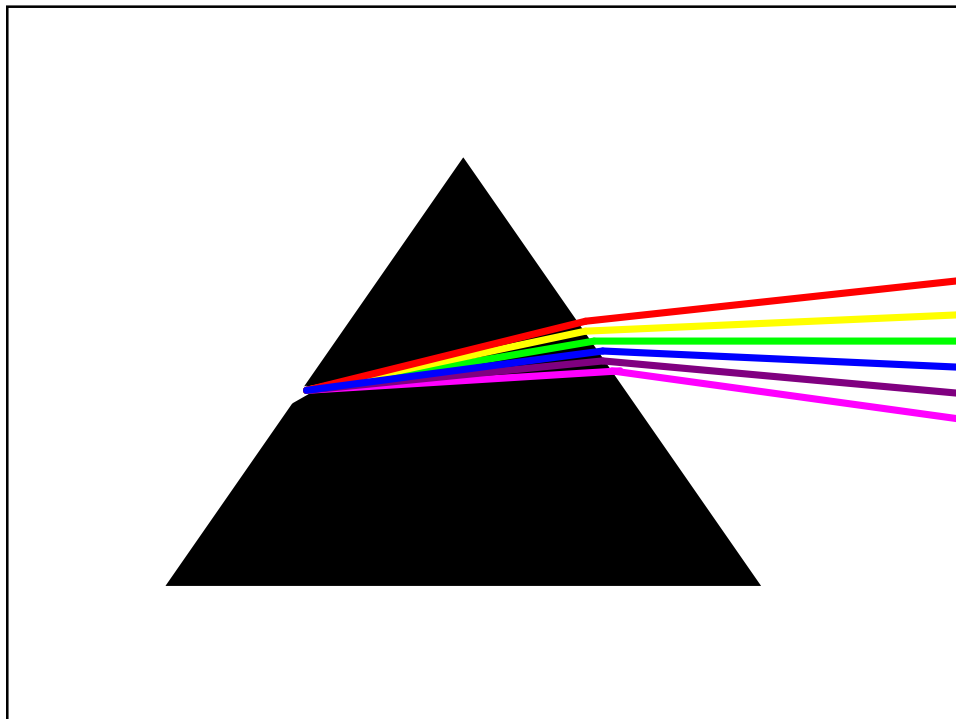
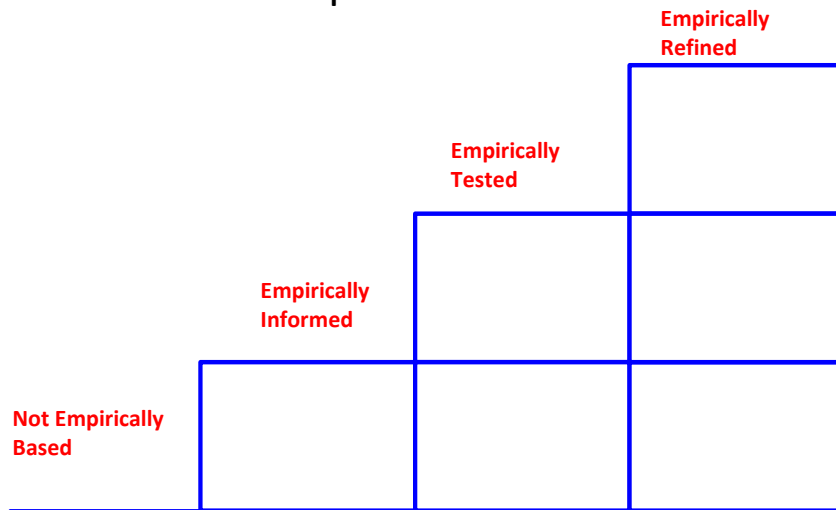


Research: Taking the Opportunities You Have While Developing Those You Wish For

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Best Practices are Built from a Sound Empirical Basis



Measurement Issues

- Self-report or objective measurement or both?
- Divorce? Assessing long-enough to detect?
 - Sample retention is critical to interpretation
- Domestic aggression
- Measures designed to show immediate impact vs. measure and methods able to show real long-term change?
- Customer service information: Ratings of things to inform you as to how to improve what you do

Standard Measures, Published Measures, and Home Grown

- It is wise to use some measures that are widely accepted or used in other studies.
- There are few “standardized” measures widely used in the study of romantic relationships (and, technically, of those that do exist, you’d have to pay a lot to use them).
 - Standardized measures are based on large samples with known characteristics that allow precise comparison to tables of things like percentiles. This is not needed and not very valuable in the study of romantic relationships and outcomes.
 - Standardized measures are important for things like measuring child developmental outcomes.
- But, it is also wise to develop some items of your own that are tailored to your focus and understanding of what you are trying to change.
 - (Do not fail to measure something important to you because there is not an official measure of it!)

A Wise Step

- Where possible, if the data you collect may become really important, run your measures by a researcher who has done outcome studies.
- Experienced researchers can usually rapidly spot problems in how you are going about measuring things.

