One Happy Island: Assessing Preferences and Needs for Marriage and Relationship Education in Aruba

by

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Abstract

Research has generally supported the viability of Marriage and Relationship Education (MRE) for strengthening marriages. However, the research has generally been limited to the middle-class, European population in the United States, with a more recent acknowledgement of the need for culturally relevant adaptations which would increase the appeal and the efficacy of education programs for minority audiences. Using inductive qualitative, focus group methodology, 59 Arubans were interviewed with regards to their concerns about marriage, their ideas for strengthening marriages, and their preferences and needs for MRE. The participants presented various concerns, which included lacking communication skills, infidelity, and economic strains. They also mentioned various preferences, such as having an instructor with credible life experience, using spirituality as a resource, and interacting via role plays or skits. Recommendations regarding the application of these preferences and other observations are given in the discussion section, as well as limitations and possible directions for further study.

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CHAPTER 1—Introduction

Aruba has consistently been listed among the top ten highest-divorcing countries in the past decade. While divorce in the U.S. significantly declined between 1985 and 2006, divorce in Aruba dramatically increased during the same period (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2006). Since this time, the divorce rate has dropped slightly in Aruba, while still remaining an area of concern for Aruban government, social workers, and other interested individuals.

It would seem Aruba could benefit from some form of intervention. Marriage and Relationship Education (MRE) has been recognized as a viable form of intervention for married and premarital couples in the United States. Unfortunately, while MRE is gaining credibility through program evaluation studies, the scope of these studies has generally been limited to a middle-class, well-educated European American population (Carroll & Doherty, 2003).

Several minority ethnic groups have little access to MRE (McGroder & Cenizal, 2009). Many programs have been translated into other languages and some have been designed with specific minority groups in mind, in an effort to broaden the reach of MRE to diverse populations. However, before curriculum can effectively meet population needs, developers need to see the interaction between culture and curriculum. Simply translating a curriculum into a foreign language can be done with relatively little understanding of the underlying culture, overlooking nuances that might significantly impact a group's ability to understand, internalize, and practice new material. In addition, cultural differences might dictate the alteration of material in terms of content, format, or other areas. Program developers and interventionists

should have a working knowledge of the implications of culture for the application of MRE in any given group they are seeking to help.

Education programs should not be treated as one-size-fits-all interventions. What is an effective intervention in one population might be rendered less effective due to cultural differences in another group (Castro, 2004). These differences go deeper than a language barrier, and program modifications need to go beyond basic translation (Reniscow, Baranowski, Ahluwalia, & Braithwaite, 1999). Examining needs is the first step towards being able to make these modifications (Bernal, 2010).

Program developers need research that will direct their efforts in either creating culturally appropriate interventions or molding existing interventions to meet the needs of distinct cultural groups. Interventions should be grounded in exploratory research, which will guide the decisions that are key in effectively adapting educational material to a particular group. For example, findings from research might indicate to a program developer the need for adaptations to an already-existing program. These suggestions would be based on considerations like cultural variations with regards to culture, marriage and family life, age, immigration status, language, education level, and socio-economic status within a target group. These models of program adaptation would be used to adapt evidence-based interventions to meet the needs of various cultural groups.

The present study will begin to build a body of literature by assessing a minority group that has never before received the benefit of marriage education programs specifically targeted to meet its needs. It is presumed that the Aruban people have ideas and preferences with many implications for program development and implementation; however, these ideas have not previously been formally surveyed or considered in the implementation of programs in Aruba. It

seems likely that Arubans, due to the current level of marital distress and the island's strong emphasis on education, will be open to the idea of accessing additional or improved educational resources to strengthen their marriages.

Three sensitizing questions will guide the information sought from the study sample. 1) What are common concerns about marriage in Aruba? 2) What ideas do Arubans have about how to strengthen marriage? 3) What preferences do Arubans have regarding marriage education, including aspects such as price, location, promotion, and format?

CHAPTER 2—Literature Review

The elevated divorce rate in Aruba signals a possible need for intervention; however, it does not offer any detail of what couples in Aruba are actually experiencing, why the divorce rate has risen, or whether there is a need or hope for change. This literature review will show the literature regarding Aruba's cultural identity, in order to provide a basic understanding of some of the history and culture believed to influence family life on the island. Then, a short review of current efforts to strengthen marriages in Aruba will be given; because there is limited empirical or published data on these efforts, the information herein largely represents informal observation and survey. Following the discussion of already-existing interventions in Aruba, a more thorough review of Marriage and Relationship Education (MRE) will be given, in order to give a broader vision of the possible scope of such interventions. Lastly, the importance of cultural sensitivity will be addressed via the literature on the intentional adaptation of MRE to meet the needs of a distinct cultural group, such as on the island of Aruba.

Cultural Identity

Studies of families in the Caribbean have been qualitative and are largely inclusive of the entire region (see Olwig, 2007; Barrow, 1999; Roopnarine & Brown, 1997). While providing a broad context in which to understand family life in the Caribbean, these studies are limited in their relevance to any particular island, because of significant variation—cultural, structural, and historical--between the different islands.

Aymer (1997) noted the impact of slavery on the Afro-Caribbean woman's tendency for independence in rearing and providing for the children. These women have a heritage of slavery—being moved around with or without a husband, and assuming responsibility for both child-rearing and hard, manual labor to support their family. As evidence of this heritage, Aymer (1997) references the fact that women from the eastern Caribbean have often traveled alone to the southern Caribbean island of Aruba to find work. Many of them leave children behind in their home countries to be cared for by relatives, and often work for years, sometimes settling indefinitely on Aruba. With the construction of Lago Refinery in the 1930s, Aruba emerged as a major hub for the oil industry. This singular event in Aruban history brought workers from all over the Caribbean. Aruba became a legend, attracting many women and men who hardly knew what to expect, other than wages that could be sent home to fund the rearing of their children abroad.

Aymer (1997) highlighted several patterns evident in the formation of families in the entire Caribbean region, but made specific mention of Aruba as a prime example of a phenomenon where women are heads of household in a majority of cases. This is attributed to a) a struggling economy in which many men became unemployed and thus were forced to relocate to other countries to find work, b) a resulting change in economic climate accompanied by the closing, relocating, or suffering of local businesses, and c) the offering of what are generally considered to be "male jobs" to females, at lower wages. This progression, according to Aymer (1997), impacted the Aruban family greatly, normalizing and propagating single motherhood on the island. Women, who were generally unable to predict financial help from their partners, were compelled to work to support their families. Gradually, these women become the sole

providers *and* primary caregivers for their families, enabling men to take a more transient role, with limited participation in the family (Aymer, 1997, p. 100).

In describing the culture of family and child rearing in Aruba in the twentieth century, it is important to note the prevalence of women immigrants to Aruba who left children--and possibly partners--behind in their home countries. These women, although separated from partner and/or children, certainly influenced social norms and ideas with regards to women and motherhood. This influence took shape in the form of early and premarital mating, single parenthood, and women as heads of household. These societal norms were influenced over time by the island's history of a transient feel due to constantly high immigration rates.

Vera Green (1974) also noted Aruba's marked trend toward single motherhood. The socially accepted mating pattern in Aruba hasn't historically held marriage as a prerequisite for having children. Also, unlike some other communities' standards, having children prior to marriage hasn't seemed to increase Arubans' obligation to get married. On the contrary, the unwed mother's chances for marriage tend to decrease upon having children (Green, 1974, p. 47).

There is an interesting dissonance between the single-mother, non-traditional trend in family life and the prevailing Catholicism on the island. Aruba, originally inhabited by Arawak aborigines who came from Venezuela as early as 1000 A.D., became inhabited by the Spanish government in the sixteenth century, bringing Catholicism to the island. In 1636, the Dutch government gained possession of the island. Catholicism is the predominant tradition on the island, and forms many of the ideals for family life, even if these ideals are uncommon, particularly for immigrants and/or lower-income individuals.

Intercultural marriages are highly prevalent in Aruba, and have become more so as immigration has increased. There has historically been a certain pride associated with Aruban

heritage versus immigrant status, and this translates to a strong preference among most Arubans to marry other Arubans; particularly, there is a preference among lighter-skinned Arubans to marry others of a similar skin color (Green, 1974). In addition, Green states, “Antillean-Dutch marriages usually do well if they remain in Holland, but not if they return to the island.” An Aruban therapist observed the same pattern, speculating that Arubans are much more adaptable to other cultures, but outsiders may have a harder time adapting to Aruba (Buckley, 2009).

Alternatives to marriage are prevalent. For example, there is an increasing occurrence of something colloquially termed “LAT Relationships.” LAT stands for “Living Apart Together.” In these relationships, men and women retain their separate houses, while visiting each other for days or more at a time, but retreating again to their respective homes every so often (B. Buckley, personal communication, July 2009). The 2000 Census gives insight into some of the other alternatives to traditional marriage. For example, in 2000, over half of Aruba’s adolescents between 15 and 19 years of age were living with a partner in a consensual union (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2005). Thus we see a relatively young age at which youth are mating.

Interestingly, of those who are married, many do not live with their spouses. The Central Bureau of Statistics reported that well under half of married men and women actually lived with their spouses in 2000 (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2005). This could again point to the island's transient feel, with one spouse or the other working abroad. It could also point back to the historical context, in which the women have become accustomed to single parenting; perhaps this sense of independence has become an ingrained feeling that persists today, even when the opportunity is available for spouses to live together.

Alternatively, and this argument seems to match the sentiment of many Arubans, perhaps foreigners are marrying Arubans in order to gain citizenship, but without any intention of

actually being “married.” There is almost a feeling of paranoia among Arubans—the feeling that non-Arubans are illegally immigrating and taking over jobs on the island. Some Arubans estimate that approximately 15,000 illegal immigrants reside on the island, making up a significant portion of the population—legal citizens number around 100,000. It seems to be very difficult to immigrate, and the easiest way to do so seems to be by marrying. Many Arubans report that outsiders will pay Arubans to marry them, and in turn they can work, obtain a Dutch passport, and send their children to high-quality Dutch schools on the island.

This paranoia is certainly perceived by outsiders, regardless of whether they have gained citizenship or not. One female, who had emigrated with her family from Haiti as a teenager, was a legal citizen of Aruba. At the age of 23, she fell in love with a Jamaican man who was 36 years old. He was living as a legal resident on the island and working as a construction worker, and had been for several years, but was not eligible for citizenship. When they became engaged, they planned to marry on the island, which was only natural given they had both lived there for several years. They were required to undergo rigorous questioning by government officials, who seemed dubious about the couple’s intentions, citing the age disparity between the couple. This woman reported that it was “humiliating” to be questioned in this way, and felt it was unethical for officials to have any say in whether the couple could marry on the island (O. Refuse, personal communication, July 2009).

Because data specific to Aruba is limited, it can be helpful to draw on region-wide data. In particular, several islands are close in proximity and share much of Aruba’s cultural heritage. Aruba belongs to a set of islands known as the Netherlands Antilles, which is divided into two groups. The first group includes the “SSS Islands” (St. Maarten, Saba, and St. Eustasias) which are located southeast of the Virgin Islands. The second group includes the “ABC Islands”

(Aruba, Bonaire, and Curacao), which are located just north of Venezuela. The ABC Islands represent the only region in the world in which Papiamento, one of Aruba's official languages, is spoken. The three islands share a unique Dutch heritage.

The evolution of marriage in Curacao is particularly illuminating in attempting to understand the cultural framework pertaining to families in the Netherlands Antilles. In particular, strong economic and social forces have greatly influenced the state of the institution of marriage. The Catholic Church reportedly marginalized single-parent families by insisting that their infants be baptized in the dark (before sunrise or after sunset) and omitting church bells from the service, in order to discourage non-marriage and babies born out of wedlock. At the same time, Shell Gasoline Company created monetary incentives for married employees. Due to these social and economic pressures, the marriage rate increased and the rate of babies born out of wedlock decreased dramatically in the 1960s. However, when these pressures were removed, the rates returned to previous historic levels, indicating a lack of any internalized change (Abraham-Van der Mark, 2003).

As seems to be the case in Aruba, there is a strong emphasis placed on motherhood in Curacao (Abraham-Van der Mark, 2003). "A mother remains a mother until the shroud covers her" is a popular local proverb reflective of strong cultural values. Mothers are primary caretakers, and many prefer not to marry so they can raise their children alone without the interference of a man. Historically, many men seem unwilling or unable to accept the responsibility of fatherhood, and few commit to a monogamous relationship with the mother of their children (Abraham-Van der Mark, 2003).

Clearly, there are several historical factors as well as current social influences surrounding family life in Aruba. A strong sense of independence among women hails from a

history of slavery, immigration, economic struggles, and absent men. This trend and capacity towards single motherhood lends itself to a wide range of family constellations. Within this range falls the very traditional nuclear family which aligns with traditional Catholic values, as well as more progressive constellations made up of cohabiting couples, couples "living apart together," and couples living on different islands or nations. A wide range of resources may be necessary to strengthen the various family systems on the island.

Existing Relationship Interventions in Aruba

The only known type of MRE available in Aruba is Marriage Encounter. This program has been evaluated for efficacy, although primarily in the United States. In a meta-analysis by Jakubowski, Milne, Brunner, and Milne (2004), 13 marriage enhancement programs were evaluated empirically in the United States, with 4 designated as "efficacious." Marriage Encounter was placed in the *possibly efficacious* category, meaning that empirical evaluation has shown marginal success with small sample sizes (Jakubowski et al, 2004). In other words, Aruba's primary MRE is a program that is generally believed to be effective, although evidence to show its efficacy with the Aruban population is lacking.

Marriage Encounter, historically a Catholic-based program aimed at applying religious principles towards strengthening couples' marriages, is now offered worldwide from a variety of different religious orientations. In Aruba, Marriage Encounter is still offered solely through the Catholic Church. It is open to all who wish to attend, but is probably more heavily attended by Catholics due to greater publicity within the Church and greater emphasis on the importance of marital education for those wishing to marry in the Catholic Church (premarital education in the Engaged Encounter program is a requirement for those wishing to marry in the Church).

Couples and Relationship Education

Many family life scholars are interested in helping families by way of education. Outcome studies regarding Marriage and Relationship Education (MRE) are generally favorable. Carroll & Doherty (2003) found that participants were significantly better off in terms of their marital relationship than 79% of non-participants. Stanley et al (2006) noted higher levels of satisfaction and commitment, and lower levels of conflict and divorce for participants. Hawkins (2008) noted in a 117-study meta-analysis that relationship quality and communication skills both improved moderately, while Nock et al (2008) observed a reduction in divorce when couples participated in pre-marital counseling or education, especially when the couples were considered high-risk.

Many researchers note that current information on marriage education is limited to the well-educated, middle-class, European American population in the U.S., who tend to be the main recipients of MRE (Carroll & Doherty, 2003). There has, however, been a recent shift in program developers' attempting to adapt programs to meet the needs of more diverse populations. Ooms (2007) discussed the importance of making changes to content, format, and delivery when diverse clients had differing needs from that of the majority population. As an example of this, Ooms gave several considerations that program developers ought to have when delivering MRE to Latino population, including adapting to their nonverbal, indirect communication styles and their preference to avoid conflict. Ooms also suggested that educators recognize Latinos' dependence on extended family and the stress of being separated from them, having immigrated to the United States. These and other considerations represent an effort to meet the needs of a specific population, making intervention efforts more effective and appealing.

