

# **PREPARE/ENRICH Program: Version 2000**

**David H. Olson & Amy K. Olson**

This paper describes a program that enhances one of the most important and challenging tasks of life: staying happily married for a lifetime. The PREPARE/ENRICH Couple Program is a program for premarital and married couples who want to get their marriage off to a good start or enrich their marriage. The couple inventories and program have high levels of reliability, validity and clinical utility. A typology of couples identifies four premarital types (vitalized, harmonious, traditional and conflicted) and a fifth marital type (devitalized). A Couple and Family Map is used to describe the couple relationship and family of origin. Four personality scales (assertiveness, self-confidence, avoidance and partner dominance) are included in Version 2000. This paper describes the couple assessment scales (PREPARE, PREPARE-MC, ENRICH and MATE), materials provided to the couple and to the counselor, six goals of the program and integrated couple exercises.

Published in Berger, R. and Hannah, M. (1999) (Eds.) Handbook of Preventative Approaches in Couple Therapy. Pages 196-216 New York: Brunner/Mazel, Inc.

David H. Olson, Ph.D., is Professor Emeritus of Family Social Science, University of Minnesota, and President of Life Innovations, P.O. Box 190, Minneapolis, MN, 55440.

Amy K. Olson, B.A., is Research Associate, Life Innovations, P.O. Box 190, Minneapolis, MN, 55440

## INTRODUCTION

### *Historical Background*

The choice to marry is one of the most important decisions in life, yet many people do not invest time and energy into preparing for their marital relationship. Couples typically spend more time preparing for their marriage ceremony than building skills to help them have a happy and lasting marriage.

Current statistics verify a divorce rate of over 50 % (Olson & DeFrain, 1997). A significant proportion of married couples experience serious marital conflict early in their relationship, as indicated by the high divorce rate early into marriage. In fact, the average length of marriage is only six years. Clearly, couples are not prepared to deal with the challenges of marriage.

### *Theory and Issues related to Couples*

The initial development of the PREPARE and ENRICH scales was in 1978 and was based on the theoretical ( Duvall, 1971; Rappaport, 1963; Rausch, Goodman & Campbell, 1963 ) as well as empirical ( Fournier, Springer, & Olson, 1979; Kitson & Sussman, 1977 ) indicators of the critical issues and common conflict areas in marriage. A major category and assessment scale was then developed to assess each of these conflict areas for couples. They fall into four general groups: Personality issues, which are individual characteristics; Intrapersonal issues such as personal beliefs and expectations, Interpersonal issues which include communication and relationship issues and External issues which are outside factors that affect the couple relationship. Table 1 describes the common conflict issues and the corresponding PREPARE/ENRICH areas.

### *Factors Influencing Development of PREPARE/ENRICH*

PREPARE was originally developed after learning about the difficulty of working with premarital couples. In the late 1970's, David Olson was approached by three premarital programs in the Twin Cities that were running large lecture programs for groups of 50 couples. An evaluation demonstrated that these programs were generally ineffective and they too often turned couples off to the idea of couple enrichment programs. The question was what could be done to help couples get better prepared for marriage.

**Table 1**

**Common Conflict Issues in Couples and PREPARE/ENRICH Areas:**

<b><u>Common Conflict Issues</u></b>	<b><u>PREPARE/ENRICH Areas</u></b>
<b><i>Personality Issues</i></b>	
Expressing Self	Assertiveness
Self Esteem	Self Confidence
Denial/Avoidance	Avoidance
Control Issues	Partner Dominance
<b><i>Intrapersonal Issues</i></b>	
Idealization/Social Desirability	Idealistic Distortion
Personality/Habits	Personality Issues
Incompatible Values/Beliefs	Spiritual Beliefs
Interests/Activities	Leisure Activities
Expectations	Marriage Expectations
Satisfaction	Marriage Satisfaction
<b><i>Interpersonal Issues</i></b>	
Communication	Communication
Arguments/Anger	Conflict Resolution
Children	Children and Parenting
Commitment	Couple Closeness
Marital roles	Role Relationship
Sex/Affection	Sexual Relationship
<b><i>External Issues</i></b>	
Relatives/Friends	Family and Friends
Money/Work	Financial Management
Family Issues	Family Closeness & Family Flexibility

The initial idea was to create a couple questionnaire which would get the couple talking with each other about their relationship. By including in the questionnaire relevant issues for couples, it was hoped that they would begin discussing and even resolving some of these issues before marriage. After the initial questionnaire was developed, a research project was designed to determine the impact of a premarital inventory and counseling for couples (Olson, Fournier, Druckman and Robinson, 1979). The study included five groups: no premarital preparation, participation in some type of program, PREPARE with no feedback, PREPARE with two hours of feedback, and PREPARE with four two-hour feedback sessions. The study clearly demonstrated that the PREPARE groups made more important changes than the first two groups. Also, the group with PREPARE and four feedback sessions made the most positive change. These findings lead to the further development of the PREPARE Inventory and more clearly defined feedback sessions.

