

**A MEANING AND VALUES-BASED PREMARITAL WORKSHOP MANUAL**

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## **Abstract**

This project offers a review of the literature on factors related to relationship satisfaction and stability, premarital programs, and the role of meaning or values in relation to intimate relationships. Within this project, there is a meaning and values-based premarital workshop manual that provides facilitators with detailed information, directions, and workshop exercises. The workshop is intended to be a duration of 4- to 5-hours for couples in the initial stages of becoming committed in their relationship. The aim is to provide couples with a structured program where they gain knowledge on the role of values in intimate partnerships and explore each individual and their partner's values. The manual may be used as a stand-alone document or a supplementary manual component for facilitators of existing skill-based programs.

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## **Chapter One: Introduction**

Premarital programs are considered a preventative service targeted towards couples, with the objective of increasing marital success (Blanchard, Hawkins, Baldwin, & Fawcett, 2009). There are many premarital programs available, however the majority of programs are primarily skill-based (Halford, 2004) and are typically delivered within a group setting (Williams, 2007). Skill-based programs refer to those programs that teach couples skills that have been found to be beneficial for intimate relationships (Halford, 2004). In the research on premarital programs, there is a gap in supporting the long-term efficacy of these preventative approaches as longitudinal data is lacking (Fawcett, Hawkins, Blanchard, & Carroll, 2010; Halford, 2004). Furthermore, researchers have identified premarital programs as moderately effective in terms of improving couples' overall relationship satisfaction (Fawcett et al., 2010; Hawkins, Blanchard, Baldwin, & Fawcett, 2008). An overall need for continued improvement of programs has been recognized (Fawcett et al., 2010).

In two approaches to psychotherapy, logotherapy and Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), meaning and values work have been acknowledged as important and beneficial when working with couples (Peterson, Eifert, Feingold, & Davidson, 2009; Schulenberg, Schnetzer, Winters, & Hutzell, 2010). Therefore, it is my position that adding a meaning or values component to already existing, moderately effective, skill-based premarital programs will strengthen their structure and provide couples with greater benefit in terms of improving relationship satisfaction and stability.

## **Significance and Importance**

In Canada, 40.7% of marriages are projected to result in a divorce within a 30-year time frame (Statistics Canada, 2008). Premarital prevention programs may be a key factor in reducing rates of divorce and marital discord (Carroll & Doherty, 2003; Halford, Markman, Kline, & Stanley, 2003). These programs are thought to be effective by taking a preventative stance rather than being a reactive intervention service (Markman, Stanley, Jenkins, Petrella, & Wadsworth, 2006). Notably, “most couples who have married and divorced never received any preventative services or therapy after marriage” (Markman et al., 2006, p. 413). Given these findings, it has also been posited that participation in premarital programs may be valuable in terms of increasing the chances of couples seeking therapeutic support if needed throughout their relationship course, which could be advantageous to relationships (Stanley, 2001).

Divorce can impact the emotional or psychological health of involved persons (Waite, Luo, & Lewin, 2009). These negative impacts can affect many people including the divorcing individuals as well as close or distant family members (Frisby, Booth-Butterfield, Dillow, Martin, & Weber, 2012). Overall, there appears to be a large body of literature that reports the negative consequences of divorce (for review see Amato, 2010). Therefore, premarital programs with their potential to reduce the rate of divorce and increase marital satisfaction deserve ongoing development and evaluation based on research.

## **Intent**

The intent of the proposed project is to present a premarital workshop manual that contains content which addresses meaning and values, with the objective that the manual

will be used alone or alongside an existing skill-based program. My expectation is that a values-based premarital workshop will increase couples relationship success over time. Exploring meaning involves each participant understanding their personal meaning and/or values as well as supporting and acknowledging his or her partners' meaning system. Schulenberg et al. (2010) noted that in relation to meaning "the issue is not just whether people are living their lives in relation to their values, but whether they are living their lives in relation to their most important values" (p. 96). Peterson et al. (2009) gave an explanation of ACT and ACT's incorporation of values and meaning, which included understanding personal values and integrating those values into actions. Given that ACT incorporates values within their theoretical framework, the therapy provides as an example of or reference to the importance of values, particularly in relationships.