Cultural Adaptations

Culture-specific values and perspectives are likely to influence perception of marriage, and the common issues and problems arising in marriages within the group. This realization is pushing advocates and researchers towards greater understanding of how cultural influences ought to be appropriately addressed and accounted for in Marriage and Relationship Education. For example, the Hispanic Healthy Marriage Initiative (HHMI) is focused on strengthening marriages for Hispanics in the United States via various organizations throughout the United States. The HHMI offers grant funding to organizations whose target populations are at least 50% Hispanic individuals and families. The HHMI is utilizing data from these various organizations in order to better understand the current implementation of MRE in the Hispanic population.

The HHMI identified the following retention strategies which were often effective in retaining participants in the various programs: 1) Balancing the length of the program with retention goals, 2) Providing a welcoming, fun, and interactive classroom experience, 3) Reducing participation burdens by providing food, transportation assistance, and child care, 4) Contacting absent participants and providing make-up sessions, and 5) Working with participants' employers to secure program participation buy-in. The organizations also used various strategies for marketing, and in many cases, adapted the content or delivery of their programs to match perceived needs or challenges; for example, content areas to address gender role or acculturation stress, or providing education programs in Spanish (see HHMI 2012, HHMI 2010).

Early hypotheses made by the HHMI suggest the importance of adopting a non-western framework by which to understand marriage and relationships in a distinct culture. In an effort to widen the reach of interventions to include other cultural groups, researchers have suggested a

need for cultural adaptations. Falicov (2009) described this process as an adherence to the core elements of a particular evidence-based intervention, while supplementing with relevant cultural content. Castro (2004) refers to the same process as a matter of resolving tensions between "fidelity" and "fit": protocol for the original intervention needs to be followed to the extent possible (fidelity), while providing relevant information to the targeted group (fit). Thus, changes are made to interventions when necessary to meet the needs of the group. For example, a group whose culture places very little value on literature/reading would likely struggle to benefit from an intervention that relied heavily on the written word for instruction. The same material could be adapted and disseminated in a different way more likely to effectively reach and be internalized by its recipients. Cultural adaptation can be applied to any program in a variety of ways, such as language matching between client and facilitator (Castro, 2010).

However, researchers will wonder when it is appropriate to modify empirically-evaluated programs, and to what extent this should be done. Based on a review by Castro (2010), cultural adaptations are justifiable (ie. 'fidelity' can be compromised to accommodate 'fit') when one of the following criteria are met: 1) there is ineffective clinical engagement, 2) unique risk or resilience in the target population, 3) unique symptoms of a common disorder, 4) non-significant intervention efficacy for a particular subcultural group. The Aruban population seems to have unique risk factors (criterion #2) that contribute to the prevalence of marital strain and/or divorce, given its high divorce rate and level of concern surrounding the island's marriages. By this criterion alone, it is plausible that Arubans could benefit from culturally-adapted interventions. Unfortunately, the research necessary to propel such interventions has been sparse (Bernal, 2010).

Bernal (2010) discussed a several-step framework by which to conduct this needed research, and then move beyond the initial research towards implementation and evaluation of culturally adapted interventions. First, basic research must be carried out, assessing for basic needs. Second, intervention development, refinement, and adaptation can begin. Third, interventions can be tested for efficacy. This is sometimes referred to as "piloting." Fourth, the intervention is disseminated and tested further. Finally, researchers can review and integrate findings, allowing for further refinement (Bernal, 2010). Strikingly similar stage models have been advanced by several others (see Castro, 2010).

Bernal's (2010) stage model provides a basic formulation about how to move from research to implementation. The present project focuses on the first step only—a needs assessment of the Aruban people. The subsequent steps—intervention development, efficacy testing, dissemination, and further testing—are beyond the scope of this project, but represent important steps to be taken in the future, if program development or adaptation is thought to be necessary in Aruba.

If, indeed, program development or adaptation is pursued at some future point in Aruba, there are certain components which form the basis for culturally relevant interventions. The three key components, as described by Castro (2004), are: 1) comprehension, 2) motivation, and 3) relevance. *Comprehension* refers to content that meets the linguistic, educational, and developmental needs of the group. *Motivation* refers to content that is important and interesting for the group. *Relevance* refers to content that is applicable to participants' daily lives. Researchers have hypothesized that these three components, or *cultural relevance*, are associated with increased interest and participation from targeted subgroups of the population, leading to increased effectiveness for targeted groups (Castro, 2004).

If program developers seek to either develop a new educational program, or to modify an existing program, some foundational work should be done to establish the potential for comprehension, motivation, and relevance. Without any assurance that a new or adapted program would meet these needs, there would be little assurance that the program would garner much interest or sustained participation from the target population. According to Castro (2004), there are various factors which would put a culturally adapted intervention at risk of being less effective, including characteristics of the learners, characteristics of the program delivery staff, and other administrative or community factors. Language, ethnicity, and risk factors are all examples of group characteristics that could account for less favorable outcomes in an evaluation study of the culturally adapted group.

Because culturally-adapted MRE is a relatively new phenomenon, little is known about the actual efficacy of these programs in comparison with original intervention programs. Until recently, studies evaluating the efficacy of culturally-adapted programs have used no-treatment control groups, leaving the question of whether culturally-adapted programs are superior to original evidence-based programs largely unanswered (Castro, 2010). Some researchers are beginning to use more rigorous methods for evaluating culturally-adapted programs. Again, evaluation is beyond the scope of the current study, although it would be important in the future to evaluate programs used in Aruba.

Presently, there is a need for an understanding of culture, in order to make modifications that go beyond a surface-level understanding of cultural differences. Reniscow, Baranowski, Ahluwalia, and Braithwaite (1999) referred to these modifications as deep structure modifications. Deep structure modifications reflect an understanding of long- and deeply-held beliefs and values: for example, a deep structure modification might be to change the way a

particular content area was approached when delivering education to a particular group. This might be done because of group members' deeply-held beliefs which differ from the values used to form the original intervention. In contrast, surface structure modifications reflect only a basic understanding of the needs of a particular group: for example, translating materials into the appropriate language, providing music or other cultural symbols associated with a particular group (Reniscow, Baranowski, Ahluwalia, & Braithwaite, 1999).

Further exploratory research of cultural beliefs and values will allow interventionists to make appropriate modifications, taking into consideration socio-economic status, age, immigration history/acculturation, education, etc. of a particular group. As Zayas (2010) stated:

> Our search has to take us to useful, applicable models for adaptation. What we can offer the field going forward are decision trees, algorithms, calculus, or other conceptual models that clinicians in the proverbial trenches of social and health service delivery can use as they tailor [empirically supported treatments]. . . to the populations they serve. From such adaptation experiences as reported in these papers and those that exist in the literature, the field can begin to generate general principles for adapting treatments to different groups. (p. 4)

Snyder et al (2010) surveyed the needs of Hispanic immigrants to the U.S with regards to MRE, and presented key themes for consideration in making modifications to meet the needs of this cultural group. In particular, participants reported on their preferences with regards to *content*, *intensity*, *method*, *timing*, *setting/place*, *delivery/price*, and *promotion* of MRE. While these themes do not represent an exhaustive or comprehensive understanding of the Hispanic culture and/or marital

framework, they are a starting point for researchers and interventionists who wish to continue down the path of creating a culturally-adapted intervention suitable for this group.

Because of Aruba's diverse population, it may not be possible to create a single culturally relevant intervention without marginalizing subgroups of the population. Population segmentation may be necessary to accommodate wide within-group variation; in addition, using various types of adapted interventions can help to accommodate the within-group variation (Castro, 2010).

Conclusion

This literature review has summarized the published work on an Aruban cultural identity, shaped by the historic context of immigration, slave labor, single women households, and economic factors. This information lends insight into unique challenges and strengths pertaining to Aruban families. The existing efforts to strengthen Aruban families, assessed through informal survey, were presented. Marriage Encounter and Engaged Encounter are the only known formal efforts to strengthen marriages via education. These programs have been empirically validated and found to be marginally effective, but the only evaluative studies have sampled the European American population.

Because MRE has had more extensive implementation and evaluation outside of Aruba (mainly in the United States), the literature regarding the general effectiveness of MRE was reviewed, demonstrating that in general, participation in certain types of MRE has been associated with positive outcomes for couples. The question then becomes: How might some of these benefits be disseminated to a greater population than the group

currently receiving MRE? A summary of literature describing the importance of adapting MRE or other interventions to meet the needs of culturally distinct groups was presented. Beyond surface-level modifications such as language translation, a deeper understanding of the culture is important in order to create effective educational programming.

Examining needs is a key first step down the path to creating and implementing culturally-adapted interventions (Bernal, 2010). The current undertaking can scarcely claim to provide the comprehensive wherewithal to create culturally-relevant MRE for the Aruban population. Rather, this project represents an effort to take that first step, by examining a cultural group's report on their own perceptions and experiences of marriage on the island. Examining the key themes that emerge will allow researchers to make suggestions to program developers or interventionists who deliver MRE in Aruba.

CHAPTER 3—Methods

The lack of culturally-sensitive interventions for marriage is evident in the United States, where the majority of MRE is targeted at middle-class, European American individuals. A lack of literature on effective MRE outside of the United States points to a gap in the understanding on the existence, use, and appropriateness of marriage-strengthening interventions in other regions. Growing concern in Aruba and other countries regarding a disintegration of marriage and family signals a need for appropriate and effective interventions. Exploratory research will form the groundwork for the development and implementation of programming that will effectively meet the needs of the target population in Aruba.

Rationale for Qualitative Method

One reason for using qualitative methodology is to explore new areas of interest. Glaser (1992) recommended researching areas of study that are new areas of interest, which need opening up, and for which there is a sparse base of existing literature. Because this study is the first attempt at studying marriage in Aruba, existing resources for strengthening marriage in Aruba, and desired resources in Aruba, it is a prime area in which to employ qualitative methods.

In quantitative methodologies, it is generally expected that researchers start out with a preconceived theory, a framework which guides the rationale for the study, as well as the collection and analysis of their data. Beginning with a theory gives direction to the research process, the measures used, and the questions asked. However, anthropologists and culturally-sensitive researchers will often use inductive methods in order to avoid imposing a theory that is culturally-insensitive. This approach does not represent a disregard for theory, but rather, a

concerted effort to grasp cultural nuances that might otherwise go unnoticed if working from a specific theory.

Methodology Overview

There are many different qualitative methodologies. This study will employ grounded theory methodology. Grounded theory is based on the premise that researchers enter the work inductively, without a set theory guiding the work. Rather, the theory is drawn from the data, and built through the process of data collection and analysis, as researchers seek to organize emergent themes, which describe potential phenomena, into a cohesive theory (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). For an understudied population such as Aruba, this sort of approach is ideal as it allows researchers to begin the process of forming a meaningful theory about marriage education needs, grounded in the data.

Corbin and Strauss (1990) described the basic assumptions of grounded theory. The first is that conditions change over time, and this should be reflected in a flexible approach. Qualitative researchers can draw on supplementary sources such as personal communication, observation, and newspaper articles. Throughout the process of research, the qualitative researcher is open to new information that lends insight to the subject at hand. The other premise of grounded theory is that researchers seek to understand the context, or "relevant conditions," in which research subjects reside, as well as the subjects' actions. The subjects are capable of responding to the relevant conditions—therefore, qualitative researchers seek to understand the interplay between context and action (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). It is not enough simply to seek understanding of the Aruban culture, nor is it enough to seek an understanding of the behavior and ideas of its people. Rather, a grounded theory approach to this project requires that an

attempt be made to understand the “relevant conditions” and how the cultural context influences Arubans' approach to marriage, and vice versa.

Conceptual Framework and Questions

The researchers employed inductive research methods, which posit that researchers do not begin their work with any definite hypotheses. However, as Blumer (1954) described, inductive researchers generally have a set of guiding questions, called sensitizing questions, that serve as reference points in conducting their work. In the present study, the following questions served as those reference points for data collection and analysis:

1. What are common concerns about marriage in Aruba?
2. What ideas do Arubans have about how to strengthen marriage?
3. What preferences do Arubans have regarding marriage education, including aspects such as price, location, promotion, and format?

These sensitizing questions guided the selection of the 14 open-ended interview questions used, which were also the same interview questions used by Snyder et al. (2007, 2009). These questions adhered to guidelines set forth by Lengua et al. (1992) and the Hawkins (2004) marriage education framework. The interview questions were translated into Papiamento by an Aruban native who is a professional translator (see Table 1).

Focus Groups

In depth-interviews have been described in the literature on a continuum that moves from unstructured to structured (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982). The interviews in this study were structured in that the same wording was used for each focus group, and the questions were asked in the same order each time. The focus group facilitator was instructed to ask follow-up questions as

needed to elicit additional participation, but this was a rare occurrence, and as a general rule the same questions were used for each group.

Table 1. Focus group questions. (English and Papiamento versions)

1. What concerns do you have about marriage? **Kico ta bo preocupacion tokante matrimonio?**

2. What do you think causes trouble in marriage? **Kico bo ta pensa ta causa dificultad den matrimonio?**

3. What can persons do to achieve a strong, happy marriage? **Kico nos por hasi pa logra un felis i fuerte matrimonio?**

4. What sources do you currently use to help you strengthen your marriage? (or, if not married, what source(s) would you use to help strengthen a marriage? **Ki tipo di informacion bo ta usa actualmente pa yuda fortalesa bo matrimonio? (of, si bo no ta casa ainda, ki tipo di informacion lo bo usa pa fortalesa bo matrimonio?)**

5. What kind of help for marriage do you want to get? **Ki tipo di ayuda pa matrimonio lo bo gusta recibi?**

6. If there was education to help you build a strong marriage, what would you like to see used? What knowledge and skills would you seek? **Si tabatin educacion tokante con pa traha un matrimonio fuerte, kico bo lo kier pa ta wardu usa? Ki tipo di conocimentu i habilidadnan bo lo busca?**

7. How would you like to get this information? What approaches would you like to see used? Some common approaches are classes, magazine, articles, websites, and videos. **Con bo lo gusta pa recibi e informacion aki? Ki tipo di metodonan bo lo kier pa ta wardu usa? Algun metodonan comun ta lesnan, revistanana, reportahenan, webstienan, i videonan.**

8. What is the best way to let you know that education like this is available? **Kico ta e miho manera pa lagabo sa cu tal educacion ta disponibel?**

9. Where would be the most convenient place to receive education or materials like this? **Unda lo ta e lugar mas conveniente pa recibi tal educacion of material?**

10. How much time would you be willing to spend learning about how to have a strong marriage? **Cuantu tempo lo bo ta dispuesto pa duna na e sinjanza tokante con pa tin un matrimonio fuerte?**

11. What would you be willing to pay for the education if you needed to? **Kico lo bo ta dispuesto pa paga pa e educacion si e lo ta necesario?**

12. What kinds of things would keep people from learning how to have a strong marriage? What negative experiences have you had when trying to get help? **Ki tipo di cosnan ta stroba hende di sinja con pa tin un matrimonio fuerte? Ki experiensianan negativeo abo tabatin ora bo a purba di haya ayuda?**

13. What would motivate people to participate in marriage education? **Kiko lo motiva hende pa participa den educacion matrimonial?**

14. How can we get both women and men to participate? **Con nos por motiva ambos, hende homber i muhe, pa participa?**

One additional question was asked to the professional group, in order to obtain information from local experts about currently existing resources as well as resources these experts felt were lacking.