## ***Overview of Version 2000***

PREPARE was developed in 1978 as a result of extensive research and has been revised three times (1982, 1986, 1996). In 1996, major revisions were made in the PREPARE, PREPARE-MC and ENRICH inventories and they were expanded into the PREPARE/ENRICH Program with six couple exercises. The goal of the Program was to build on the strengths of these well-designed Inventories, and add a more comprehensive skill based program for couples.

**Table 2**

### **Improvements in Version 2000 of the PREPARE/ENRICH Inventories**

- Major item revision with 40% new items and 30% revised
- 30 Background Questions with 15 Questions on Abuse
- Four newly created personality scales
- New Typology of Couples with 4 Premarital Types and 5 Marital Types
- Expanded focus on family-of-origin & Couple System using Couple & Family Map (Circumplex Model)
- Six Couple Exercises

The 20 categories in each of the Inventories were expanded and revised so there are now 165 items in each Inventory. About 40% of the items are new, 30% were revised extensively and the remaining 30% had minor revisions. Major revisions were made to the items in order to reduce double negatives, expand the areas covered, and increase the clarity and quality of the items. Unclear and unreliable items were dropped, increasing the reliability of all the scales. The reliability of the scales now averages .80 and the range is from .73 to .90 for all the Inventories.

Thirty background questions are now contained in all the Inventories with 15 items added that focus on various types of abuse. The abuse questions deal with alcohol and drug abuse and other types of abuse including emotional, physical and sexual. The abuse questions include abuse from parents, partner and others.

In order to enhance the understanding of couple dynamics, four Personality scales were added to the Inventories and they focus on: Self Confidence, Partner Dominance, Assertiveness and Avoidance. All the scales are integrated into the feedback process and couples experience exercises in the workbook which are designed to improve their assertiveness skills.

Family-of-Origin (two scales) and Type of Marriage (two scales) was added to all Inventories. Each person describes their relationship on couple closeness and couple flexibility and their family-of-origin regarding family closeness and family flexibility. These descriptions are plotted onto the Couple & Family Map (based on the Circumplex Model of Marital and Family Systems). This provides a more comprehensive picture of the family-of-origin and its relationship to the couple system.

A 25 page Building a Strong Marriage Workbook was expanded from the earlier booklet to include six couple exercises: two communication exercises, conflict resolution skills, linking family-of-origin and couple relationship, a financial management exercise, and a goal setting exercise.

## **THEORETICAL UNDERPINNING**

The theoretical assumption is that the quality of the marital relationship can be predicted from the premarital relationship. Therefore, we can identify the relationship factors that, if improved, will make a difference to the quality of a marriage (Fowers and Olson, 1986). Version 2000 of the PREPARE/ENRICH Program is a comprehensive premarital program which has a theoretical and empirical foundation and clinical relevance to couples.

This program applies four important characteristics of an effective preventative approaches. First, factors which relate to marital success need to be identified. Second, couples need to be assessed on those critical variables. Third, feedback and exercises need to be given to couples, which will help them deal with problem areas. Fourth, couples need skill building exercises focusing on communication and conflict resolution skills.

An instrument and program which attempts to improve a couple's relationship should be able to obtain information on the most critical factors in premarital relationship formation and development that are predictive of later marital satisfaction and stability. In a recent study, Stahmann and Hiebert (1997) attempted to identify factors which relate to marital success. A diverse group of 238 clergy who did premarital counseling were asked to estimate the percentage of and premarital couples experiencing problems or complaints in 29 possible areas. For first marriages, the five problem areas ranked as occurring most frequently were: communication (63%), unrealistic expectations of marriage or spouse (62%), money management/finances (60%), decision making/problem solving (55%), power struggles (51%). For remarriages, the five problem areas ranked as occurring most frequently were: communication (57%), children (57%), problems related to previous marriage (49%), power struggles (48%), and money management and finances (47%).

Larson and Holman (1994) reviewed 50 years of published longitudinal and cross-sectional research on premarital factors that predict future marital quality and stability. Marital stability was defined as the marital status of a marriage (i.e., separated or divorced), and marital quality was defined as a subjective evaluation of a couple's relationship. Based on an ecological or ecosystemic perspective, they concluded that premarital predictors could be organized into three major categories. First, background or contextual factors include family-of-origin effects, sociocultural factors like education and age at marriage, and current contexts like support for the relationship from family and friends. Second, individual traits and characteristics include emotional health, self-esteem and interpersonal skills. Third, couple interaction processes focuses on interpersonal similarity. Based on their research, Larson and Holman concluded that individual traits and behaviors and couple interactional processes are the two most important categories of factors in predicting marital quality and stability.