### **Project Rationale**

The rationale for the creation of a premarital workshop is in response to findings of moderate effectiveness of existing premarital programs (Fawcett et al., 2010; Hawkins et al., 2008). Fawcett et al. (2010) conducted one of few meta-analyses that solely concentrate on the effectiveness of premarital programs. Additionally, their meta-analysis included unpublished research. The findings indicated that there is a space for improvement in relation to increasing couples' relationship satisfaction in the area of premarital program research (Fawcett et al., 2010). Given the connection between skill-based programs and their moderate effectiveness, I propose that an addition of a meaning component to enhance the traditional skill-based framework, the results of which could be subjected to future research. In further support of the rationale for this supplementary

manual, researchers have more specifically identified that the content or primary foci of premarital programs require additional reflection and adjustments (Fawcett et al., 2010).

The main rationale for including a meaning or values component is based on research on two types of therapy, logotherapy (Schulenberg et al., 2010) and ACT (Peterson et al., 2009), in relation to couples. A meaning component in a premarital program would allow for couples to gain deeper understanding into themselves, their partner, and the meaning accorded to marriage or a committed relationship.

Understanding meaning in a marriage or relationship is key in maintaining and enhancing satisfaction (Schulenburg et al., 2010). Furthermore, the connection between satisfaction in an intimate relationship as related to the concept of meaning and values has been supported through research, which will be discussed in the literature review (Gaunt, 2006; Steger & Kashdan, 2013).

### **Statement of Interest**

My interest in completing a project on premarital programs and creating a supplementary workshop manual is driven by my passion for preventative approaches and improving couple's relationships in terms of satisfaction and stability. Premarital programs combine all of these aspects. I believe that by increasing the effectiveness of premarital programs and boosting the number of couples who access this service, particularly for non-religious partners, the therapeutic community can continue to aid in decreasing the overall prevalence of divorce. In addition to reducing divorce rates, I believe there can be an increase in couples that are mutually satisfied and committed in their relationship.

In relation to the values component, my interest was sparked during my Master's level counselling psychology coursework. I have come to believe that people are often unaware of their personal values and/or meaning, which can cause adverse effects on intimate partnerships. Furthermore, I believe understanding personal values may lead to happiness in many aspects of life that extend beyond relationships, which may in turn produce positive effects.

### **Key Definitions**

Throughout this document, there are many terms that are used frequently. I will provide brief definitions of several generalized terms to provide further clarity.

*Relationship satisfaction* refers to a person's level of happiness and/or contentment in his or her intimate relationship or partnership.

*Relationship stability* refers to a person's level of strength and consistency in his or her intimate relationship (i.e., a couple that has separated compared to a couple that has never separated).

The term *premarital* often refers to the time period between formal engagement and marriage. However, in acknowledging the rise in common-law couples (Statistics Canada, 2011a), I refer to the term premarital in relation to the period prior to or beginning of a commitment such as marriage or common-law status.

*Skill-based premarital program* refers to programs that are focused on teaching skills identified to be beneficial to the enrichment of intimate relationships, such as communication (Halford, 2004).

*Communication skills* are a common component of premarital programs (Halford, 2004). *Communication* may be referred to as "knowing how to listen, sharing one's

thoughts and feelings honestly, refraining from criticizing, etc.” (Epstein, Warfel, Johnson, Smith, & McKinney, 2013, p. 300). Additionally, *communication* is often discussed in terms of positive or negative interaction (Clements, Stanley, & Markman, 2004; Stanley, Markman, & Whitton, 2002).