What resources are currently available in the community to strengthen marriages? What kinds of resources do you wish were available? Ki tipo di ayudata disponibel actualmente den e comunidad pa fortalece matrimonio? Ki tipo di ayuda bo lo desea pa ta disponibel?

Procedure

Referrals were obtained through various sources and were contacted through email, telephone, or in person. In keeping with standards set by Snyder et al (2007, 2009), it was determined that each focus group would have a minimum of three participants. Participants were over-recruited in an attempt to avoid having to reschedule groups. Eleven focus groups were conducted. Ten of these groups consisted of single and married Arubans, sorted by category and gender. The following groups were sampled: single, never-married males (N=9) and single, never-married females (N=9); engaged and/or cohabiting males (N=3) and engaged/cohabiting females (N=3); males expecting their first child (N=3) and females expecting their first child (N=3); males in their first year of marriage (N=3) and females in their first year of marriage (N=3); males currently married for at least seven years (N=4) and females currently married for at least seven years (N=5); and finally, one male and female group of professionals (N=11). There were a total of 57 participants.

The categories for the focus groups were chosen based on literature suggesting the existence of distinct stages in the marital life cycle. We interviewed males and females separately in order to obtain the most candid responses possible, in hopes that our participants could freely discuss their feelings, beliefs, and ideas about marriage and marriage education. Because the professional group targeted the participants' observations as professionals, rather

than from the vantage point of their own personal relationships, we decided to interview males and females together.

Participants were contacted and invited to participate in the appropriate focus group. They signed an informed consent form (Appendix A for English, Appendix B for Papiamento version of the form), which included basic protocol of the study as well as potential risks and benefits to participants.

After signing the informed consent, participants filled out a demographics questionnaire with items regarding age, race, number of years living in Aruba, and religion (see Table 1). While demographic information was not linked to specific participants, it provided a snapshot of the participants in the sample.

All participants who completed the focus group were given 35 florins (the equivalent of approximately $20) in cash.

Each focus group lasted for about two hours, and was led by a facilitator who was trained in focus group methods by a university professor who is experienced in qualitative research methods. The facilitator, who was a native Aruban, was trained on how to welcome group members, ask questions verbatim and in a less-biasing way, and how to prompt for further participation or clarify questions if group participation seemed limited. Each focus group was audio recorded, and a note-taker attended each focus group and took notes in case of technological difficulties.

Sample Description

This study was patterned after a marriage education needs assessment conducted among the Latino population in a western U.S. city (see Snyder et al, 2007) The researchers sought to collaborate with Latino individuals and agencies to recruit the study sample, thus keeping with

the suggestions in the Hawkins et al. (2004) marriage education framework (Snyder, 2007). Similarly, researchers in the current study sought to collaborate with interested Aruban individuals and community agencies. By so doing, a diverse population was reached which included many who had previously been consumers of marriage education, or who would be likely to do so in the future (eg., engaged individuals, young parents).

Various approaches were used to recruit participants. The director of a local non-profit organization called Pro Famia Feliz (Pro Happy Family) assisted with recruiting recently married and engaged individuals. An obstetrician referred several mothers who were expecting their first child. Local churches were contacted and volunteers assisted in hanging flyers and spreading word about the study. An advertisement was placed in a local newspaper, and a local radio station interviewed members of the research team about the project in efforts to recruit participants. An informational website was created to attract additional participants. Snowball sampling techniques were used to encourage participants to refer potential participants.

Our sample consisted of 57 individuals, who were predominantly Aruban, although other nationalities and ethnicities were represented as well. Aruba's population is rather diverse: in 2008, 37,075 Aruban residents were foreign-born. This represents 35% of Aruban's total 105,844 residents in 2008. The decision was made to include all Aruban citizens who wished to participate, regardless of nationality. This was done in order to give a more accurate picture of the actual cultural dynamics on the island, reflective of a truly diverse group. In keeping with recommendations from Snyder (2009) and Umaña-Taylor & Bámaca (2004), the decision was made to interview males and females separately, in order to avoid gender bias in the responses.

The following tables show the participant demographics of the various focus groups:

Table 2. Single, Never-married Females, *N*=9.

N	Age	Education	Religion	Ethnicity	Age when immigrated
1	21	Prof Degree Completed	LDS	Latin	1-5
2	27	Prof Degree not Completed	LDS	Latin	20
3	24	High School	LDS	Aruban	n/a
4	19	High School	LDS	Aruban	n/a
5	19	High School	LDS	Aruban	n/a
6	19	High School	LDS	Latin	1-5
7	19		LDS	Latin	1-5
8	22	High School	Jehovah's Witness	Latin	1-5
9	20	Tech Degree	LDS	Aruban	n/a

Table 3. Single, never-married males, *N=9.*

N	Age	Education	Religion	Ethnicity	Age when immigrated
1	19	<HS	Catholic	Aruban	n/a
2	19	<HS	Catholic	Aruban	n/a
3	49	Tech degree	LDS	Curacao/Dominica	n/a
4	20	HS	Catholic	Aruban	n/a
5	36		Methodist	Aruban	11-18
6	17	<HS	Catholic	Aruban	n/a
7	35	Prof. degree	None	Chinese	n/a
8	26	Tech degree	Catholic	Aruban	n/a
9	27	Tech degree	Catholic	Aruban	n/a

Table 4. Cohabiting and/or engaged females, *N=3*.

N	Age	Education	Religion	Ethnicity	Age when immigrated
1	41	Prof. Degree not completed	Catholic	Dutch	25
2	35	HS	Catholic	Aruban	birth
3	30	Bachelor's	Catholic	Aruban	N/a

Table 5. Cohabiting and/or engaged males, *N=3.*

N	Age	Education	Religion	Ethnicity	Age when immigrated
1	32	Professional degree	Catholic	Aruban	
2		<HS	Catholic	Dutch	6-10 years
3	22	HS	Catholic	Aruban	

Table 6. Females married <1 year, *N=3.*

N	Age	Education	Religion	Ethnicity	Age when immigrated
1	21	HS	Catholic	Aruban	N/a
2	32	Professional degree	Catholic	Latina	32
3	24	Professional degree	Catholic	Aruban	N/a

Table 7. Males married <1 year, *N=4.*

N	Age	Education	Religion	Ethnicity	Age when immigrated
1	25	Tech degree	Catholic	Aruban	N/a
2	45	<HS	Catholic	Guyanese	25
3	25	Tech degree	Catholic	Aruban	N/a
4	31	Tech degree	Catholic	Aruban	N/a

Table 8. Females expecting first child, *N=3.*

N	Age	Education	Religion	Ethnicity	Age when immigrated
1	31	Professional degree	Catholic	Aruban	N/a
2	20	HS	Catholic	Aruban	N/a
3	33	Professional degree	Catholic	Aruban	N/a

Table 9. Males expecting first child, *N=3.*

N	Age	Education	Religion	Ethnicity	Age when immigrated
1	22	HS	LDS	Aruban	
2	30	Tech degree	Catholic	Aruban	
3	27	Tech degree	Catholic	Aruban	

Table 10. Women married >7 years, *N=5.*

N	Age	Education	Religion	Ethnicity	Age when immigrated
1	51	Professional degree not completed	LDS	Latina	33
2	49	<HS	LDS	Latina	35
3	50	Professional degree	Christian	Latina	34
4			LDS	Aruban	
5		HS	LDS	Aruban	

Table 11. Males married >7 years, *N=4.*

N	Age	Education	Religion	Ethnicity	Age when immigrated
1	54	Professional degree not completed	LDS	Latino	36
2	60	HS	Catholic	St. Martin	N/a
3	59	Tech degree	Catholic	Aruba	N/a
4	59	Professional degree	LDS	Other	N/a

Table 12. Professional males and females, *N=11.*

N	Age	Education	Religion	Ethnicity	Age when immigrated
1	59	Professional degree	LDS	Aruban	N/a
2	55	Professional degree	Catholic	Aruban	N/a
3	52	Professional degree	Catholic	Aruban	N/a
4	53		Catholic	Aruban	N/a
5	59	<HS	Catholic	Aruban	N/a
6	28	HS	Protestant	Latino	N/a
7	46	<HS		Dutch	N/a
8	73	Professional degree	Catholic	Aruban	N/a
9	72	Professional degree	Catholic	Aruban	N/a
10	44	Professional degree	Catholic	Aruban	N/a
11	51	Tech degree	Catholic	Aruban	N/a

Data Analysis

After the focus groups were completed, the audio tapes were transcribed verbatim. A team of two researchers independently translated the focus group interviews into English. The translators then met together in person or over the phone to discuss any discrepancies in translation. Their translations were largely congruent; however, minor differences were settled through discussion. An estimated 95% of the two translations were congruent, with a mere 5% or less needing to be resolved through discussion.

This approach followed the protocol established by Herrera (1993) known as the Serial Approach for Instrument Translation, step one. This approach requires the translators first to make their own independent translations of each focus group's content, then meet together to review, combine and/or resolve any translation discrepancies of the translated material into one final agreed-upon version.

A team of three researchers (which included the two translators and a third research assistant) were trained in open coding methods by a professor in family sciences at a large, western U.S. university. They independently read and coded the translated interviews, mining the participants' responses for themes. Inductive qualitative methods were used (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), meaning that the researchers did not look for particular answers; rather, they summarized participants' responses to questions with basic codes. The data was read and reread several times to generate codes representative of recurring themes. The coders met together to discuss their coding; very similar codes were combined and minor discrepancies were resolved through discussion.

Qualitative data analysis software was used to organize codes and to facilitate re-reading of the data for further themes. Axial coding, as described by Strauss and Corbin (1990), was used to generate sub-themes allowing for a more in-depth understanding of participants' ideas. Representative and memorable quotes were selected to tell the story of the data.

Researcher's Assumptions

As is the case with all researchers, the researcher has her own biases which affected the focus of the study, as well as several aspects of recruitment and data analysis. It is important to acknowledge these biases and their influence in the process.

I first went to Aruba as a missionary for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. I spent about half of my 18 months' assignment there (the other nine months were spent in Puerto Rico and Curacao). While there I became acquainted with many Arubans and non-Arubans living on the island. I experienced the island's culture through spending the majority of my time talking with individuals about their personal and religious beliefs, their families, and their lives. A natural interest in language and culture pushed me to try to understand the people and to meet them on their level, even though I was an outsider and was accompanied by a companion at all times—usually another American.

I returned to Aruba in 2009, about a year after I left my mission, to collect the data for this project. As an undergraduate student in Marriage, Family, and Human Development at Brigham Young University, my ultimate goal was to create marriage-strengthening programming for the people in Aruba. My underlying assumptions were a) that marriage is important and worthwhile, and the most important relationship to strengthen and protect, b) that Arubans would want help with their marriages, c) that Arubans didn't already have appropriate interventions for marriage, otherwise their divorce rate wouldn't be so high and d) that someone with training in family studies, even from an outside culture, would be well-equipped to begin the process of creating and implementing effective MRE.

I realize now that not all of those assumptions are reasonable, though I think it is important that I am upfront and transparent about what I was trying to do at the outset of this study. As I have continued my studies through the completion of this project and in graduate school, I have learned a) that I still believe marriage is important and worthwhile, though other types of relationships are just as important to others and are also worth interventionists' attention, b) that I still believe Arubans are open to receiving help to strengthen marriages, c) that Arubans

may already have some interventions that are under-accessed or could be improved to reach more people or more specific needs, and d) perhaps most importantly, that someone with training in family studies *might* be equipped to *assist* in the process of creating and implementing effective MRE, but only with significant direction from Arubans, both in program development and in intervention itself.

That last point—that the Aruban voice ought to be the impetus behind the formation and delivery of MRE—must have been clear to me on some cognitive level as I was beginning this project. Had it been otherwise, I'm not sure I would have carried out this project. However, in the early stages, I was influenced by my mentor—an experienced researcher and family life educator—who seemed to really believe in the concept of cultural sensitivity. Working with the Aruban people through this process and reading what they had to say has completely convinced me that the people themselves are key to any solution—any effective intervention must be framed around their preferences and needs, with the greatest chances for success occurring when the people are also involved in the implementation and delivery of such an intervention.

Conclusions

In summary, the data was collected in adherence with guidelines set forth by grounded theory, using inductive, qualitative methodology. Qualitative researchers recognize their own biases and influence in the process of data collection and analysis, and this researcher has sought to recognize this, also. This project was formed around basic sensitizing questions formed to assess concerns about marriage in Aruba, current resources available to Arubans wishing to strengthen their marriages, and ideas and preferences for marriage-strengthening resources.

CHAPTER 4—Results

Following the tables and their subsequent brief summaries, the answers to fourteen questions will be presented. Several themes were prominent and common across many of the focus groups. These will be presented in a *common themes* section, and will comprise the majority of the results section. These themes will be organized by three subsections, according to the specific research questions of the project. The first four questions, comprising a discussion of common concerns about marriage and relationships and ideas about how to strengthen them, will be presented first. Next, the discussion on Questions five through 11 will address preferences, expectations, and ideas about marriage education in Aruba. Lastly, a discussion about obstacles to accessing MRE, as well as ideas for broadening appeal and motivation, will be presented as assessed via questions 12, 13, and 14.

In conducting these groups, it was interesting to note that several unique themes emerged in only one or two of the groups, but became prominent themes in those groups. Several examples of this occurred. It is unclear whether these themes were prominent in particular groups due to 1) the marital life stage of the group, or 2) the suggestibility of individuals answering questions in a group (ie. the fact that *one* participant had a certain idea and mentioned it in the focus group, leading others to consider the same idea). Additionally, some ideas seemed particular to males or females, or older or younger participants. These ideas, unique to one or two groups, will be referred to as *unique themes,* and they will be presented after the more prominent and common findings.

Each theme mentioned in the focus groups is displayed, with X's indicating the particular groups who mentioned each theme. The five leftmost columns are comprised of women's groups, and the subsequent five columns are men's groups, with the professionals' group taking up the rightmost column. The groups are abbreviated as such: Single=Sing, never-married; Co/En=Cohabiting or Engaged; M<1yr=Married less than one year; Expect=Expecting first child; M>7r=Married 7 years or more. Themes uniquely expressed by members of the professionals' group will be noted in the professionals' column. Each table will be briefly summarized.

Table 1. What concerns do you have about marriage in Aruba?, *N=57.*

	Women					Men					
	Sing	**Co/En**	**M<1yr**	**Expect**	**M>7yr**	**Sing**	**Co/En.**	**M<1yr**	**Expect**	**M>7yr.**	**Prof.**
Insufficient Courtship						X				X	
Unsure Who to Marry						X					
Poor Reasons for Marrying						X					
Both Spouses Working			X		X		X			X	
Infidelity			X			X	X	X	X		
Insufficient Relationship Skills		X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	
In-laws										X	
Sex											X
Peer Pressure									X		
Substance Abuse					X						
Parenting					X						
Trauma											X
Machismo			X		X					X	
Money			X			X		X		X	
Immaturity of Youth										X	
Lack of Values			X		X	X		X		X	
Disinterest in Marriage									X		
Technology					X						
Divorce			X		X	X		X		X	

The most commonly reported concerns about marriage in Aruba were insufficient relationship skills (mentioned by all the male groups and three of the female groups), infidelity (mentioned by four male groups and one female group), divorce (mentioned by three male groups and two female groups), and lack of values (mentioned by three male groups and two female groups). The professionals' group added “sex” and “trauma” to the list.