Larson, Holman, Klein, Busby, Stahmann & Peterson (1995) reviewed five premarital assessment questionnaires (PAQs) available to educators and premarital counselors. The authors evaluated the five PAQ's based on theoretical and psychometric criteria pertaining to their usefulness in educational and counseling settings. Building on Larson and Holman's (1994) previous and extensive review of literature, they evaluated each PAQ for the inclusion of premarital items that were found to predict future marital success. PREPARE assesses most (85%) of the premarital factors defined in their research as good predictors of marital satisfaction and stability. Based on Larson and Holmann's evaluation of premarital assessment questionnaires, they found PREPARE to be "most psychometrically sound" and rated it as, "the best instrument for premarital counseling" (1995, p. 251).

In summary, these reviews clearly demonstrate the importance of having a couple assessment tool and couple program that focuses on at least the following six areas: communication, conflict resolution, family-of-origin, finances, and goals. The PREPARE/ENRICH Program builds on these important areas and provides both a couple assessment and couple exercises on these topics.

## **INTERVENTION MODEL**

### ***Linkage of Intervention Model and Theory***

The theory and research on couples identified the most salient issues to focus on with couples. The PREPARE/ENRICH Program built directly on these findings and includes two steps: (1) couple assessment with relevant Inventory; (2) several feedback sessions using six couples exercises. Each of these steps will be briefly described.

In step one, couples take one of the four couple Inventories: PREPARE, PREPARE-MC, ENRICH or MATE. PREPARE is designed for couples planning to marry who do not have children. PREPARE-MC is designed for couples planning to marry who have children (either together or from previous relationships). ENRICH is designed for married couples seeking enrichment and counseling and couples who have cohabited for two or more years. MATE is designed for older couples (50 or older) planning to marry or facing other life transitions such as retirement or relocation.

All four Inventories contain 165-items designed to identify and measure the couple relationship in 20 areas. There are 12 content areas, 4 personality scales and four scales focusing on the family-of-origin issues. The specific categories are: Idealistic Distortion, Marriage Expectations (PREPARE & PREPARE-MC only) and Marital Satisfaction (ENRICH only), Personality Assessment, Communication, Conflict Resolution, Financial Management, Leisure Activities, Sexual Relationship, Children and Parenting, Family and Friends, Role Relationship and Spiritual Beliefs.

The PREPARE/ENRICH Inventories contain two family-of-origin scales (assessing family cohesion and family flexibility) and two scales assessing the couple system (couple cohesion and couple flexibility). These scales help to show the relationship between the Family-of-Origin and the Couple Relationship since a person's family provides a frame of reference for

evaluating a couple relationship. These four scores (two from each person) are plotted onto the Couple & Family Map (Circumplex Model).

There are also four Personality scales (Assertiveness, Self-Confidence, Avoidance and Partner Dominance) that are assessed in the PREPARE/ENRICH Inventories. Assertiveness is a person's ability to express their feelings to their partner and be able to ask for what they would like. Self-Confidence focuses on how good a person feels about himself/herself and their ability to control things in their life. Avoidance is a person's tendency to minimize issues and reluctance to deal with issues directly. Partner Dominance focuses on how much a person feels their partner tries to control them and dominate their life.

### ***Six Goals and Six Couple Exercises***

There are six goals in the PREPARE/ENRICH Program and there is one couple exercise for each goal. The six goals are: to assist the couple in identifying and building upon their relationship strengths, identifying areas of the relationship that may be problematic or in need of enrichment, and to teach the couple to communicate more effectively about important issues. The PREPARE/ENRICH Couple Program contains six couple exercises to help the couple achieve these goals. The exercises are designed to encourage communication and planning together about how to deal with important topics. For each goal there is a couple feedback exercise relating to that specific goal. The six couple feedback exercises are summarized in Table 3.

**Table 3**

#### **Six Couple Goals and Six Couple Exercises in PREPARE/ENRICH Program**

1. Exploring relationship strength and growth areas
2. Strengthen couple communication skills, including assertiveness and active listening
3. Resolve couple conflict using the Ten Step Procedure
4. Explore family-of-origin issues using Couple and Family Map (Circumplex Model)
5. Develop a workable budget and financial plan
6. Develop personal, couple and family goals

### **STRATEGIES FOR INTERVENTION**

There are six couple exercises and the materials for completing these exercises are included in the 25 page Building A Strong Marriage Workbook that is given to each couple when they come back for the feedback session. The six exercises are now described in more detail in the following section.

#### ***Sharing Strength and Growth Areas: Couple Exercise I***

Couples independently choose from three areas of the 12 PREPARE/ ENRICH scales that they feel are relationship strengths, and three areas they feel are relationship growth areas. Then each partner is encouraged to share what he/she believes the strengths are in their

relationship. One partner proposes a strength area, discusses the strength, and then the other partner indicates one strength they have selected. This process is repeated until all three strength areas have been discussed by both partners. As partners share their perceptions, the counselor interjects the results found in the Inventory regarding the strengths and illustrates them with some specific items.

