Balakrishnan, Rao, Lapierre-Adamcyk, and Krotki, 1987). The notion that this imbalance in the bonding forces led to overlooking potential crucial problems is supported by a study by Booth and Johnson (1988) in which they provide evidence that cohabitors are at risk for marital problems even before they marry.

The old saying, "love is blind", has been supported by the research of Waller (1938). He found that partners tend to idealize each other during courtship. The ***P.I.C.K. a Partner Training Program*** (*Premarital Interpersonal Choices & Knowledge*) suggests that each partner will have better marital selection judgment when the boundaries of the relationship attachment are kept in a proper balance. When this does **not** occur, the premarital closeness will mask salient characteristics of the other person that should be exposed and explored in the premarital process.

III. APPLICATION OF THE RESEARCH TO MATE SELECTION EDUCATION

A. "Less Is More" – Research that Supports Slowing the Pace of Attachments

I believe we need to balance out our emotional romances with more rational assessments. Even though romance has always existed, it was never the cardinal determiner for mate choice. It has only been since the early 1900's that societies began basing marriage on a romantic feeling (De Rougemont, 1949).

We are in this new era of mate selection. From a historical perspective, we are just in the *childhood stage* of romantically based, individually determined, mate choice. And like much in childhood, we have asserted our autonomy and swung with the proverbial pendulum to the extreme opposite of arranged marriages- the use of emotional attachment as the *primary premise* for marital choice. As a result, we have neglected integrating the evaluations of the head with the affections of the heart.

This over-emphasis on the chemistry of a premarital relationship has been made clear by a repeating experience in my clinical work. When I counsel individuals who are dealing with marital problems, they can usually think retrospectively and see clear signs of those problems in their premarital relationship that are now challenging their marriage. I would inquire as to why they pursued the relationship when there were these obvious danger signs. Over and over, I was given the same explanation- "I guess I was too much in love."

Extensive research reveals that the fundamental cause for the *love is blind* phenomena is an **over attachment** in the emotional bond which forms in a premarital relationship.

Attachment is the glue of a relationship. Although it is universal and timeless, it is one of the least understood experiences of humans. Attachment occurs in different strengths and grows or diminishes over time, but no one has explained why or how these changes occur. Attachment compels one person to give his or her life for another, and moves another to forgive the unforgivable.

In the realm of marriage, the persevering forces of attachment are essential to overcoming the challenges and shortcomings partners face. We admire those lasting relationships that emulate the ideal of "together forever." We marvel at how they are able to maintain their love and closeness in the face of potentially crippling obstacles.

However, this indispensable characteristic of attachment in marriage can be the curse of a premarital relationship. We have all known someone who has overlooked and minimized obvious problems and ended up marrying an unhealthy partner because he or she just couldn't seem to let go of his or her intense attachment. Although we do not know how to explain it, we know that this person was *over attached*. ***Over attachment is a significant problem in dating relationships because it disengages the mind and leads to minimizing and denying problem areas in a prospective partner***.

The struggles singles have with *accelerated attachments* have become the nemesis of our present romantic era. This experience of "love at first sight" makes for a great romantic story, but, in reality, is a poor guide for marital choice. However, it is more acceptable today than ever in history to engage in an accelerated attachment. From opening up to hooking up, singles are in a social current of accelerated attachments. As a result, they are much more prone to make poor choices in the mate selection process.

In the Rutgers University's 2000 project, *The State of Our Unions*, it was reported that singles predominately practiced two types of premarital relationships (Whitehead & Popenoe, 2000). The terms "sex" and "relationships" were used to reflect the "two separate spheres of unwed coupling." The first referred to casual sex that required "no commitments beyond the sexual encounter itself," and "no ethical obligation beyond mutual consent" (pp. 10).

The second term, "relationships", referred to the pursuit of a more serious love interest. This usually meant postponing sex until they really **knew** each other. "Being 'in a relationship' also required higher ethical standards than casual sex. Trust, honesty and sexual fidelity are expected" (pp. 11).

The crucial, unasked question imbedded in this outlook is, "How *long* does it take to "really know each other?" Most of the respondents said that sex was only postponed for a couple of weeks of seeing each other. Some said that it was expected by the third date. "If you wait too long," said one, "they think you're not interested" (pp.11). The point is that the current date/mate definition of a *slow pace* in a new relationship is *still* a *fast pace*. The result of this accelerated pace of attachment is the illusion of knowing your partner when you actually only know him or her in superficial ways. The depth of the bond begins to exceed the breadth of thoroughly knowing him or her. It is this accelerated attachment that fuels the phenomena of the over attached *love is blind* syndrome.

A deeper and clearer understanding of the formation of attachment and the ways to pace a relationship is greatly needed by singles and singles-again (the average length of a premarital relationship for those who had been divorced is even less than the never-been-marrieds). Scott Stanley (2001) argued that one of the primary reasons premarital education has value is because it slows couples down and fosters greater deliberation. The lack of time in a premarital relationship has been shown to correlate with higher rates of divorce in the subsequent marriage. Singles need a plan in order to have a conscious, intentional approach to dating and mate selection.

David Olson has established that couples who take his inventory, PREPARE, explore potential problem areas before marriage. Ten to fifteen percent of these couples decide not to marry. This supported the value of premarital education, exploration of crucial issues, and time for deliberation in the prevention of marital problems and divorce. Another study found that couples who dated for more than two years consistently scored higher on marital satisfaction than those who dated less than two years (Grover, et.al. 1985). Once again, educating singles in these areas of premarital education in a framework of pacing the development of attachment hold tremendous promise for the prevention of future marital problems and divorce.

B. Conclusion

This investigation has significant implications in three major arenas. First, this program suggests that individuals need to be educated about specific areas to consider in

the mate selection process in order to minimize risks in the marriage. With a long history of arranged marriages, autonomous choice based on romantic feelings and ideals seems to greatly lack the needed balance between following your heart, and using your head. This program teaches the individual how to maintain boundaries in the growing feelings of closeness, while knowing the specific areas to thoroughly consider in the premarital process. It is further proposed that when singles understand these issues before they enter into a serious relationship, they will be more likely to explore these issues and pace their relationship more slowly. There are two workbooks that accompany this program. A Workbook/Audio Leader's Guide is also available for program facilitators.

Second, potential problems from the lack of relationship skills, previous relationships, and/or family of origin experiences may be explored and properly resolved during the premarital process. This may help to lower the fifty percent divorce rate and add to the growing premarital intervention movement.

Third, there are tremendous social and economic implications to any improvements in the satisfaction and longevity of the marital relationship.

In conclusion, then, the **P.I.C.K. a Partner Training Program** (*Premarital Interpersonal Choices & Knowledge*) provides a *model of the bonding forces* which occur in all romantic relationships. This model is derived from the literature on intimacy, love, close relationships and attachment. In addition, the program explores the *five most important areas to consider* about a prospective partner. These areas provide a picture of what this person will most likely be like as a spouse in marriage.

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