Table 2. What do you think causes difficulties in marriage? *N=57.*

	Women					**Men**					
	Sing	**Co/En**	**M<1yr**	**Expect**	**M>7yr**	**Sing**	**Co/En.**	**M<1yr**	**Expect**	**M>7yr.**	**Prof.**
Poor Communication	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X		
Lack of Trust	X	X		X		X	X		X		
-due to “infidelity”	X		X								
-due to “temptation”								X			
-due to outsiders tempting spouse	X		X								
Finances			X			X		X			
Insufficient Information about Partner						X		X			
Lack of Support				X				X			
Limited Time Together			X					X			
Disrespecting Partner	X					X					

As is evident in Table 2, the majority of the focus groups mentioned poor communication as something they felt causes difficulties in marriage. All of the women's focus groups mentioned this, as did three of the men's groups. The other theme that was mentioned in several groups was “lack of trust.” While several participants did not expound on what they meant by this, some went on to relate a lack of trust to infidelity. Interestingly, aside from “infidelity,”

which was mentioned by two female groups, “temptation” was a new term introduced by one of the male groups. In examining the content of the participants' comments, it was determined that “infidelity” and “temptation” were both referent to the same thing. It is possible that there is a somewhat gendered perception of infidelity, with a cultural responsibility placed on females for “tempting” males into infidelity. Finally, “finances” was a third most prevalent concern, mentioned by two male groups and one female group.

Table 3. What can you do to have a strong and happy marriage? *N=57.*

	Women					**Men**					
	Sing	**Co/En**	**M<1yr**	**Expect**	**M>7yr**	**Sing**	**Co/En.**	**M<1yr**	**Expect**	**M>7yr.**	**Prof.**
Religion/Spirituality			X	X	X	X			X	X	
Trust	X	X	X	X		X	X				
Communicate/Listen	X	X	X	X	X	X					
Express Love/Affection	X				X	X	X				
Support Partner			X	X		X					
Accept Partner's Shortcomings						X	X			X	
Court Sufficiently Prior to Marriage	X					X			X		
Seek Partner's Happiness				X			X			X	
Avoid “Routine”	X			X					X		
Be Faithful to Partner		X				X					
Respect Partner		X				X					
Allow Partner Space/Freedom			X	X							
Do Things Together				X	X						
Be Dedicated to Relationship			X		X						

In terms of what participants felt they could do to have a strong and happy marriage, the most commonly reported theme was "religion/spirituality." This suggests that a spiritual component in MRE might be helpful or necessary. Several male and female groups mentioned this. Interestingly, the next two themes were largely reported by female groups: "trust" and "communicate/listen."

Table 4. What source(s) do you currently use to help you strengthen your marriage? (or, if pre-married, what source(s) would you use to help strengthen a marriage?) *N=57.*

	Women					**Men**					
	Sing	**Co/En**	**M<1yr**	**Expect**	**M>7yr**	**Sing**	**Co/En.**	**M<1yr**	**Expect**	**M>7yr.**	**Prof.**
Religion/Spirituality	X	X	X	X	X	X			X	X	
Personal Religious Practices	X	X	X	X	X	X			X	X	
The Bible/Other Scriptures			X		X				X	X	
Teachings from a Specified Church				X	X				X		
Experienced People	X		X	X		X	X	X	X		
Parents	X		X	X		X	X	X			
Friends			X				X				
Church Leaders							X	X			
Others (including godparents, in-laws, grandparents, extended family)							X	X	X	X	
Educational Programs/Workshops		X	X	X	X	X			X		
Engaged Encounter/Marriage Encounter			X	X	X	X			X		
Other (Non-specified)		X	X		X						

Counseling			X			X					
Self-help Books, Magazines		X				X					

Religion and spirituality was a leading theme in response to the question about resources currently used to strengthen relationships—every female group mentioned this, as did three of the male groups (included in this code were several sub-codes: personal religious practices, the Bible/other scriptures, and teachings from a specified church). Seven of the ten groups mentioned "experienced others" (including family, friends, church leaders, and others) as a resource they would look to for help to strengthen marriage. Six groups (four female, two male) mentioned educational programs and workshops—in particular, Engaged Encounter and Marriage Encounter were mentioned, with 5 of the 6 groups who mentioned education mentioning these programs in particular. Recruitment bias was likely a factor in many of the participants mentioning these particular programs, as a large number of participants were recruited by the focus group facilitator, who was an instructor for Engaged Encounter and Marriage Encounter and invited several past participants to join the present study. Finally, counseling and self-help literature were mentioned by two groups each.

Summary of Questions 1-4

Several themes resonate throughout these first four questions, which assess general concerns about marriage and ideas/resources for strengthening marriage. Insufficient relationship skills were mentioned in response to questions 1, 2, and 3, with particular emphasis on communication and listening. Participants seemed to feel that these skills are foundational to building a strong relationship, and that a lack thereof explains a good deal of the difficulty in marriage. Infidelity was also mentioned as both a concern (Question 1) and as a source of difficulty (Question 2), with "trust" mentioned as a means of strengthening relationships in

Question 4. Finally, religion and spirituality were heavily emphasized in response to Questions 3 and 4, with many participants mentioning spirituality as a means of strengthening marriage and as a resource currently accessed.

Table 5. What kind of help for marriage do you want to get? *N=57.*

	Women					**Men**					
	Sing	**Co/En**	**M<1yr**	**Expect**	**M>7yr**	**Sing**	**Co/En.**	**M<1yr**	**Expect**	**M>7yr.**	**Prof.**
Professional Help		X		X		X	X	X		X	
Family	X					X	X	X	X		
Church Support				X	X	X	X			X	
Support from God	X	X				X	X				
Friends	X		X			X					
With Similar Religious Beliefs		X	X								
Premarital Instruction	X								X	X	
In public school curriculum									X	X	

It is interesting to note that the most commonly-reported answers to the question about what kind of help participants would like to receive were largely personal: that is, they involved receiving help from someone, be it a professional (such as a counselor), family, church members, God, or friends. Three groups mentioned premarital instruction, making education the least-mentioned theme. Interestingly, answers to the previous question seemed to suggest that participants commonly rely on education and self-help literature in order to strengthen their relationships. There seems to be a divergence between which resources are currently being accessed (education, self-help literature) and the resources that participants state they would want (more human/personal resources such as family, church members, or friends). Creating an intimate, personal feel in an MRE program could be important.

Table 6. If there was education to help you build a strong marriage, what would you like to see used? What knowledge and skills would you seek? *N=57.*

	Women					Men					
	Sing	**Co/En**	**M<1yr**	**Expect**	**M>7yr**	**Sing**	**Co/En.**	**M<1yr**	**Expect**	**M>7yr.**	**Prof.**
Communication/Listening	X	X		X	X	X			X		
Relational Attributes: Respect, Trust, Patience, etc.	X	X			X	X		X	X		
Conflict Management		X	X		X		X	X			
Real-life Stories	X		X	X		X			X		
Interaction—Role Play, Practice, Demonstrations			X	X				X			
Information on Avoiding Serious Problems						X		X			
Parenting Education				X	X						
Help Getting to Know Partner Before Marriage			X				X				

Question 6 elicited two types of responses: those that referred to desired content, and those that referred to desired format. The most commonly reported answers referred to the content. In particular, many participants wanted MRE to address communication/listening (mentioned by four female groups and two male groups). Answers referring to the format of the class emphasized a preference for an interactive format, including role play, practice, demonstrations, and real-life stories from others.

Table 7. How would you like to get this information? What approaches would you like to see used? Some common approaches are classes, magazines, articles, websites, and videos? *N=57.*

	Women					Men					
	Single	**Coh/En**	**M<1yr**	**Expect**	**M>7yr**	**Single**	**Coh/En.**	**M<1yr**	**Expect**	**M>7yr.**	**Prof.**
Real-life Examples from Couples	X	X		X	X	X	X		X		
Videos	X	X		X	X	X	X	X			
Classes						X	X	X		X	
Internet	X		X	X		X					
Magazines/Newspaper	X		X			X					
PowerPoint			X	X				X			
Drama/skits		X	X					X			
Role Plays	X	X									
Methods Keeping Reading to a Minimum	X	X									

The most commonly reported answers to this question were a) that participants wanted instruction to include real-life examples from couples and b) the use of videos. These answers were both given by participants from a wide range of marital statuses across both genders. Interestingly, the idea of having classes was only mentioned explicitly by men, although several of the methods suggested (videos, Powerpoint, drama/skits, and role plays, for example) were likely conceptualized by participants as being part of a course. Alternatively, some of the suggestions, such as internet and magazines/newspaper, suggest a desire for more independent learning (these suggestions came from single women, women in the first year of marriage, women expecting their first child, and single men). Again, it is interesting to note that direct references to traditional courses came primarily from men, and references to non-traditional learning (ie. Internet or reading) came from females. This seems to contradict the popular notion that males may be opposed to attending relationship education.

Another interesting observation is that 21 coded responses were given by female groups, while only 14 coded responses were given by male groups. This could hint at less exposure to or interest in MRE, and therefore fewer ideas about more non-normative applications of MRE. Perhaps, then, the mention of "classes" made exclusively by male groups, would point less to an openness to MRE and more to a lesser degree of interest.

Table 8. What is the best way to let you know that education like this is available? *N=57.*

	Women					**Men**					
	Single	**Coh/En**	**M<1yr**	**Expect**	**M>7yr**	**Single**	**Coh/En.**	**M<1yr**	**Expect**	**M>7yr.**	**Prof.**
Television	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Radio	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	
Newspaper	X	X	X	X	X		X	X		X	
Flyers	X	X				X	X		X		
Internet				X	X	X			X		
Church			X			X			X		
Posters	X					X					
Word of Mouth	X						X				
Billboards				X		X					

Mass media such as television, radio, and newspaper, seemed to be universally appealing across genders and marital life stage. Flyers, church, posters, word of mouth, and billboards seemed to appeal to a "younger" audience (in terms of marital life stage). For example, flyers were mentioned by single and cohabiting/engaged males and females, and men expecting first baby; church was mentioned by women in their first year of marriage, single men, and men expecting first baby; posters were mentioned uniquely by single men and women; word of mouth was mentioned by single women and cohabiting/engaged men; and billboards were mentioned by expecting women and single men. Participants who had been married at least seven years (and who naturally, were a bit older) uniformly mentioned television, radio, and newspaper, and the women also mentioned internet. No other significant patterns were evident with regards to marital life status or gender.

Table 9. Where would be the most convenient place to receive education or materials like this? *N=57.*

	Women					Men					
	Single	**Coh/En**	**M<1yr**	**Expect**	**M>7yr**	**Single**	**Coh/En.**	**M<1yr**	**Expect**	**M>7yr.**	**Prof.**
Church	X	X	X		X	X	X			X	
A Marriage/Family Center	X	X				X	X	X	X	X	
At Work/School	X		X			X		X	X		
Non-specified		X				X		X	X		
Popular/Central Places		X				X			X		
Somewhere with Privacy						X		X	X		
In a Home	X	X		X		X					
In Nature			X	X							

Where would participants prefer to go to receive MRE? Two answers were given by seven groups from a wide range of marital life statuses and from both genders: a church, or a marriage/family center. Interestingly, churches are a likely host for MRE on the island, while the author believes "a marriage/family center" probably represents a more imaginative answer to the question. A couple of uniquely male or female contributions were made. For example, three male groups (single, first year of marriage, expecting first child) expressed that the ideal location would be a place with privacy. Two female groups (first year of marriage, expecting first child) expressed an interest in MRE that takes place in a remote location, such as on the beach. It is possible that females might hope for a location that is primarily romantic while males hope for a location that is primarily private; fortunately, it would be possible to choose a location that appeals to both genders in those regards.

Table 10. How much time would you be willing to spend learning about how to have a strong marriage? *N=57.*

	Women					**Men**					
	Sing	**Co/En**	**M<1yr**	**Expect**	**M>7yr**	**Sing**	**Co/En.**	**M<1yr**	**Expect**	**M>7yr.**	**Prof.**
"Whatever it takes"		X		X		X		X	X	X	
8 hours									X		
3 months, 3 times a week		X									
4-6 months			X	X							
A Weekend					X						
Twice a week for two hours								X			
Once a month									X		
Every Day, Any Time										X	
One weekend every two months				X							
8-10 courses					X						

In hindsight, this question lacked precision, and therefore elicited responses that were difficult to code and interpret. Because the question simply asked how much time participants were willing to spend but did not specify beyond, a wide range of themes were coded and presented in the table. The most popular answer was non-specific: "whatever it takes." It is unclear whether this answer suggests a social desirability bias or an overly simple question, but it was reported by six groups (cohabiting or engaged women, women expecting first child, single men, men in first year of marriage, and men married at least seven years). The other answers often addressed number of hours, frequency, or overall duration (and sometimes two of these) but not all three dimensions. With the exception of one theme (4-6 months), the themes were not repeated by multiple groups. A suggestion to future researchers using a similar question would

be to tailor the question to address any or all three of these dimensions of time as pertaining to an MRE program (number of hours, frequency, and overall duration).

Table 11. What would you be willing to pay for the education if you needed to? *N=57.*

	Women					**Men**					
	Sing	**Co/En**	**M<1yr**	**Expect**	**M>7yr**	**Sing**	**Co/En.**	**M<1yr**	**Expect**	**M>7yr.**	**Prof.**
Sliding scale based on income		X	X			X				X	
Whatever is necessary				X		X			X		
The cost of a cruise					X						
Free						X			X		
150-250 Florins (app. $80-$140)											
-for 6 months -per hour		X			X					X	
500 Florins (app. $300)											
-for 6 months -for a weekend -for an unspecified duration	X	X				X			X		
1,000 Florins (app. $550)			X	X							

Similar to the previous question, a wide range of answers was elicited due to lack of specificity in the question itself. Again, in hindsight, a more specific question ought to address either overall price or price per hour, class, or some other time variable. This kind of specificity would yield results that could be interpreted and use. Unfortunately, identifying patterns is nearly impossible when participants made such a range of interpretations of the question.

Summary of questions 5-11

These questions assessed general preferences regarding MRE in Aruba. Arubans stated a preference for personal help, including professionals, family members, church leaders, God, and

friends. In line with the previous set of questions, participants shared they would want MRE to teach them communication skills. Additionally, relational skills such as respect, trust, and patience were desired. Ideally, classes would utilize real-life stories and an interactive format. A wide range of marital life stages and participants from both genders seemed to prefer an interactive format-style class or videos, and participants also seemed to universally believe television, radio, and newspaper were good ways to let them know of MRE. Churches and centers for marriage and family were preferred locations; with a small group of both genders mentioning the desire for a remote location (females may have wanted a romantic or relaxing location while men wanted confidentiality).