The terms *meaning and/or values* are used interchangeably in this paper. As previously identified, meaning refers to “values identification, clarification, and prioritization” (Schulenberg et al., 2010, p. 96).

### **Project Overview**

In this project, I included a chapter outlining the methods used during the process of completing this project such as search terms and databases. Subsequently, I provided a review of the literature on influential factors surrounding marital success and dissolution, premarital programming, and meaning or values. In the following chapter, the workshop manual is presented, which can be used as a stand-alone document for practitioners that are interested in facilitating this workshop. Finally, I included a chapter in which I will discuss the strengths and limitations of this project as well as future considerations based on my final project.

## **Chapter Two: Methods**

In this chapter, I provide an overview of the sources used for information collection throughout the creation of this project. Additionally, I outline the specific details including the database, search terms, and other research methods or considerations. In conclusion, the guidelines followed in the completion of this project are explored.

### **Databases and Search Methods**

The University of Lethbridge library psychology databases were used as the primary research information source. The primary databases used to search relevant research included: PsycINFO, Science Direct, Wiley Online Library, JSTOR, SAGE Journals Online, and Academic Search Complete. Additionally, the search engine Google Scholar was utilized.

In part one of the literature review, specific search terms included but were not limited to: marriage, marital satisfaction, marital stability, risk factors of divorce, factors in relationship satisfaction and stability, and marital success. In order to explore a current understanding of the factors surrounding satisfaction and stability in intimate partnerships, research conducted from the year 2000 onwards was included. Part two, included terms such as: premarital programs, relationship education, marriage preparation, premarital couples, premarital assessments, effectiveness of premarital programs, PREP, Couples Communication program, and Relationship Enhancement. In part three, the search terms included but were not limited to: meaning, values, premarital couples, intimate relationships and values, intimate relationships and meaning, Acceptance and Commitment Therapy, and logotherapy. Based on these search methods,

there appears to be a gap in research attending to meaning and values in relation to premarital couples and psycho-educational premarital workshops. Additional articles and resources were found based in the existing articles references and searched using the previously mentioned databases. Relevant articles were organized by topic, explored, and synthesized to create the literature review portion of this project.

In the fourth chapter, the literature review material was utilized to create the introduction and informational components of the presented workshop manual. The activities and handouts were either adapted from therapeutic tools learnt throughout the course of the author's Master of Education: Counselling Psychology program, cited from sources that emphasize values work, or designed by the author of this project.

Information and adapted, created, or referenced activities that primarily highlighted and explored values was used as inclusion criteria for the presented workshop manual. In conclusion, the final chapter is an exploration and examination of the findings based on the literature review and manual components of this project. As the author, I discussed the perceived strengths, limitations and areas for potential future directions based on the gathered information.

### **Research Guidelines**

The *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*, sixth edition (APA manual) and the University of Lethbridge Thesis, Project, and Capstone Guidelines were followed in the creation of this Master of Education: Counselling Psychology project. These documents were used in areas such as, but not limited to, formatting, editing, and citations. In the workshop manual portion of this project, creative expression was used in terms of formatting, layout, graphics, and font style.



### **Chapter Three: Literature Review**

The overall goal of this project is to provide a comprehensive literature review and create a workshop manual designed for premarital couples that focuses on values and meaning. The intent is to provide a workshop that provides couples with an opportunity to increase their relationship satisfaction and stability over time. The following literature review is separated into three components. The three components serve to address important areas relevant to the field of premarital programming and the creation of a premarital workshop. First, as a foundation, the research on satisfaction and stability in marital and intimate relationships is reviewed. Subsequently, the over-arching topic of this project is explored, which includes research relevant to premarital programs. Finally, the focus of the presented workshop manual is considered. Therefore, meaning and values in general and more specifically in relation to couples is reviewed.