Common Errors:

These Matter The Most if There Are Serious Plans for Use of the Outcome Data

- In research on couples, failing to have a way you can match up the forms from the two partners.
- In pre-post and follow-up designs, failing to have a way to match up a person's forms from each time point.
 - e.g., data are worthless and not analyzable if you don't know which pre goes with which post and which follow-up form, etc.

Data Collection and Analysis Efforts Can Be Tuned to Who You May Need to Provide Evidence To

- The more money that is at stake, the higher the standards for what may be taken as evidence
- Some decisions makes are very unsophisticated about data, and you may need less substantial efforts than you think to provide evidence they will be satisfied with.

Control Groups?

- It is useful to have comparison groups but not all comparison groups are useful.
- In many community level project without a serious research budget, the best evidence of impact you may be able to obtain is by measuring your participants before and after services, and at some follow-up. (i.e., no control group)

A Complex Question:
When is Break-Up or Even Divorce a
Positive Outcome (and for whom?)

- Take the time to think hard and well about what relationship break-ups might mean in your area of work.
 - When are they a good outcome?
 - When might they be a bad outcome?

Family Stability Project New (provocative) Result

- Randomized Trial of Premarital Education
 - PREP offered by university team or by clergy/lay-leaders within their churches
 - Typical offering in churches (NO: Naturally Occurring Services)

Divorce Outcomes

- The couples in the PREP groups improved more in communication early on and maintained those gains for some time.
- In terms of divorce, the groups were all similar in long-term odds of divorce.
 - While we expected the PREP groups to do the best on this outcome, it is true that most all couples in this study got a pretty solid premarital education experience.
 - The Naturally Occurring services are NOT a “no treatment” control group. They got solid premarital education and did as well on divorce as those receiving PREP.
 - Hence, these findings parallel general findings of positive impacts from premarital education. (e.g., Stanley, Amato, Johnson, & Markman, 2006)

Long-Term Divorce Outcomes Moderated by Premarital Negativity

- We tested if couple outcomes varied based on premarital level of negative communication and physical aggression.
- These dimensions of negativity prior to taking premarital education DID moderate outcomes.

– Markman, Rhoades, & Stanley (under review)

Long-Term Divorce Outcomes Moderated by Premarital Negativity

- Couples with high negativity and/or aggression prior to marriage:
 - More likely to divorce if got PREP
 - More likely to stay together if got Naturally Occurring Services
- Couples with lower negativity prior to marriage:
 - More likely to remain married if got PREP
 - More likely to divorce if got Naturally Occurring Services

In Plain English

- Our interpretation is this (and it fits what one could expect if taking seriously the notion of teaching people about healthy marriage/relationship dynamics):
- Couples taking PREP were exposed to much more information about what is healthy and not, including what is damaging for children, than couples receiving typical church offerings for premarital education.

- Those in the most negative relationships taking PREP learned more about the damaging effects of such patterns.
- Quite possibly, a subset of these couples then became more, not less, likely to divorce because they had a better understanding of such patterns that, for some, likely did not change enough over time.

- Conversely, couples with more serious difficulties regarding negatives prior to coming to premarital education may have received responded more to commitment oriented messages in naturally occurring premarital education, becoming more likely to stick it out.

Implications

- We need to replicate this, but this is actually a finding consistent with the notion of teaching toward healthy relationships, not merely stable relationships.
- The findings in the Baltimore of the BSF study in the US may bear a similar pattern (there were more break-ups for those who received the services). The services may have led to the most deficient relationships in that study being more likely to end.

Implications

- Break-ups in the less healthy relationships are unambiguously positive for unmarried couples without children.
- Move this type of finding back a year or two for many of these couples and it is a positive outcome.
- What does this mean about timing the of premarital education? The earlier we can get couples to take such programs (or inventories), the better from the standpoint of prevention of family break-down.

- What does this say about the needs of higher conflict couples who are highly committed?
 - And/or who already have children?
- At least in the US, there currently exists no, or few, good options for such couples what they need.
- Such couples who remain together need both a solid assessment of danger/risk, and if appropriate, intense, behavioral, highly skilled services aimed at significant reduction in negative behavior.
- At present, such services are only available to wealthy couples (who do not typically seek it anyway).

Lessons From These Findings

- Stay tuned to further findings from various studies in the US that can shed light on nuances of break-ups.
- As Galena Rhoades often says, remember that relationship education is also relationship assessment.
- Some couples will be strengthened. Some individuals are going to learn something that leads them to move on from that relationship.

- Most all of the measures we use in our various studies are measures anyone can use.
- Our lab has developed a number of measures in addition to using ones that are widely used in the field.
- If you see measures in our work that you would find useful in yours, feel free to use them.

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You can get word.doc versions of some of our
papers at:

<http://www.box.net/shared/xnxx4fb1ao01p0750h9s>

[Scott's blog] www.slidingvsdeciding.com