Table 12. What kinds of things would keep people from learning how to have a strong marriage? What negative experiences have you had when trying to get help? *N=57.*

	Women					**Men**					
	Sing	**Co/En**	**M<1yr**	**Expect**	**M>7yr**	**Sing**	**Co/En.**	**M<1yr**	**Expect**	**M>7yr.**	**Prof.**
Negative Influences		X	X	X		X	X	X	X		
Friends/Coworkers		X		X		X	X		X		
Someone Wishing to Break up couple			X					X			
Non-religious ideology					X						
Shame	X	X		X	X	X	X			X	
Too busy			X	X	X		X				
Financial Cost	X	X								X	
Problem with Instructor	X	X	X								
Fear of being told how to live	X										
Preferring to talk to someone who will take your side		X									
Personal			X								

Beliefs Conflict with Intructor's											
Lack of Trust			X				X		X		
Selfishness			X				X		X		
Drugs						X					
Machismo	X										
Partner Won't Attend		X									

The most common answers to this question were negative influences (in particular, friends/coworkers) and shame. These were each mentioned by seven groups, across a range of marital life stages and from both genders. Shame was also mentioned by seven groups, across genders and stages. Being "too busy" was third most common, being mentioned by three female groups and one male group. Interestingly, the most common answers involve other people—either being deterred by people who are "negative influences," or feeling concerned about how others will react, or not wanting others to know the couple is having problems.

Table 13. What would motivate people to participate in marriage education? *N=57.*

	Women					**Men**					
	Sing	**Co/En**	**M<1yr**	**Expect**	**M>7yr**	**Sing**	**Co/En.**	**M<1yr**	**Expect**	**M>7yr.**	**Prof.**
Advertising		X	X				X	X			
Adequate Information Beforehand			X			X		X		X	
Encouragement from Others	X					X				X	
Feeling a Genuine Need		X	X			X			X		
Being Engaged			X			X					
Having a Problem with Partner		X	X						X		
Desire to Improve or Maintain a Relationship	X										
Feeling Unable to find a Solution						X					
Cash/Material					X				X		

Incentives											
Assurance of Confidentiality								X		X	
Well-known/Qualified Instructor								X		X	
Applicable Material					X		X				
Desire to Give Example of Marriage to Children	X										
Fun									X		
Interest/Curiosity						X					
Mandatory		X									
Direct Contact (vs. mass media advertising)		X									
Becoming Aware of Society's Problems					X						

The most common answers to this question were advertising, adequate information beforehand, and the sense of a genuine need. Advertising was mentioned by four groups: cohabiting/engaged females, cohabiting/engaged males, women in first year of marriage, and men in first year of marriage. Similarly, the sense of a genuine need (including being engaged, having a problem with partner, having a desire to improve the relationship, or feeling unable to find a solution) was mentioned by two male groups (single, expecting first child) and two female groups (cohabiting/engaged, in first year of marriage). The idea to provide adequate information was given by three male groups (single, in first year of marriage, and married at least seven years), and also by one female group (in first year of marriage). This theme reappears in the following question, with the implication that perhaps men, in particular, benefit from and are comforted by having information about what MRE will entail before they attend.

Table 14. How can we get both women and men to participate? *N=57.*

	Women					Men					
	Sing	**Co/En**	**M<1yr**	**Expect**	**M>7yr**	**Sing**	**Co/En.**	**M<1yr**	**Expect**	**M>7yr.**	**Prof.**
Focus on Persuading the Women to Participate				X		X			X	X	
Provide Men with Clear Information				X	X		X				
-*About the Itinerary*					X						
-*About why it would benefit them*				X	X		X				
Make it Mandatory							X				
Speak Directly with the Men				X							
Material Incentives Geared Towards Men					X						

While the question itself did not necessarily suggest that either males or females would be more difficult to recruit, the majority of responses seemed to suggest that it would be more difficult to recruit males to participate in marriage/relationship education. The most common response was that recruiters should focus on persuading women, who would then work on persuading men. Providing men with adequate information about the education was another common answer (in particular, letting men know what to expect about the course and assuring them of confidentiality). Making the education mandatory, speaking directly with men, and providing material incentives geared towards men were all themes reported by one group each. Interestingly, many groups did not provide code-able responses to the question, suggesting that many participants were unsure how to motivate both genders to participate in a marriage/relationship education program.

Summary of Questions 12-14

This final set of questions assessed common obstacles to accessing MRE, as well as suggestions for motivating individuals to participate. The primary obstacles for avoiding MRE involved other people—either negative influences or discouragement from others, or the shame of revealing to others one's problems. Conversely, motivational factors mentioned tended to involve either positive encouragement from others or an assurance of confidentiality (ie. avoiding the shame of revealing problems to outsiders). In terms of appealing to both men and women, participants felt it was important to focus on recruiting both women and men—women, because they were likely to help persuade men to participate; and men, because they were more likely to participate if they had adequate information about the course beforehand.

Focus Groups

Because the data was collected via focus groups, it is fitting to mention some unique dynamics of focus groups that emerged during the project. By design, participants answer interview questions in a group setting. This allowed each member to consider the other answers given and, in turn, build off of what had already been said. In some instances, participants diverged somewhat from what had already been said, giving the researcher a picture of a wider range of opinions and ideas.

Common Themes

Concerns about Marriage

Insufficient relationship skills: Can't we all just get along?

A common concern reported across all groups was that individuals were somehow lacking the skills to form a successful relationship. References to insufficient relationship skills were recorded approximately 41 times, and of those 41 references, 24 referred specifically to

communication skills. Consider several statements participants made regarding this concern, which touch on several unique aspects of the broad construct of communication.

One concern appears to be over a lack of connection with a partner, experienced as poor communication. One woman from the engaged/cohabiting group, responding to the question, "What are your concerns about marriage in Aruba," said, "If you don't have communication. I think communication is the most important, because if you don't have that you can't go on. Why would you be with someone if you guys don't have communication?"

Another participant, a woman in her first year of marriage, expressed the concern that while it is important for partners to be able to forgive one another, some people lack the skills or courage to communicate about grievances, causing small issues to grow into big problems over time.

> I find that often times, understanding for the other. Sometimes, for the small things--we don't tell each other sorry. Forgive is a big word. Forget that something didn't go well. Communication, and I always say, when something hasn't gone well, they tolerate the pain and it becomes a big problem (Woman in first year, 2009).

The following concern seems to tap into the socioeconomic culture surrounding most Aruban families, in which both partners work full-time. In addition to posing a challenge to parent-child interaction, the concern expressed is that increased access to technology is making it difficult for youth to develop the interpersonal skills necessary for successful relationships. This concern came from a man who has been married for several years:

> I think the biggest thing is lack of communication. I think that we've lost the skills to communicate with each other in the family. I think that because we don't

> have the closeness with the mother, when she's at home—everyone is working, and when they get home they're so tired. We leave the kids to fend for themselves, or they're on the computer all the time. Interpersonal communication. That's what it is (Man married several years, 2009).

And finally, this participant in his first year of marriage seems to suggest that he is concerned about communication in marriage specifically because the lack thereof could lead to infidelity or "temptation," as it is commonly referred to throughout the focus groups. "Communication carries you to temptation—lack of communication. Most people lack communication. My relationship goes well based on the communication."

Of the 22 references to "communication," 9 came from the Professionals group. Several of the professionals, when questioned about their concerns for marriage, simply stated "communication" or "lack of communication." Others in this group were more specific, mentioning "communicating standards and values," "communicating about how to organize life/the budget," and "healthy communication—not fighting."

Several other relationship skills were named by participants, including "trust," "respect," "sharing," "patience," and "conscientiousness." Simultaneously, several deficits were also named: "lack of trust," "pride," "sharing," "disrespect," and "selfishness."

Money, Money, Money

Financial problems were a commonly-cited concern about marriage in Aruba. This concern was predominantly mentioned by males (in particular, single males, males expecting first child, and males married 7 years or more) and professionals. One male, expecting his first child, said, "One problem is economically—lack of things can cause problems within a couple if they are in need of things." A single, never-married male agreed with this statement when he

said, “Financially, when there is a lack of money, it can become a big problem.” It is interesting to note this concern from a single male, who has sensed the financial problems couples face, although he has not been married to experience them in that way himself. Finally, a male married for several years stated, “In my case, I don't have problems. But I see a lot of people that have problems—let's say, the financial part. That is a great problem for a lot of people.”

Interestingly, the males primarily mentioned described financial difficulties in terms of living on a limited income. As is common with most of the responses to the focus group questions, no one ventured to talk about personal financial difficulties with a partner. This was true for the women who spoke about financial difficulties, as well. One response, from a female expecting her first child, added insight into another dimension of the struggle surrounding money problems. She said, “The financial aspect. I think it's also a very big aspect. You find that sometimes the wife has a bigger income than the husband. That can cause a problem in marriage.”

It is interesting to consider this statement in connection with another common concern coded from the responses, which was that both spouses are working. In most instances, it was felt that participants referred to a lack of time spent strengthening the marriage. However, perhaps additional challenges go along with the departure from the traditional family—roles become less defined, and women become less dependent on their partners. Infidelity, which may be a long-standing problem on the island due to male-female dynamics, might be a ready outlet for males feeling unneeded. And, as some participants indicated, divorce is much more acceptable for any reason—and where several older Arubans might have endured marital infidelity and managed to stay married, many of the younger generation may see the need to stay married in quite the same way.

Tomato, Tomahto: How infidelity is experienced differently by different groups

Somewhat of a disparity was observed between the language and focus used by male groups and women groups to describe the events surrounding infidelity. While women frequently spoke of their troubles related to “infidelity,” men were more likely to talk about the difficulties of “temptation,” or the constant invitations to be unfaithful, and the difficulty of remaining faithful to one woman while spending long hours away from home each day. Interestingly, many participants stated that both men and women are in the workplace. No participants discussed the susceptibility of women to temptation in the workplace—rather; it appears to be men who are susceptible. If more women are in the workplace, perhaps the exposure to “temptation” is greater than in previous generations.

For example, consider the response to the question, “What causes difficulty in marriage?” from a young man expecting his first child. He said, “The biggest one is temptation. Temptation with, let’s say, infidelity. If you’ve said you’re gonna take the step to get married, you better be sure already that you can withstand the temptation. Temptation you will find everywhere--even at work. You’re at work more than you are at home and with your family.”

Not only are men seen as more susceptible to temptation, the tendency to look for multiple partners seems to have become commonplace and accepted in younger age groups. One young, single woman reported on young men’s tendency to have multiple partners at the same time, saying, “It’s in style. It’s become that way. . .Why would I be with someone who’s with another person? Other people are like, 'Why not?' It’s become so normal, that there are even sayings. . . and they laugh like it’s something really cute, like, “A guy without a mistress is like a garden without flowers,” and “Many people are sweet.” Even on the radio they say it.” This speaks to the possibility that marital infidelity springs from an accepted norm which encapsulates a large segment of the male population—even beginning before marriage or adulthood.

It is notable that these expectations begin so early in life—and where do they come from? Perhaps many adolescents have witnessed infidelity in their parents' marriage. This experience would surely shape young people's ideas about infidelity and its effects in a marriage. One woman, expecting her first child, shared the following experience from her parents' marriage:

> I can say that in my case, I have a 15 year old brother born from an outside relationship, but my mother told my father not to leave. . .'we married, and we promised each other'. . . My father accepted that, and they're together still. It's a problem, but if you know how to handle it, you'll get through it (Woman expecting first child, 2009).

While this quote represents only one family's experience, it is an interesting look at the feelings surrounding infidelity. If indeed, there was no traumatic experience, depression, or divorce as a result of the infidelity, perhaps it was experienced as more of a normative bump along the marriage road—one that needs "handling," but that doesn't represent a death sentence for a marriage, by any means. The fact that the marriage was more important to the woman's parents than ….says something about the value of marriage as an institution to Arubans, in particular those of her parents' generation. This brings some meaning to the comments made by several older participants about the "lack of values" held by young people, and their tendency to divorce for trivial reasons, as the divorce rate has increased over time. It also sheds light on the observation that even for young people, having multiple partners seems to be acceptable (and even somewhat trendy, according to the previous quote).

What happens when the love is gone?

Because the high divorce rate in Aruba was an initial rationale for this study, it was interesting to see the level of concern about divorce expressed by participants. Over half of the focus groups mentioned divorce as a concern regarding marriage in Aruba. Of the reasons given

or implied for divorce, participants listed things like insufficient courtship before marriage (not knowing partner well enough), lack of values, or a lack of dedication to marriage.

As acknowledged in the literature review, the cultural background has set the stage for non-traditional family constellations such as cohabitation. However, it is likely that in modern times, the fear of divorce is another powerful influence in this trend. One woman who was cohabiting with her partner stated:

> I don't have any concerns, but for me it's the same thing whether I'm married or living together. If things go wrong, what do we do if we're married? You don't live together to separate. But it's...well, I was already married once. It didn't go well. I think the thing about relationships is love. And whether you're married or living together, the love is the same thing. And if the love is bad when you're married or living together, you divorce or get separated either way (Woman cohabiting or engaged, 2009).

Her comment indicates some concern about the barrier to exiting a relationship created by marriage. If, as her experience seems to have confirmed to her, most relationships end in separation, cohabitation might be an appealing alternative to marriage. Although she did not expound on her experience of divorce, it appears to have been negative enough to discourage her from trying marriage a second time.

One reason given for divorce was that people have insufficient reasons for getting married, and that this often leads to dissolution of the relationship. One man, expecting his first child, stated:

> There's a lot of divorce, right? Maybe, before you make a decision like that you should get to know each other very well—you need to be very sure of

> each other. The marriage needs to come from both sides, not just because your girlfriend is pregnant, or because of the pressure. Most of the time that's what happens. Because then, everything is sweet, and you say to your girl, let's get married. After you have the baby things get harder. You've made that decision, you feel she's the woman of your life, and you feel good with her, and there's nothing missing—there's love, which everyone needs (Man expecting first child, 2009).

There is an interesting interplay here between traditional religious and family values, and current family dynamics on the island. There seems to be some social preference toward being married when children enter the family, which seems to pressure some couples into marriage. However, to have children before marriage appears to be very common. It is possible that this trend hails back to the island's history of strong and independent women.

Passage to marriage: "Back when I was a kid. . ."

Many participants expressed concerns related to courtship, mainly with regards to insufficient time spent getting to know a potential spouse, couples marrying too young, and lack of experience living together before marriage. Most of the married participants in our sample had lived with their significant other before marriage (or without intending to marry), and many had children before marriage. With the exception of one, those expecting their first child in our sample were not married to their partners. Of our nine never-married women, two already had children. Of those in their first year of marriage, only one couple was recently married without having lived together or had children together previously.

As noted in the previous section, some participants expressed concern about the pressure to marry when children are involved. Notably, of the three female participants expecting their first child, only one was married, although the other two were in ongoing, romantic relationships

with the father of their child. One of them, a 20 year-old, had plans to attend nursing school abroad in Curacao, while her boyfriend and her mother raised the baby in Aruba. The trust and reliance on the older generation is remarkable. Also remarkable was the woman's optimism as she commented on her own perceived ability to cope with being away from her baby while attending school. She talked about the transition as if it were something very normative. Again, the islanders have a history of transience that likely affects their ability to cope with single-parenthood or other challenges more easily than might other groups. Also, the fact that this has been normalized in society is also a protective factor. The woman did state that she and her boyfriend planned to marry, but not until she finished school.

Older participants commented on their concern for the younger generation. Some believe that the young people lack the necessary maturity to make a marriage work. Of the younger generation, one man said, "They don't have moral principles—values—like we had before." An Aruban professional commented that the "new generation is confused," and that they "don't have authority at home when there's a conflict between the couple." There were 5 references coded in this category of concern for the younger generation—4 from the professionals group, and 1 from the group of men married 7 years or more. Several, when asked what their concerns about marriage in Aruba were, stated simply, "Lack of preparation."