The same discussion process is used to share and discuss growth areas. After the couple has shared their strength and growth areas, they are encouraged to discuss questions such as, "Did your partner's responses surprise you?" When the partner's perceptions concur with Inventory results, the counselor should interject one or two specific items from the area to generate discussion about how the area under consideration is problematic or beneficial for the couple. If the Inventory results do not concur with the partner's perceptions, the counselor may have the couple discuss the concern more fully with one another.

Sharing strength and growth areas help the couple to understand each other better, by increasing each other's awareness of how they each view the relationship. This exercise also encourages communication, and clearly defines relationship strengths which can be built upon in the future.

### ***Creating a Wish List: Couple Exercise II***

Assertiveness and Active Listening are two specific communication skills emphasized in Couple Communication Exercise II. By teaching assertiveness and active listening skills, it helps increase the positive cycle of increasing assertiveness and self-confidence and reduce the negative cycle of avoidance and partner dominance for both the individuals and the couple (based on four personality scales).

Partners each make a Wish List of three things they would like their partner to do more often and they take turns sharing these wishes. Sharing their wishes with each other encourages each partner to be assertive with each other. As the couple share their wishes with each other, the counselor provides them with feedback related to their assertiveness and active listening skills. The counselor would also give feedback from the four personality scales (Assertiveness, Avoidance, Self-Confidence, and Partner Dominance) and the Communication scale. The counselor would conclude by giving the couple positive feedback about their assertiveness and active listening skills and how to continue to build these skills.

A typical example is Susan and Michael who shared their wishes with each other. Susan asked Michael "Would you tell me more often how you are feeling and what you are thinking." Michael said "I will try, but I will need to be reminded." Michael had a special request for Susan and he said: "I wish you would be willing to come to a baseball game with me." Susan responded: "I will go to a game if you let me know a couple of weeks in advance so I can plan for it." In both of these cases, the partner not only showed they understood the request, but were willing to comply with the request. Agreeing is not a necessary step in active listening since the goal is only to demonstrate that they understand what the other person had requested.

### ***Ten Steps for Resolving Couple Conflict: Couple Exercise III***

For this exercise, the counselor would walk the couple through the Ten Steps exercise during a feedback session using an issue from one of their Growth Areas to introduce the process. Then the couple would select an issue to work on as a homework assignment to be reviewed at the next session. Table 4 identifies the Ten Steps for Resolving Couple Conflict which was developed based on current research and theory regarding relevant steps that have been used in a variety of conflict resolution models.

**Table 4**

**Ten Steps for Resolving Couple Conflict**

1. Set a time and place for discussion.
2. Define the problem or issue of disagreement.
3. How do each of you contribute to the problem?
4. List past attempts to resolve the issue that were not successful.
5. Brainstorm- List all possible solutions.
6. Discuss and evaluate these possible solutions.
7. Agree on one solution to try.
8. Agree on how each individual will work toward this solution.
9. Setup another meeting.
10. Reward each other as you each contribute toward the situation

***Feedback Using the Couple and Family Map: Couple Exercise IV***

In a marriage, a person not only marries another person but also that person's family. Because of the importance of family-of-origin in shaping a person's view of the world and expectations for a relationship, we focus on family-of-origin in each Inventory. Each person describes their Couple Relationship and their Family-of-Origin in terms of closeness and flexibility on the Inventory. These four descriptions are plotted on the Couple and Family Map, which is based on the Circumplex Model of Marital and Family Systems developed by Olson and colleagues (Olson & DeFrain, 1997). The goal is to help the couple see the importance of their family relationship in their couple system. Also, it helps the couple be more proactive in thinking about what they want and do not want to bring from their family into their couple relationship.

During the feedback process, the counselor would define couple and family closeness and couple and family flexibility for the couple, and give a general overview of the Couple and Family Map. They would then show each person how their Family-of-Origin and Couple Relationship was plotted on the Map, and allow them to react to their perception. Discussions of similarities or differences are explored, as the couple explores questions such as, "How similar are the couples descriptions of their Families-of-Origin?", and "What would the couple like to change about their Couple Relationship?" This information is summarized with the couple and they are asked to share what they learned.

A sample of the Couple & Family Map is presented in Figure I which illustrates how the couple (male and female) describes their couple relationship and how they each described their family-of-origin. Carla and Justin not only see their couple relationship differently in closeness and flexibility, but they also come from very different families. Carla describes the couple relationship as “somewhat flexible” and “very connected” whereas Justin describes it as “flexible” and “connected”. Their description of the couple relationship is in part influenced by the different families where they grew up. Carla had a “very connected and “somewhat flexible” family, while Justin had a “disconnected” and “very flexible” family. Justin said: “I was surprised to see how different my family is from Carla’s family” and Carla responded that: “Justin’s family is not very close and not much fun to be with.” This couple is starting the process of exploring their family-of-origin with each other and this exercise is designed to facilitate this discussion.