Resources

There's no place like home

The responses given by participants to questions about how they would go about strengthening their marriages demonstrated a strong orientation toward asking family members for help. In particular, many participants expressed that they would ask their parents for help, if they were ever struggling with marriage. More broadly, participants showed an orientation towards experienced adults, whether related to the individual or not.

> Who do I go to? Personally, my father is one. He was married to my mother for 26 years. My father is one, I would go to him. My partner's parents, as well. The president of the church I go to. Everyone who has experience…I'd go to them (Male expecting first child, 2009).

Another male expecting his first child agreed, stating, "You can go to your mother." A woman expecting her first child said, "My parents. . . I think I would go to them. When I am in that situation I'll find out." Although parents were the most commonly cited resource among older adults, other adults such as grandparents, other extended family, and godparents were listed.

> I believe the person who has most helped me is my godmother from my marriage in the Lord. Because—you don't look for a godmother because you need style, or whatever, but you look for a person who in certain moments when you feel overwhelmed, has more life experience and can help you (Man in first year of marriage, 2009).

Professional help and community resources

Some participants referred to professional help as sort of a last resort for couples unable to resolve their issues on their own or with help from family or friends. For example, one male in the cohabiting/engaged group stated that he would go to his father for help ("He has more experience--he's lived longer") but that "if he can't help me it's better to go to a counseling center." Parallel with the sentiment of this statement, most of the focus groups, in response to the question about where they would go for help strengthening their marriage, emphasized natural social resources such as family and friend groups. Occasionally, references to community resources such as "Engaged Encounter," "Pro Famia Feliz," and "counselors" entered the

discussion, but generally only after group members had mentioned the natural social supports on which they reported they would rely.

At the same time, however, a small number of participants seemed to feel professional help would actually be superior to help sought from family or friends. As one single male stated, "professional help is best, because they've studied for it. Not everyone has trust in their parents." A woman in the cohabiting/engaged group said, "When something is going wrong, in order for you to bring it back, I also believe in some sort of counselor, because people who are independent, who are really...who don't take your side or his, who really listen and see, who can tell you, "You're doing such and such wrong."

Where can I turn?

Because there seems to be such a strong orientation towards seeking help and advice from family and friends, very few people mentioned actually feeling unsure about where they would turn for help with their relationship. One expectant father said:

> I still don't know of any place where I could go to resolve a problem with my spouse. You can go to your mother. Still I don't know any place you can go in Aruba. Something needs to be done. There's not help. No one there to help me (Father expecting first child, 2009).

While this was a very rare sentiment in these focus groups, apparently there are those who feel unsure of where to turn. One speculation is that perhaps foreign-born Arubans feel less familiar with community resources. It is also possible that they feel less comfortable accessing them because of race/class divisions, culture differences, or a language barrier. Again, this sentiment of not knowing where to turn was very rare.

Preferences, Expectations, and Ideas

Course location

Several participants expressed a need for earlier education, beginning with children in school. Similar to programs on the island for courses in hospitality, it was suggested, a school with courses on marriage ought to exist. Another suggested that just as Aruban children learn Dutch, starting with the basics at a young age in school, they ought to be instructed on marriage starting at an early age, with increasing levels of difficulty throughout the years.

Many echoed the following sentiment, which states that perhaps marriage and relationship education should begin at an early age, in school:

> Schools—in schools. Marriage is something very important. I think young children need to learn that. They need to learn family values, from the time they are small. I'm sure it would have results, if they know what it (marriage) is.

Three men's focus groups had participants who did not specify a location, but indicated it should be a "private" location, ensuring they would not be seen or heard by others. Participants from two of the women's focus groups suggested a remote location, in nature. It is unclear from the comments themselves whether this was also to ensure privacy or confidentiality, or whether an outdoor ambiance was simply preferable.

The most common responses were: churches, marriage/family centers, schools, and public places such as convention centers. There was not an overwhelming preference for any one type of location—in fact, a couple of participants in the same group mentioned that while a church might be a personal preference for some Arubans in terms of location, educators ought to consider that other Arubans would be deterred if they heard the word "church."

Price

At least half of the participants claimed they would be willing to pay "whatever it takes" to get the help they needed for their marriage. The question may not have been sufficiently defined, because there was a wide range of interpretation by participants as reflected in their answer. Because there was no specification in the question with regards to duration or frequency, it was difficult to code the answers, which sometimes referred to a specific amount of time and other times did not.

In addition, participants may have answered by saying they would be willing to pay "whatever it takes" in an effort to maintain social desirability. It is also possible that the majority of participants had a difficult time conceptualizing a monetary price for a service they had never before received, such as marriage education. Of course, it is also possible that participants genuinely felt they would "pay anything" for marriage education. Whatever the explanation, there was a wide range of answers to this question, and the prevailing answer was "whatever it takes."

Course setup and instructor attributes

Many participants, across all genders and stages, expressed a desire to have visually-based, interactive courses. While some advocated the use of PowerPoint presentations, the resounding theme was a desire for interaction, group discussion, role plays, and drama. A woman in the cohabiting/engaged females group stated:

> I think it would be a good idea to have videos, or sketches (drama, or acting out). Role plays. Seeing it visually as well, you can see the situation and you can give good examples and bad examples. You see the difference. Instead of just listening, see it as well (Woman cohabiting/engaged, 2009).

While some participants mentioned a preference for written materials, others explicitly stated that educators should avoid assigning too much reading. One suggestion given was to prepare handouts that couples could take home with them, in order to refer back to lecture points made in class.

The preference for religious-based instruction was an overwhelming theme across all groups. Many talked about using the Bible, faith in God, or a social support system from church as a means of overcoming marital troubles. The simple fact that religiosity and spirituality were so often discussed in the focus groups points to a definite preference, at least among the sample, for the inclusion of this aspect in MRE.

Although we did not ask a question focused specifically on instructor attributes, comments from participants were very informative as to desired educator traits. Comments in most of the groups connoted an overall value of age and experience in potential marriage-strengthening individuals. With the exclusion of three groups, all groups mentioned parents and/or experienced friends or others as resources they currently turned to or would turn to in order to strengthen their marriage. Evident in these responses was a high respect given to elderly and experienced individuals.

Several participants mentioned their reliance on parents and other relatives for marital counsel. One participant stated:

> I have a good relationship with my father, and I ask him for a lot of advice. He's got lots of years of experience, and many years with his wife. He explains to me what I should do, how to make a relationship stronger [. . .] he's like my counselor.

The overwhelming preference, however, was for hearing experienced couples who could share real-life examples about their own marriages. In particular, several participants specified this preference even further—not only did they want to hear from experienced couples who were doing well, they wanted to hear from experienced couples who had gone through marital trouble and figured out how to overcome it.

This preference might actually be hard to come by—in considering another common theme, which was that many participants feel people are too ashamed to attend MRE, it occurred to the researcher that finding educators who would speak about their own problems might be difficult. However, it was the most commonly-stated preference in terms of course format. One participant shared:

> Experiences of couples that have gone through these problems. Seeing their problems, you realize that it's normal; also, what they did, or what they went through." Others suggested that couples, rather than individuals, give the classes—"people who already have gone through very difficult things, and who are now sharing more than ever with one another. That's the best way.

A small number of participants would want an instructor to have academic experience and teach a research-based course. One stated a preference for an instructor with both personal experience and a foundation in research when he said:

> Couples are needed who recount their life experiences—how it is. That's what I would like to see done, in order to be happy forever. [. . .] Life doesn't always go smoothly. Data and information from those who do research [are needed], because you see the percentage of divorce compared to marriage (Man married several years, 2009).

In contrast, the overwhelming majority seemed to prefer an instructor with vast life experience over a well-educated instructor.

> Not someone who has just studied from a book and who comes to tell me how it is. If I'm not married, I can't know how to be married. In my opinion, I can't rely on people like that. I am becoming a father now. They say, 'yes, do this—do that.' But I don't have the child in my hands—I can't say what I will do or what I won't do with him/her. You learn by being a father. I think the same thing [about marriage]—nobody can teach you how to be a good husband or how to approach your marriage. You yourself must do your best. If a problem comes and I want help, it will be with my mom, my dad (Man expecting first child, 2009).

Desired Skills/Knowledge

Communication was among the most commonly-stated skills participants would hope to gain from a course on relationships. Others included patience, forgiveness, problem management, and financial help. Conflict management or anger management was listed by several groups as a desired skill. In addition, many of the single participants wanted to gain information that would help them to get to know their partner better, and decide whether to marry their partner.

Information on avoiding serious problems was a theme unique to males. One participant specified that he would want to know how to avoid infidelity or how to deal with it if it happened. Women were the only ones to mention parenting education when asked about skills they would like to gain—in fact, it seemed a little strange at first that they mentioned this at all. It would be helpful to understand what sort of information they were looking for and how they

felt this would strengthen their marriages—was it the desire for their husbands to become more skilled and involved in family tasks, or simply the idea that increased satisfaction as a caregiver would equate with increased satisfaction in the marriage?

Suggestions for Motivating Couples to Participate

Several participants suggested that individuals would need to have some intrinsic motivation, and that educators would be able to provide individuals with very little real motivation to attend marriage education. This intrinsic motivation, they stated, could come from an existing problem that the participant felt needed resolving. Others suggested that the education would have to be mandatory, just as premarital courses are for couples marrying in the Catholic Church.

Some participants from different groups suggested an informational session. They seemed to think this would be especially helpful in persuading men to participate in marriage education, helping them to become more comfortable with the format of the course and promising confidentiality before requiring any sort of commitment. One woman shared:

> Inform both, or just come one day, give the necessary information. . . what will happen, maybe or the points that will be discussed. . . ask about their life, information, what exactly will happen, with the course that you can. . . because a lot of people don't want to share parts of their lives with others. That is, if they have problems. I think necessary information needs to be given.

Along with having an intrinsic motivation to attend marriage education, and having adequate information, many participants stated "word of mouth" as a powerful motivator. If they heard

testimonials of other couples who had gained from the experience, they would be much likely to attend themselves, they reported.

Unique Themes

Intercultural marriage

A couples' counselor on the island who participated in the focus group for professionals, noted the difficulty in intercultural marriage. He shared:

> I notice also with intercultural marriages, an Aruban marries a foreigner, with a completely different culture. I also notice that when we (Arubans) go to Holland, we adapt to their culture. But when we come back, if they can't handle it, (things end in divorce) (Professional male, 2009).

Very few participants commented on the difficulties of making an intercultural marriage work. In fact, aside from this one comment, none of the other groups mentioned this. A handful of other participants in the professionals group nodded or verbally affirmed the comment made by this participant. Perhaps intercultural marriage is so much the norm that there is very little perception of stress or difficulty associated with it; perhaps Arubans have built up an effective skill set for dealing with challenges a westerner might perceive as being inherent to that type of relationship.

Parenting

While the group of women married at least 7 years were asked to discuss concerns about marriage and what they felt they could do to have a strong marriage, it became evident in their comments that they had a strong focus on child-rearing. Although it was not always explicitly clear in their comments how they felt this related to the marriage, the majority of their comments related to the challenges in raising children in a dual-earning household. The following comment

hints at the need for mothers and father to develop the skills to communicate and educate their children:

> I think that my children depend a lot on their parents. They need their parents, who should go and update also with all these changes they are going through. All the changes that your child receives from outside and from inside the home. A lot of times I see that the parents themselves say, "No—they will learn that at school, they will learn that from friends", let's say, talking about sex, right? I know a lot of times that is how the parents think. But they won't talk about that, because they are embarrassed, they don't feel free to talk about it (Woman married several years, 2009).

The following comment hints at possible divisions between partners when there is disagreement over parenting or discipline:

> I think that when the couple—the kids when the father says something, and the kid turns and goes to ask mom, and the mom says, 'yes, go, you may go.' Then when the father gets angry, I believe in that moment, the couple has a problem. I think it's needs to be that when the father tells the child yes, you can go to such and such a place, the mom goes and asks him, "What did you tell our child?" And then so that they can be in agreement, what do they do? Both need to say yes, or both no. Not one say yes, and one no. Because today, they (kids) know how to manipulate/trick you. Because when the kid asked, the dad said no. Mom said okay. They already know that when dad says no, to keep begging and begging, and mom and dad will let them go eventually. In other words, you need to stick to what you say. If you say no, then no. If

> you say yes, then okay. You need to stick to what you say (Woman married several years, 2009).

Another woman shared about the difficulty resulting from machismo in the home as it relates to the parent-child relationship:

> I speak for my home. The temperament of my spouse, and of my daughter, is very strong. But I always, when he speaks very strongly—'such and such a thing,' like a dictator—I have always spoken with him, and he has corrected that. He speaks loudly to her, and she doesn't have good communication with him—everything is with me. "Mommy, such and such, Mommy..." I tell her that if it's with her dad, she should speak to him. So, she doesn't have that confidence with him—that's really important. And well, I speak with her, telling her that her father has his temperament, but we need to be patient with him, and she understands me— and I try to make it so that. . . (Woman married several years, 2009).

Again, the importance of the male influence in child rearing is mentioned here:

> There's another difficulty as well: the spiritual part. For example, with the men, it could be alcohol, or they could have an addiction with cigarettes—that's the model for our home. Because he is the head of the family, the children follow the footsteps of their father. Maybe the mother, too. That's a model to teach our children. We need to have certain behavior in our home. I believe that the place for education is in our home. Everything starts at home. If I do bad things at home, our kids leave the home and do

> them, too. Therefore, education is part of our home. The man as well as the woman, need to define their roles (Woman married several years, 2009).

Location

In contrast to the majority of responses suggesting conference centers, hotels, churches, and schools as an ideal location for courses, a small number of participants—mainly females—mentioned they would prefer courses to take place in a remote location. One woman suggested rotating locations according to the subject of the course—for example, she suggested meeting on the beach to discuss "lighter" topics and meeting in a church to discuss more serious ones. Another unique suggestion was to provide the education on a cruise ship—couples could pay for a nice vacation on a cruise and receive marriage education at the same time.

Summary

This chapter has focused on the responses to the fourteen questions asked in the focus groups. Themes which were common to several groups were presented, as well as themes which were unique to a particular portion of the marital life stage or to a particular gender. In addition, themes which appeared across different questions were presented, with the fourteen questions organized into three categories of questions. Further discussion of these themes and recommendations for MRE will be presented in the Discussion chapter.

CHAPTER 5—Discussion

Our discussion returns to the three sensitizing questions asked at the outset of this project. 1) What are common concerns about marriage in Aruba? 2) What ideas do Arubans have about how to strengthen marriage? 3) What preferences do Arubans have regarding MRE, including aspects such as price, location, promotion, and format? These points will be discussed under *Key Findings*, followed by a discussion of the researcher's observations and experience related to cultural dynamics on the island throughout the research process. Recommendations for MRE will be given, followed by limitations and ideas for future research.

Key Findings

Common Concerns

The most common concerns about marriage were 1) insufficient relationship skills, 2) divorce, 3) financial problems, and 4) infidelity. These concerns were common to males and females and across different marital life stages. Other concerns such as transition to marriage and gender roles represent deep contextual patterns within the Aruban culture. As discussed in the literature review, the Aruban culture has not always provided a context for traditional, two-partner families. Instead, many families immigrated and men and women—married or not—often resided in separate countries for work. These situations seem to form a context for multiple partner relationships or extramarital affairs. It is possible that these norms are integrated into the culture of Arubans today.

While the western assumption is that a high level of distress is associated with infidelity, the researcher also notes the possibility that embedded in Aruba's culture is a sense of normalcy

surrounding infidelity. This normalcy of multiple partners and infidelity was evident in several comments by participants. The prevalence of affairs speaks to the transient nature of marriage in Aruba, which has been shaped by the island's history of slavery and transience. The trend seems to have been accepted somewhat by the younger generation, based on comments made by participants in the earlier marital life stages. It is possible that the economics play an ongoing role in the formation of extramarital affairs: one participant commented on the difficulty when women earn more than their partners, and several participants commented on the difficulty of both spouses working and having little time to spend with one another. These comments speak to cultural ideals in Aruba, in which men are the primary breadwinners. If women are making more money than their partners, the men may feel displaced from their traditional roles. Men may look to other women in the workplace for validation.

Whatever the root cause of the infidelity, it is possible that the Aruban culture provides its members with some sort of unwritten script about how to cope with infidelity. As noted in the results section of this document, one woman cited her mother’s commitment to the marriage and forgiveness as key components in a successful marriage (Beckstead, 2012, p. 60). Perhaps Aruban culture teaches a sense of resiliency surrounding affairs, providing ample modeling of marriages that are able to survive the impact of an affair. In addition to modeling, the ability to make a marriage work despite infidelity may also be increased by supportive dialogue within the culture—for example, mothers who forgave an unfaithful spouse might pass the message to their children that making a marriage work is a priority, despite infidelity. This message, if not given explicitly, is implicitly given when children see their parents or others work through infidelity to stay together.

Another important component of a curriculum addressing marriage and relationships in Aruba would be to address gender role identity. While Aruba's unique history seems to have shaped independent and strong women, this strength and independence may be at odds with the cultural ideal of more traditional gender roles. However, with continued prevalence of infidelity and single motherhood, women are likely to develop strength and independence. MRE in Aruba could address the development of these attributes in women, assisting them in coping with negative life events and also assisting women and their partners to examine their gender role ideals and the potential clash between the ideals and the reality.

Cohabitation provides yet another example of a clash between the island's ideals of traditional marriage and family relationships, and the reality of non-traditional unions, including living together prior to marriage or instead of marrying. Cohabitation seems to be consistent before marriage among most Arubans, and the transition to marriage may be rushed in some cases when a couple becomes pregnant. An interesting note here is the conflict between traditional Catholicism and the transient state of marriage. These two dynamics seem to fight for attention. In other words, while it may be difficult for many to commit to a long-term relationship, there is also perhaps a negative stigma attached to parenthood out of wedlock. MRE could focus on helping Arubans who are single or cohabiting to consider the factors weighing in their relationship decisions—including religious beliefs, personal experience, and cultural norms.

Program developers should be aware that these are prevalent dynamics and that some concern exists about these trends. Courses should be tailored to address these concerns, with specific content regarding gender role development in the context of Aruba's culture, as well as assisting Arubans in examining their ideology and expectations. Further probing to understand the preferred type of education with regards to affairs would be beneficial (i.e., in addressing

affair prevention, as well as coping and healing following infidelity). Specifically examining male and female dynamics and expectations within the context of infidelity would provide a learning environment for both sexes.

Strengthening Marriage

Arubans shared several ideas about how to strengthen marriage. An interest in MRE was noted, although this ought to be tempered some by the fact that several suggested it should be mandatory or built in to the school system, indicating that some people might not actually go to great lengths to access education on their own. Alternatively, this suggestion could be interpreted as Arubans' having a sense that this type of education is necessary and should be prioritized within the school system.

In general, however, a preference for support of family and friends seemed to outweigh this preference for formal education. The strong social orientation on the island was evident in the many participants who stated they would go to family members or friends for help if their marriage was struggling. Many participants suggested spending increased time together as a couple, a common thread being that a majority of couples today are dual-earning partnerships. There seems to be some disconnect between most participants and the historical background, which indicates that many families had dual-earning partnerships and non-traditional unions, many living thousands of miles apart. Some of the comments which indicated distress over dual-earning partnerships seemed to imply that there had been a relatively recent demographic shift from a more traditional, single-earner household. Perhaps there is a segment of the population for which this was the case more recently.

Preferences for MRE

With regards to preferences for MRE, the participants were almost uniformly interested in having instructors with personal life experience; several even mentioned that they would prefer instructors to have gone through some difficult times themselves in their marriage. It is likely that there is a sense of security in being educated by a person who has experienced the same struggles as the learners—in a way, this normalizes the experience and validates what the learners are going through, eliminating or reducing shame. Additionally, the learners can feel safe and secure knowing that the educator found a way to overcome the problem.

A wide range of prices and locations were mentioned, making it difficult to narrow down common preferences. It appears most participants would be open to accessing MRE in a church, a school, or convention center and the majority of participants suggested they would pay what was necessary if their marriage needed help, rather than suggesting an actual amount. Several participants suggested the Aruban government should implement earlier relationship education, perhaps as part of the public school system. This indicates an interest in and openness to MRE, although it also suggests some degree of passivity or shame about actually seeking out and participating in MRE. This sort of mentality might be typical of an island nation which had been possessed by Spanish and Dutch nations for the majority of its history.

Meta-Research Findings

As described in Corbin and Strauss (1990), the qualitative researcher remains open to meta-level processes that occur during the data collection. There were several observations that seemed worth noting.

First, the focus group facilitator was an Aruban male who became interested in the project due to his extensive work with Aruban families as the president of a non-profit organization associated with the Catholic Church. He had directed numerous sessions of

Marriage Encounter and Engaged Encounter, and a large number of participants in the study were people he had referred from Church, Encounter, or as otherwise personal acquaintances. This help in identifying individuals in the different marital life stages and persuading several of them to participate was invaluable in the completion of this study. However, it would be negligent to overlook the effect his influence, as focus group facilitator, may have had on some of the responses.

The facilitator was given a basic script for the focus groups, although slight deviation was appropriate at times to foster greater group participation or to ensure groups did not last more than about two hours. At times, however, the facilitator seemed to join the discussion, asserting some of his own ideas and biases. There were only a handful of such instances, which were systematically coded and will be discussed here. For the most part, they seemed to cause fairly minor deviations in the group discussion, although this is difficult to judge.

These instances, coded as “undue facilitator influence,” usually occurred when group members were momentarily quiet after hearing a question. A couple of times, they occurred when the facilitator appeared to be looking for a particular answer that group members were not giving. For example, when group members in one focus group seemed unsure how to respond regarding price of MRE, the facilitator asked them, “Would you pay 200 florins?” In another instance, he began suggesting locations for MRE courses to be held, in addition to those being named by group members.

There were also some instances in which the facilitator would seek to encourage group members by sharing inspirational stories about couples who had been helped through MRE. This felt, at times, like an advertisement for Engaged Encounter or Marriage Encounter. It also felt, at times, like participants were being encouraged to share their own experiences specific to these

programs. Once or twice when the facilitator made comments that seemed off-track or biasing, the researcher suggested he return to the script, and he shrugged her off, nodding at her and saying, “This is okay.” Rather than engaging in a power struggle with the facilitator, the researcher noted the dynamic, which was unexpected and seemed somewhat inappropriate to her. Some participants had mentioned *machismo*—male dominance—as a dynamic in Aruban families that could be an obstacle to accessing MRE.

Although the researcher can only comment on her singular experience with the facilitator, she felt this pattern of interactions could be based on unspoken expectations that the group facilitator, as an older male, would be in charge. This also fits with the several comments by participants indicating a respect for older persons and a tendency to look to them for direction. The researcher was a European American, undergraduate-aged female from the United States. Although she recruited the group facilitator, and acted as his employer, he was sometimes resistant to direction. He was an Aruban male, perhaps in his mid-50s. *Machismo* could have implications for effective delivery. It might be worth considering having separate courses for males and females, or it might be important to have a male instructor where males were present, or a very commanding female presence as an instructor with males present.

Another point of interest for the researcher was the idea of social desirability bias (Edwards, 1957) as not only a topic mentioned by participants, but also as a meta-research process occurring throughout the groups. Social desirability bias refers to the tendency to reject negative attributes, believing they pertain to other people but not us. Several participants mentioned that Arubans would likely have qualms about participating in MRE because they felt ashamed, they didn't want people to know they had problems, or they were worried about what others would think if they sought help. However, most of them referred to other people in their

comments, making statements such as “A lot of people don't want others to know they need help.”

The researcher noted that this very phenomenon might be occurring in the focus groups themselves. For example, one participant began to respond to a question about how to strengthen marriage, but quickly followed by saying, “Not that we've had problems with each other” (referring to his relationship with his partner). Another participant stated, “In my case I don't have problems. But I see a lot of people that have problems—let's say, the financial part—that is a great problem for a lot of people.” While these participants could genuinely feel they don't have problems in their personal relationships, it seems that some number of “problems” is universal to most relationships. If nothing else, it was interesting to note the efforts made to mention a lack of problems in the group setting, especially in light of so many comments regarding the fear of attending MRE courses because it would be shaming to be seen as having problems.

This social desirability bias could have implications for MRE delivery that would be comfortable for participants. As many participants stated, Arubans tend to be interested in interactive education including role plays and skits. Perhaps rather than inviting Arubans to act out a problem or a dialogue they had had with their spouse, they could be asked to act out a more neutral scenario, perhaps something a conversation or scenario they were familiar with from someone else’s life, or an imagined scenario. This might help them to feel more comfortable while participating in the role plays, which seemed to be a favorite method of delivery.

Recommendations

First, certain topics should be emphasized or added to existing curricula. Infidelity and divorce/remarriage should be integrated into education programs, with an emphasis on both

preventing infidelity and healing when infidelity has occurred. While education might help some participants avoid infidelity or divorce, the reality is that many participants will be dealing with the repercussions of these things, or that they will experience one or the other at some point in their lives. It is believed that helping to normalize participants' experiences of these things will do several things: first, it will help participants to engage in the learning process instead of feeling ashamed of past troubles; second, it will give participants the opportunity to find empathy and support from others who have experienced similar difficulties; third, it will provide material for discussion on how to avoid negative patterns of behavior in the future. Engaging in a candid discussion about infidelity and/or divorce can help participants generate a knowledge of helpful behaviors versus unproductive ones. Other topics which ought to be included in the curriculum are: communication and listening skills, finances, sex, parenting, and conflict management.

Second, confidentiality should be a high priority in providing MRE to Arubans. Shame and embarrassment were cited as major reasons people would not participate in MRE. Assuring confidentiality should be included in marketing efforts, so that potential participants are not deterred from the outset. In addition, educators should be sensitive to participants who do not feel comfortable sharing personal experiences and stories. However, it appears that Arubans would really appreciate hearing real-life stories and examples from others, especially people who have gone through marital troubles themselves. Perhaps in sharing or role play activities, couples could be given the option to use a personal example or to make one up.

Third, there is a strong gender dynamic on the island, and educators should be aware of this. A male and female couple who team teaches the course would be ideal, as both genders in the audience would be more likely to feel validated and represented in the material taught. Additionally, special attention should be given to recruiting male participants. This can be

achieved through a variety of strategies. Women and men should both be contacted to discuss MRE. While women may seem to play an important role in persuading their partners to participate, males should not be left out of the loop. Information should be given directly to the men, with information about how the education will benefit them and what it will entail. An informative meeting might help to provide this information, but personal phone calls or visits could also be used to reach out to male participants. In addition, gender roles can be weaved into the curriculum, helping participants to examine the gender roles prescribed by society and Aruban culture, as well as their own expectations for gender roles.

Fourth, educators should be comfortable sharing their own experiences with the audience as a means of normalizing negative experiences and facilitating a discussion about solutions. Arubans tend to seek help from family members and friends, with more formal education being reserved for more intensive needs. The more closely MRE can resemble an intimate, personal discussion with friends, the more comfortable Aruban participants will feel. Retention rates will likely be higher, as well. Educators need to examine their own shame associated with marital troubles, recognizing that their audience will feel more at ease if they recognize that the educators have had some of the same struggles they are having.

Fifth, educators should be sensitive to cultural norms such as cohabitation, which are very prevalent but may not fit well with the religious background of many MRE programs. Educators should examine their own biases and consider how to model acceptance of life choices different from their own. A decision-making component could be added to the course, giving participants an opportunity to uncover the fears and pressures which they feel surrounding marriage and to weigh their options. Appropriate information should be given about potential relationship risks and benefits of living together before marriage.

Sixth, religion and spirituality are seen by many Arubans as being key to strengthening marriage. Educators should be comfortable facilitating discussion surrounding religion, while maintaining an environment that is accepting of diversity. It would be useful for educators to assist participants in examining the spiritual resources available to them.

Limitations and Future Research

Members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS) were overrepresented, accounting for 29.3% of the sample. This was due to recruitment bias and is a weakness of our sample. 58.6% of the sample was Catholic, and a greater proportion of Catholics would need to be present in a more representative sample. This sampling bias occurred despite efforts to recruit through a variety of agencies, churches, and the media; as evidenced by the sample, the majority of successful recruiting took place within the LDS and Catholic churches.

According to the 2000 Census data, approximately 80% of Arubans are Roman Catholic, with 2.5% listed as Protestant and 3.9% "Other." (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2001). Both the Catholic and the Latter-day Saint Churches have a heavy doctrinal and cultural emphasis on marriage and family; however, there was some concern that the over-representation of Latter-day Saints would bias the data.

In the methodology used for this project, participants' names and demographics were not linked to their responses—the data from each focus group was meant to provide an overall glimpse into the concerns, ideas, and preferences of that particular marital life stage. Therefore, it is not possible to examine the responses of any one religion for reliability testing. However, the groups in which LDS participants were heavily concentrated have been examined against the other groups to identify any outstanding difference from the other groups.

Three groups stood out as being heavily LDS. The women married at least 7 years, in which 4 of 5 participants were LDS; the single women, in which 8 of 9 were LDS; and the men married at least 7 years, in which 2 of 4 participants were LDS. As mentioned in the results, women married 7 years or more made particular mention of child-rearing as a primary concern and also a focus for MRE.

As mentioned in the results section, the women married 7 years were heavily focused on parenting and child-raising. This could have been a function of the LDS emphasis on family, or it could have been a function of the particular stage of life, as most of the other groups were not primarily composed of parents, even if there were some in the group who had children. There were no palpable differences in the single women group or the group of men married 7 or more years.

A large number of participants, in addition to belonging disproportionately to one of a few churches, were also personal acquaintances of either the primary investigator or the focus group facilitator. Many of them had participated previously in a Marriage Encounter course or Engaged Encounter course, of which our focus group facilitator was an instructor. This common experience of relationship education courses within the Catholic Church among many of our participants is likely not representative of the Aruban population, and may have biased our data somewhat. Additionally, although measures were taken to standardize the focus group experience by training the facilitator in focus group methodology, some bias could have occurred when participants knew the facilitator and had been previously acquainted with his personal views. Of course, there is always some degree of measurement error when human interviewers are involved, regardless of efforts to maintain consistency.