### ***Financial Plans and Budget: Couple Exercise V***

Financial management is a problematic issue in most premarital and married couples. In fact, 37 percent of all married couples indicate that the number one problem in their marriage is money (Olson and DeFrain, 1997). Couples are asked to complete the Budget Worksheet and they each make a list of their short and long term financial goals. This material are in the Building a Strong Marriage Workbook and is often assigned as a homework assignment. The counselor may help facilitate a realistic and workable budget and help the couple set both short-term and long-term financial goals. The counselor also reviews the Financial Management area from the Computer Report with the couple, focusing on Strength and Growth Areas.

### ***Personal, Couple and Family Goals: Couple Exercise VI***

Developing and sharing goals as a couple promotes closeness and bonding, as well as communication. Couples who are aware of what each person wants often pull together to help each other achieve goals. Couples are given the individual homework assignment of describing two or three Personal, Couple and Family Goals. They develop an Action Plan for one or more areas of life using the CHANGE Model and the goals should be attainable within one to five years (see Table 5). During a feedback session, the counselor or clergy will have each partner take turns sharing goals, while they focus on the similarities and differences between them. Throughout the sharing process, the counselor also gives feedback on the Assertiveness and Active Listening skills of each person.

**Table 5**

#### **CHANGE Model**

<b>C</b>	Commit yourself to a specific goal
<b>H</b>	Habits...break old and start new ones
<b>A</b>	Action...take one step at a time
<b>N</b>	Never give up...lapses might occur
<b>G</b>	Goal-oriented...focus on the positive
<b>E</b>	Evaluate and reward yourself

## **FORMAT AND PROCESS OF USING PROGRAM**

### ***Recruitment of Couples***

Premarital couples most often hear about the PREPARE Program from a clergy member when they are interested in getting married. Married couples typically hear about the ENRICH Program when they are seeking marriage counseling or when they are attending a marriage enrichment program. Because of the increasing interest and awareness of the PREPARE/ENRICH Program stimulated by the media, couples often contact the office directly to locate a counselor or clergy where they can take the program.

### ***Couple Assessment***

Once a couple is connected with a counselor, the counselor describes the complete program which includes taking the relevant Inventory and completing the six couple exercises. The counselor introduces the inventory to the couple and reminds them that it is not a test, but a tool to evaluate their relationship in terms of their strength and potential areas of growth. A couple number is assigned to protect the couple's identity when the Inventory is scored. Only the counselor can match the identity of a couple with their Computer Report. The counselor would then set a date to administer the Inventory, and a date for the initial feedback session.

When the couple is taking the inventory, it is important that they are in separate rooms so they do not discuss the items with each other. Separating them facilitates more privacy and honesty in answering the questionnaire. After the Inventories are completed, the counselor collects the Question Booklets and Answer Sheets and sends the Answer Sheets to the Life Innovations office for scoring. Couples are encouraged to discuss the Inventory before returning for the future feedback sessions.

### ***Materials Provided Counselor***

The counselor receives a fifteen page Computer Report assessing the couple's strength and growth areas from 12 different categories. This computerized summary provides a comprehensive profile description of the relationship along the various dimensions of the couple relationship. The counselor also receives a 25 page Building a Strong Marriage Workbook, which is given to the couple during the initial feedback session. The counselor will meet with the couple for several (3-6) sessions to encourage them to complete the six couple exercises.

### ***Qualities and Role of the Counselor***

The Program is used by professional counselors, clergy of all denominations and lay couples. Professional counselors can choose the option of purchasing a Self-Training Counselor Manual and videotape by completing an Application Form. Persons not trained as professional counselors, such as clergy and lay couples, are required to attend a day workshop in order to be trained on how to administer and use the PREPARE/ENRICH Program.

The counselor is trained to facilitate the couple discussing the relevant issues with each other in a direct and open manner. The counselor is also encouraged to teach and reinforce the communication and conflict resolution skills. This is a semi-structured program that gives the basic materials and design and permits the counselor some flexibility in how it is delivered based on their counseling skills and amount of time they can work with the couple.

### **APPLICATION OF PROGRAM WITH A Ben & Alyssa:**

While all couples going through the Program would participate in all the six couple exercises, we have chosen three of the exercises to illustrate how this program could be helpful to Ben & Alyssa. We will describe Exercise II on Communication; Exercise IV on family-of-origin and Exercise VI on Personal, Couple and Family Goals.