There is some concern that the study's focus on marriage, to the exclusion of cohabiting or other types of relationships, might have felt somewhat imposing to the participants, or might have somehow limited our data. The focus on marriage might have deterred some participants who were unmarried or who were otherwise less invested in the institution of marriage. As noted in the results, one female commented about how relationships seem to end one way or another, regardless of whether the partners are married or not. Her comment touches on the fact that relationship problems are common to different types of relationships, including cohabiting relationships and other types of relationships. Given the prevalence of non-traditional partner relationships, a more encompassing approach towards strengthening all types of romantic relationships in Aruba would reach a much greater need. However, the scope of this project was to gain insight into marriage in Aruba. Further research could examine effective education and interventions for additional types of romantic relationships in Aruba.

A less-structured interview might be considered in order to allow for more follow-up on interesting and insightful comments made by participants. In addition, the use of one-on-one interviews could be useful in gathering more in-depth stories from participants. There were several instances when the researcher felt more information about a topic mentioned would have been desirable, but there were time constraints and the goal to adhere to the basic script without major deviation. Further research could center on the key concerns and dynamics identified in this research, using qualitative methods to draw out more information on specific areas such as infidelity or communication patterns in the family. Greater understanding on areas that were identified by Arubans could inform the creation of content area to address them.

Future areas of interest would include program evaluation for marriage education already existing in Aruba, as well as program development and piloting in Aruba, accounting for specific

concerns, preferences, and needs highlighted in this study. Program evaluation would be the key to determining efficacy of current programming, and any new or adapted models introduced in the future. Researchers wishing to either create a culturally sensitive program or adapt a currently-existing program could follow a stage model set forth by Bernal (2010) or select one reviewed by Castro (2004); these outline the process of implementation and evaluation.

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Appendix A – Informed Consent, English

One Happy Island: Assessing Perceived Marriage Education Needs and Interests for the Aruban People
Consent to be a Research Subject

Introduction
This research study is being conducted by Camilla Beckstead and Dr. Stephen F. Duncan from the School of Family Life at Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah, USA, to assess perceptions of need and opportunities for marriage education in Aruba. You were selected for participation in the study because you are one of many potential users of the services we hope to generate in building healthy marriages in the Aruban community.

Procedures
You will be asked to attend a two-hour focus group session held at the Profar Consultancy. During the focus group, you will be asked 14 open-ended questions to probe concerns you have about marriage, and that have specific relevance for the development of marriage education materials and interventions available in your community. You will also be asked several demographic questions such as educational level and religious affiliation. The session will be tape recorded and later transcribed.

Risks/Discomforts
There are minimal risks for participating in a study such as this. However, you may feel emotional discomfort when answering questions about personal beliefs. When participating in the focus group, it is possible that you may feel embarrassed when talking in front of others. The moderator will be sensitive to those who may become uncomfortable.

Benefits
You have the opportunity to voice your opinions and this information could potentially be used to create couples/relationship education that would be beneficial to Arubans.

Confidentiality
All information provided will remain confidential and will only be reported as group data with no identifying information. All data, including questionnaires and tapes/ transcriptions from the focus groups, will be kept in a locked storage cabinet and only those directly involved with the research will have access to them. After the research is completed, the questionnaires and tapes will be destroyed

Compensation
When you leave today, you will receive a gift certificate for $20 to Lucky Store, valid at any Lucky Store in Aruba.

Participation
Participation in this research study is voluntary. You have the right to withdraw at anytime or refuse to participate entirely without jeopardy to yourself.

Questions about the Research
If you have any questions regarding this research, you may contact Camilla Beckstead at cambellsoup@gmail.com or Dr. Duncan at sduncan@byu.edu, 801/422-1796.

Questions about your Rights as Research Participants
If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, you may contact Christopher Dromey, PhD, IRB Chair, 422-6461, 133 TLRB, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT 84602, Christopher_Dromey@byu.edu.

I have read, understood, and received a copy of the above consent, and desire of my own free will to participate in this study.

Signature_____ Date _____

Appendix B – Informed Consent, Papiamento

Un Isla Contento: Determinando Nesesidatnan Persibido den Educacion Matrimonial i Interesnan pa e Pueblo di Aruba.

Consentimento pa Bira Suheto di Investigacion

Introduccion
E investigacion aki ta wordu dirihí pa Camilla Beckstead i Dr. Stephen F. Duncan for di e Skol di Famia i Bida di e Universidat Brigham Young na Provo, Utah, Merka, pa determina persepcionan di nesesidat i oportunidatnan pa educacion matrimonial na Aruba. Bo a wordu seleccioná pa partisipa den e studio aki pasobra bo ta un di e hopi usarionan potencial di e servisionan cu nos ta spera di generá pa edifica matrimonionan saludabel den e comunidat Arubiano.

Prosedimentonan
Bo lo wordu pidí pa asisti un grupo di enfoce ku lo tuma dos ora na Profar Consultancy. Durante e grupo di enfoce, bo lo wordu pidí 14 preguntanan pa haña sa e preocupacion cu bo tin tocante matrimonio, i cu tin relevansia specifico pa e desaroyo di material di educacion matrimonial i intervencionan disponibel den bo comunidat. Bo lo wordu puntrá tambe preguntanan demografico, tal como nivel di educacion, i afiliacion religioso. E session aki lo wordu grabá i despues transcribí.

Riesgo/Incomodidad

Tin un riesgo minimo dor di partisipa den un studio manera esaki. Tog, bo lo por sinti incomodo emocionalmente ora bo ta contesta e preguntanan tocante bo creencia personal. Ora bo ta partisipa den un grupo di enfoce, e ta posibel cu bo lo sinti berguensa ora bo tin cu papia dilanti otronan. E moderador lo ta sensitivo na esnan cu lo por bira incomodo.

Benefisionan
Bo tin e oportunidat pa declara bo opinionan i e informacion aki por potencialmente wordu usá pa crea educacion di relacion/pareha ku lo benefisia e hende Arubiano.

Confidensialidat
Tur informacion duná lo keda confidensial i lo wordu reportá como un informacion di grupo cu niun informacion identificado. Tur informacion, incluyendo questionarionan i grabacion/transcripcion for di e gruponan di enfoce, lo wordu mantené den un gabinet cu yabi i solamente esnan directamente involucrá cu e investigacion lo tin acceso na nan. Despues cu e investigacion lo caba, tur e questionarionan lo wordu destruí.

Compensacion
Ora lo bo caba awe, bo lo risibi un gift certificate di $20 di Lucky Store, valido na cualkier Lucky Store na Aruba.

Partisipacion
Partisipacion den e studio aki ta voluntario. Bo tin e derecho di retira bo mes of ninga di partisipa completamente sin niun daño pa bo.

Preguntanan tocante e Investigacion

Si bo tin cualkier pregunta tocante e investigacion aki, bo por contacta Camilla Beckstead na cambellsoup@gmail.com of Dr. Duncan na sduncan@byu.edu, 801/422-1796.

Preguntanan tocante Bo Derecho como Partisipante di Investigacion
Si bo tin preguntanan tocante bo derechonan como un partisipante di investigacion, bo por contacta Christopher Dromey, PhD, IRB Chair, 801/422-6461, 133 TLRB, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT 84602, Christopher_Dromey@byu.edu.

Mi a lesa, compronde, i risibi un copia di e consentimentu di ariba, i ta desea di mi mes un voluntat pa partisipa den e studio aki.

Firma_____ Fecha _____

Appendix C - Demographics

Focus Group Demographics Questionnaire

What is your age?_____

What is the highest level of education you have completed?
___Less than high school
___High school equivalency (GED)
___High school diploma
___Some college, not currently enrolled
___Some college, currently enrolled
___Associate's degree
___Bachelor's degree
___Graduate or professional degree, not completed
___Graduate or professional degree, completed

What is your religious affiliation?
___Catholic
___Latter-day Saint
___Protestant (Baptist, Episcopalian, Lutheran, Methodist, Presbyterian, etc.)
___Other (Please specify:_____)
___None

Your current personal yearly gross income (before taxes & deductions):

0.	None	5.	$80,000-$99,999
1.	Under $20,000	6.	$100,000-$119,999
2.	$20,000-$39,999.	7.	$120,000-139,999
3.	$40,000-$59,999	8.	$140,000-$159,000
4.	$60,000-$79,999	9.	$160,000 or above

What is your ethnic background?
___Aruban (your parents were born and raised in Aruba)
___Latino
___Dutch
___Jamaican
___Other (please specify)

If you are from an ethnic background other than Aruban, please specify at what age you came to Aruba:
___Birth

___Between 1 and 5 years old
___Between 6 and 10 years old
___Between 11 and 18 years old
___Other (please specify)

Appendix D – Demographics, Papiamento

Focus Groups Demographics Questionnaire—Papiamento Version

Cuanta aña bo tin?_____

Cua ta e nivel di educacion cu bo a completá?
___Menos di Mavo/Havo
___Diploma di Mavo of Havo
___Algun tempu di universidat pero no awor aki
___Algun tempu di universidat, i awor aki mi ta asisti
___Grado technico
___Licensiatura
___Graduá of grado profesional no completado
___Graduá of grado profesional completado

Cua ta bo afiliacion religioso?
___Catolico
___Santu di Delaster Dianan
___Protestant (Bautista, Episcopano, Luterano, Methdista, Presbiteriano, etc.)
___Otro (Por favor spesifica:_____)
___Niun

Bo ingreso anual personal (prome cu belating & deduccionan):

0.	Nada	5.	$80,000-$99,999
1.	Menos cu $20,000	6	$100,000-$119,999
2.	$20,000-$39,999.	7.	$120,000-139,999
3.	$40,000-$59,999	8.	$140,000-$159,000
4.	$60,000-$79,999	9.	$160,000 of mas

Cua ta bo antesedente etnico?
___Arubiano (bo mayornan a nase i a wordu criá na Aruba)
___Latino
___Hulandes
___Jamaicano
___Otro (por favor spesifica)

Si bo no ta pertenese na un antensedente etnico Arubiano, por fabor spesifica e edat cu bo tabatin ora bo a bini na Aruba:
___Nasementu
___Entre 1 i 5 aña di edat

___Entre 6 i 10 aña di edat
___Entre 11 i 18 aña di edat
___Otro (por favor spesifica)

Appendix E – Focus Group Guidelines

Guidelines for Conducting Focus Groups

One Happy Island Marriage Education Study

Before the Session:

1. Become familiar with the topic being discussed (see handout).
1. Set up chairs so that all members can see each other, such as around a round or rectangular table.
2. Provide name tents for members.
3. Small talk is essential just prior to group discussion. Greet participants and begin small talk while avoiding issues to be discussed during the focus group session. This time will allow a moderator to observe the interaction. Name tents can be strategically placed around the table after observing participants. For example, you may want to strategically place those who are extremely shy or those who may dominate the discussion.

Facilitating the Session:

1.**Know well your roles**. The facilitator directs the discussion and takes minimal notes. The notetaker takes comprehensive notes, operates the recorder, handles environmental conditions, and responds to unexpected interruptions (e.g., late comers, children someone brought, etc.). Although discussions are being recorded via tape recording, notes should be so complete that it can be used even if the tape recorder did not work. One should never rely completely on a tape recorder.

1.**Be mentally prepared**. Facilitators should be mentally alert, listen well, and think quickly on their feet. Become very familiar with the questions; some recommend memorizing them.

2.**Begin the discussion.** The recommended pattern of discussion is **welcome, overview and topic, ground rules, first question**. The overview should provide an honest discussion of the about the purpose of the study and the importance of the topic of group discussion. Ground rules are suggestions that will help guide the discussion and include rules such as: minimize or eliminate side conversations, one person will speak at a time, don't criticize what others have to say, and treat everyone's ideas with respect. The first question should be one that "breaks the ice" and encourages everyone to talk.

3.**Pause and probe.** As a general rule, a facilitator should pause for five seconds after a participant talks before beginning to talk. This five second pause gives other participants a chance to jump in. Probes, such as "would you explain that further?" or "Would you give me an example?" should be used to request additional information

4.**Keep discussions flowing** and on track, guide discussions back from irrelevant topics, make transitions into another question, and be sensitive to mood of the group. Know when to move onto another question.

5.**Be aware of group dynamics.** Facilitators should watch for the expert, the dominant talker, the shy participant, the rambler, etc.

6.**Be aware of your own responses to participants.** Avoid head nodding, and short verbal responses such as "ok", "yes", "uh huh", "correct", "that's good" etc.

7.**Be prepared for the unexpected.** Teams should be prepared for unexpected events such as no one showing up (make sure you bring list and phone numbers), only a few showing up (hold group anyway), group does not want to talk (ask individuals questions, go around the room and everyone answers specific question), the group gets involved and don't want to leave (have formal ending), hazardous weather (call everyone and cancel).

Ending the Session:

1. Thank the group for participating. The moderator may choose to summarize what was said and ask if anything was missed.

1. Provide refreshments. Most will expect it as a common courtesy. Quiet snacks are recommended (if you allow participants to pick up snacks and eat them during the focus group session). Traditional cultural food is preferred.

Special Considerations:

1. You may encounter derogatory remarks about ethnic groups (including your own).
1. Be aware that you may encounter specific dialect of group participants. Try to get some familiarity with these dialects.

Appendix F – Focus Group Script

Focus Group Introduction

Suggested Script

Welcome
Welcome to tonight's focus group for the One Happy Island Marriage Education study. I'm (say your name, perhaps your native country), and I'll be your moderator for the evening. This is (introduce notetaker), who will be taking notes. We'll also be recording the session so we don't miss any of your great ideas.

Purpose and Importance
The purpose of this focus group is to learn more about how to best strengthen marriages in the Aruban community. Your ideas will be used to help develop the resources that will be available to Aruban couples for strengthening their relationship.

Review Informed Consent and Brief Survey
In front of you is the Informed Consent form for you to sign. Note that you will be asked 14 questions to probe concerns you have about marriage, and that have specific relevance for the development of marriage strengthening resources in Aruba. The session will be tape recorded and later transcribed. Attached to the Informed Consent form are a few questions we would like to answer, so we know a little more about our group members.

Ground Rules
To help us accomplish tonight's goal, we need to review a few ground rules for our discussion:

1. One person speaks at a time.
1. Treat everyone's ideas with respect. Don't criticize what others have to say.
2. Stay focused on the question.
3. Keep things moving. When enough has been said on a question, move on.
4. Stay with the group. Avoid side conversations.

Ice Breaker
Before getting started, let's get more acquainted. I've already introduced myself. Let's introduce ourselves, what our native land is, and one thing to help us remember you by.

Turn on Tape Recorder NOW!

First Question
Now we are ready for our first question. (Proceed with the focus group questions.)

Appendix G – Letter from Facilitator

To Whom It May Concern:

We write this letter to express our interest and support for the study to be conducted by Cammie Beckstead and Dr. Stephen Duncan in July and September of this year, 2009. As members of the Aruban community, and in positions of service to Aruban families, we hope to broaden our efforts to educate effectively concerning marriage, and increase our ability to reach Aruban families. We hope to help them to strengthen their marriages, thereby strengthening our society as a whole.

We perceive great value in the results of the present study. We anticipate that the results of this study will give us some insight into current needs and preferences for marriage education. As we learn about these needs and preferences, we will be better prepared to help strengthen Aruban families.

We intend to notify other interested professionals and individuals about the ongoing study, as well as recommend eligible couples as participants in the study. We also offer Profar Consultancy as a facility in which to hold the focus groups for this research study.

Sincerely,

Hasette & Greta Riley, President

Fundacion Pro Famia Feliz

Tel: 297-583-2211

Cell: 297-593-2211 / 297-730-2211

E-mail: pffriley@yahoo.com