In Exercise II, the couple creates a Wish List which is designed to teach them how to be more assertive with each other and be able to use active listening. Ben's read from his wish list and said: "I would like to have more attention and love from you rather than what was left over after caring for Benny." Rather than using active listening, she reacted by saying: "I wish I wasn't so exhausted so I could have more energy to give attention to you." The counselor then encouraged her to first use active listening to show she understand before she agrees or disagrees with him. They both need to improve their assertiveness and active listening skills and find quality time to talk with each other like they did in the past.

Exercise IV focuses on family-of-origin issues which are becoming more prominent as they have children. After the counselor gave a brief overview of the Couple and Family Map and she showed Ben and Alyssa how they perceived their relationship and their family-of-origin. Alyssa's family was "rigid" and "very connected" while Ben's family was "flexible" and "connected." Alyssa is behaving more like her parents than when they were first dating. She now became more religious, less interested in her career and more like her mother. Ben is becoming more frustrated because he would like their family to be more flexible and he is feeling less connected to Alyssa. The counselor will try to help the couple explore how they see their couple relationship how and how they would like their relationship to be in terms of flexibility and closeness in the future.

Exercise VI focuses on each person identifying their Personal, Couple and Family Goals with each other. One of Ben's personal goals is to start his own business, a couple goal is to get more connected with Alyssa, and a family goal is spend more time with her and their son Benny. Alyssa's personal goal is to become more active in church groups, a couple goal is him to be more understanding of her and her concerns, and a family goal is to be a good mother and wife. The counselor then encourages them to develop an action plan using the CHANGE Model and they chose to work on their couple relationship. They developed a plan where they would get a sitter and spend one evening each week with each other outside the home. The overall goal was to help them improve their couple relationship so that they could be better for each other and for their children.

## EMPIRICAL RESEARCH WITH INVENTORIES

### *Reliability & Validity of Inventories*

An important strength of the PREPARE/ENRICH Inventories is their strong, psychometric properties. High levels of reliability and validity have been found for each instrument, making them valuable tools for research as well as clinical use. Each of the 20 scales in PREPARE, PREPARE-MC and ENRICH have been assessed for alpha reliability and test-retest reliability. High reliability coefficients were found for both internal consistency and test-retest on all instruments. The internal consistency ranged from .74 to .89 for PREPARE (n = 7,846; average = .79), .73 to .84 for PREPARE-MC (n = 2,530; average = .78) and from .74 to .89 for ENRICH (n = 1,962; average = .85).

Four separate studies have tested the predictive validity of PREPARE and ENRICH. PREPARE has been able to predict with about 80-85 percent accuracy which couples will be satisfied with their marriages and which couples are likely to experience difficulties. These findings are based on two 3 year longitudinal studies of premarital couples who had taken PREPARE three months prior to marriage (Fowers & Olson, 1986; Larsen & Olson, 1989). ENRICH is able to discriminate between happily married and unhappily married couples with about 90 percent accuracy (Fowers & Olson, 1989). This is based on a major study of 5,039 couples who took ENRICH as part of either marital therapy or marital enrichment programs.

The potential of the PREPARE Program for preventative work was demonstrated in a follow-up study by Fowers and Olson (1986). Based on a couple's marital status 2-3 years after the wedding, and their current responses to a marital satisfaction questionnaire, four groups were defined: (1) married satisfied, (2) married dissatisfied, (3) divorced or separated, and (4) canceled. An analysis of variance indicated significant differences between the four groups in 8 of 11 subscales. As hypothesized, it was found that couples with higher marital satisfaction scores had scored significantly higher on the PREPARE Inventory prior to marriage, than dissatisfied couples, divorced couples, and couples who canceled their marriage. Couples who canceled their wedding plans had scores that were very similar to those couples who were divorced or separated and significantly different from happily married couples.

### *Typology of Couples based on PREPARE/ENRICH Inventories:*

Four types of premarital couples and five types of married couples were derived by using the positive couple agreement scores (PCA) from the PREPARE and ENRICH Inventories using cluster analysis. Using data from 5,030 premarital couples who took PREPARE, Fowers & Olson (1993) identified the four types of premarital couples: vitalized, harmonious, traditional and conflicted.

Five types of married couples were created using a sample of 6,267 married couples (Olson & Fowers, 1993) who took ENRICH. It was validating to find the same four premarital types in married couples as PREPARE, with one additional type, the devitalized type. Four of the five marital types are similar to the four premarital types: vitalized, harmonious, traditional and conflicted. The one additional marital type is called devitalized (see Figure 2).

An important replication study of the types from ENRICH was done with a sample of 450 African-American married couples was completed by William Allen (1997). Cluster analysis replicated the same five types of couples from the Caucasian couples. This replication not only supported the five couple types, but the percentage of African American couples in the various types was very similar to the Caucasian couples.

**Vitalized couples:** The Vitalized couples were the happiest couple type because they had the highest positive couple agreement (PCA) scores on many of the areas. They had many strengths (high PCA scores) and few growth areas (low PCA scores).

**Harmonious Couples:** The Harmonious couples had many strengths, but not as many as the Vitalized couples. They like many areas of their relationship, but often have low scores in the Children & Parenting area.

**Traditional Couples:** These couples are called traditional because they had more strengths in traditional areas including Children & Parenting, Family & Friends, Traditional Roles and Spiritual Beliefs. However, they had lower scores on more internal dynamics where they indicated problems with Personality Issues, Communication, and Conflict Resolution.

**Conflicted Couples:** These couples had numerous growth areas and few relationship strengths. They were called conflicted since they seemed to disagree about many areas and they had low scores on communication, conflict resolution and many of the other areas. As premarital couples, they are high risk for divorce and for married couples; they are a common type that seeks marital therapy (Fowers, Montel, & Olson, 1996).

**Devitalized Couples (only from ENRICH):** These couples had growth areas in almost all aspects of their relationship. They are typically very unhappy and have few strengths as a couple, although they might have had strengths earlier in their relationship. These couples are also a common type that seeks marital therapy.

#### ***Validation of Four Premarital Types from PREPARE:***

In order to validate the four premarital types, 328 premarital couples were followed for three years after marriage to assess their marital success (Fowers, Montel & Olson, 1996). These 328 couples were classified into the four premarital types and outcome measures focused on whether they were happily married, separated/divorced and a group that canceled their wedding plans.

The most significant validation of the value of the typology was the finding related to the marital outcomes of the premarital couples (see Table 6). As hypothesized, the Vitalized types of couples had the highest percentage of happily married couples (60%) and the lowest percentage of separated and divorced couples (17%). Conversely, the Conflicted types of couples had the most separated/divorced couples (49%) and least number of happily married couples (17%). The Traditional types had the lowest percentage of separated/divorced couples (6%), but the highest percentage of unhappily married couples (50%). The high percentage of

unhappy couples is expected because their traditional orientation would encourage them to stay together even if the marriage was problematic.

There were 89 couples who canceled their wedding plans as a result of taking PREPARE and receiving feedback. As predicted, the highest percentage of those who canceled their wedding were from Conflicted types (35 couples; 40%) followed by Traditional types (23 couples; 26 %), then Harmonious types (20 couples; 22%) and least often were Vitalized types (11 couples; 12%).

**Table 6**

**Premarital Types based on PREPARE and Marital Outcomes**

Premarital Type	Happily Married		Unhappily Married		Separated Divorced		Total Percent
	N	%	N	%	N	%	
Vitalized	38	60%	15	23%	11	17%	100%
Harmonious	30	46%	19	29%	16	24%	100%
Traditional	17	34%	25	50%	8	16%	100%
Conflicted	10	17%	18	30%	32	49%	100%
<b>Totals</b>	<b>95</b>		<b>77</b>		<b>67</b>		<b>239</b>

***Interconnection of Four Personality Scales***

There is a positive cycle linking assertiveness and self confidence and a negative cycle linking avoidance and partner dominance (See Figure 3). In the positive cycle, as a person uses more assertiveness, their level of self confidence tends to increase. As a person's self confidence increases, their willingness and ability to be more assertive increases. In the negative cycle, when one person perceives their partner as dominating, a common reaction is for that person to avoid dealing with issues. As one person uses more avoidance, the other person will tend to become more dominant.

An empirical analysis of these personality scales demonstrates how they are interconnected with each other and with some of the other scales content scales like communication and conflict resolution (See Table 7). People who have high scores on assertiveness tend to be low in avoidance, low in partner dominance, like the personality of their partner (Personality Issues scale), feel good about their communication (Communication scale), and like how they resolve couple conflict (Conflict Resolution scale). Clinically, it would be

common for people that have high scores on the negative cycle to have a greater tendency to be abusive (background questions) and be controlling of their partner (partner dominance).

**Table 7**

**Assertiveness and Personality Assessment**

People high in assertiveness tend to be:

Low in Avoidance ( $r = -.72$ )

Low in Partner Dominance ( $r = -.50$ )

Like the Personality of their partner ( $r = -.49$ )

Feel good about Communication with their partner ( $r = .49$ )

Feel good about Conflict Resolution with partner ( $r = .68$ )

The personality assessment is designed to increase the counselor's understanding of each partner and how these personality characteristics are related to the underlying couple dynamics. These four areas are interrelated with each other and together provide a rather comprehensive picture of each person. Research on couples has found that successful couples tend to be those in which both people are high in self-confidence, low in partner dominance, high in assertiveness and low in avoidance (Olson, 1997).

**SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION**

The PREPARE/ENRICH Program is designed to facilitate the communication in each couple about meaningful issues in their relationship. The Program has six goals and one couple exercise for each goal. The Program is designed to increase their awareness of their relationship strengths and growth areas and provide them with relationship skills so that they can improve their relationship. The Program includes first taking a relevant couple Inventory (PREPARE, PREPARE-MC, ENRICH or MATE) and then getting feedback about their results from a trained counselor.

There are a variety of strengths in the PREPARE/ENRICH Program and one is that it begins with a comprehensive couple Inventory. The couple takes one of the four Inventories (PREPARE, PREPARE-MC, ENRICH, and MATE) which have been designed to maximize their relevance to couples in different stages in their relationship. The Inventories have been scientifically developed and have high reliability, high validity and large national norms ( $n = 250,000$  couples) with couples from various ethnic groups. The Inventories are based on systems theory and the Circumplex Model of Couple and Family Systems (Olson & De Frain, 1997) is used in the assessment and program. Numerous studies have been published that demonstrate the rigor of the Inventories and their relevance to couples from a variety of ethnic groups. The Program has been adopted by professional counselors and clergy from many diverse religious groups.

The Program does, however, also have some limitations. The Inventories are lengthy with 165 items and 30 background questions. The reading level is about sixth grade level so that

persons with lower reading levels would have some difficulty. It is a requirement that both people in a couple relationship take the questionnaire and, therefore, it is not designed for one person. The program is also not designed for individuals with very severe emotional problems and with couples having intense marital conflict.

Future directions include continued research on the effectiveness of the Program and the value of various aspects of the program. A new feature is a group version of the Program called **GROWING TOGETHER**. In this group program for couples, the couple receives a Couple Report, a Building a Strong Marriage Workbook and view the PREPARE/ENRICH Video that illustrates the six couple exercises. The couple completes the exercises with their partner and then they share their experiences with the other couples in the group.

## REFERENCES

- Allen, W. (1997). Replication of five types of married couples based on ENRICH. Unpublished dissertation. University of Minnesota. St. Paul, Minnesota.
- Duvall, E.M. (1971). Family development, 4th ed. Philadelphia: Lippincott Co.
- Fournier, D.G., & Olson, D.H. (1986). Programs for premarital and newlywed couples. In R.F. Levant (Ed.), Psychoeducational approaches to family therapy and counseling (pp. 194-231). New York: Springer.
- Fournier, D.G., Springer, J. & Olson, D.H. (1979). Conflict and commitment in seven stages of premarital and marital relations. Unpublished manuscript, Dept. of Family Social Science, University of Minnesota, St. Paul.
- Fowers, B.J., Montel, K.H., & Olson, D.H. (1996). Predictive validity of types of premarital couples based on PREPARE. *Journal of Marriage and Family Therapy*, 22, 1, 103-119.
- Fowers, B.J. & Olson, D.H. (1992). Four types of premarital couples: An empirical typology based on PREPARE. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 6, 1, 10-21.
- Fowers, B.J., & Olson, D.H. (1989). ENRICH marital inventory: A discriminant validity and cross-validation assessment. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, 15, 65-79.
- Fowers, B.J., & Olson, D.H. (1986). Predicting marital success with PREPARE: A predictive validity study. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, 12, 403-413.
- Kitson, G.C. & Sussman, M.B. (1997, April). Marital complaints, demographic characteristics, and symptoms of mental distress among the divorcing. Paper presented at the meeting of the Midwest Sociological Society, Chicago.
- Larson, J.H., & Holman, T.B. (1994). Premarital predictors of marital quality and stability. *Family Relations*, 43, 228-237.
- Larson, J., Holman, T., Klein, D., Busby, D., Stahmann, R., & Peterson, D. (1995). A review of comprehensive questionnaires used in premarital education and counseling. *Family Relations*, 44, 245-252.
- Larson, A.S., & Olson, D.H. (1989). Predicting marital satisfaction using PREPARE: A replication study. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, 15, 311-322.
- Olson, D.H. & DeFrain, J. (1997) *Marriage and the Family: Diversity and Strengths*. (2nd Ed.) Mountain View, CA: Mayfield Publishing.

Olson, D.H. (1996). PREPARE/ENRICH Counselors Manual: Version 2000. Minneapolis, MN: Life Innovations, Inc.

Olson, D.H. & Fowers, B.J. (1993). Five types of marriage: An empirical typology based on ENRICH. *The Family Journal: Counseling and Therapy for Couples and Families*, 1, 3, 196-207.

Olson, D.H., Fournier, D., Druckman, J. & Robinson, J. (1979) Effectiveness of premarital counseling with PREPARE. Unpublished manuscript. University of Minnesota, St. Paul, Minnesota.

Rappaport, R. (1963). Normal crises, family structure and mental health. *Family Process*, 2, 68-80.

Stahmann, R.F. and Hiebert, W. J. (1997) *Premarital counseling: Professionals handbook* (2nd Ed.) Lexington, MA: Lexington Books.