#### **Part One: Satisfaction and Stability in Intimate Relationships**

In the creation of a premarital program, reviewing the literature on what makes marriages or relationships successful and unsuccessful is important. Understanding marital factors that contribute to stability and satisfaction provides the framework and basis for creating a premarital program. The basis is provided given that premarital programs often teach skills that are understood to increase relationship success, thereby decreasing the risk of deterioration in an intimate partnership (Halford, 2004).

“Factors contributing to marital satisfaction are multiple and complex” (Russell-Chapin, Chapin, & Sattler, 2001, p. 261). In relation to premarital programming, there is limited research on the factors of susceptibility for divorce or success in marriage (Hawkins et al., 2008). However, certain factors that have been acknowledged through

out the literature to increase relationship success (Epstein et al., 2013), some of which will be reviewed. This section of the literature review will focus on research conducted from the year 2000 onwards, to provide more recent understanding of satisfaction and stability in committed relationships or marriage.

**Stability and satisfaction factors.** Epstein et al. (2013) conducted a literature review on the relationship skills that are beneficial in intimate relationships. The literature review research on marital success factors resulted in seven main themes including: “(a) communication, (b) conflict resolution, (c) knowledge of partner, (d) life skills, (e) self-management, (f) sex and romance, and (g) stress management” (Epstein et al., 2013, p. 299).

In their research, Epstein et al. (2013) included 2,201 people to complete the “Epstein Love Competencies Inventory (ELCI)”, which was generated by the authors based on the relationship skills found to be valuable in the literature (p. 301). They discovered that “with respect to current relationship satisfaction, communication was the most predictive competency . . . ; knowledge of partner . . . and life skills . . . were also somewhat predictive” (Epstein et al., 2013, p. 305). In addition, teaching relationship skills to couples was acknowledged as an overall useful practice (Epstein et al., 2013). A further exploration into factors related to marital stability and satisfaction will be provided.

**Communication and conflict resolution.** Throughout the literature on marital success factors, communication and/or conflict resolution or management are consistently regarded as a crucial and important aspect of intimate relationships (e.g., Clements et al., 2004; Epstein et al., 2013; Rosen-Grandon, Myers, & Hattie, 2004; Schneewind &

Gerhard, 2002; Stanley et al., 2002). Furthermore, the “dynamics of communication, conflict, and commitment are widely understood as fundamental to relationship success, especially in marriage” (Stanley et al., 2002, p. 659).

Couples communication and conflict is often discussed in terms of positive versus negative interactions (Stanley et al., 2002; Clements et al., 2004). Stanley et al. (2002) further defined specific elements of negative interactions for their study, which included (a) negative escalation; (b) invalidation; (c) negative interpretations; (d) winner/loser and; (e) withdrawal (p. 664). The ability to problem solve is another area of couple’s interaction and communication (Clements et al., 2004).

A high frequency of negative interactions within an intimate partnership is connected to a decrease in overall relationship satisfaction and increase in risk of divorce (Stanley et al., 2002). Through research, it was found that “negative interaction was negatively associated with every index of relationship quality and positively associated with thoughts and talks of divorce” (Stanley et al., 2002, p. 670). Additionally, not validating your partner’s feelings was found to be a more common practice in couples that eventually dissolved their marriage (Clements et al., 2004). Similarly, withdrawing from your partner is associated with negative consequences (Stanley et al., 2002).

Although negative interaction may be detrimental to intimate relationships, positive communication can have the opposite effect. In addition, communication style may interact with other relationship factors such as the partners’ sexual relationship (Litzinger & Gordon, 2005) and the ability to cope with stress (Ledermann, Bodenmann, Rudaz, & Bradbury, 2010). Litzinger and Gordon (2005) summarized that a couple’s sexual relationship and communication skills are connected to relationship happiness on a

separate as well as interconnected level. In terms of the sexual relationship in couples with negative communication, having a strong sexual connection increased relationship happiness (Litzinger & Gordon, 2005). As the sexual relationship is connected to relationship happiness, stress is a separate factor that is also associated. Ledermann et al. (2010) studied the role of different types of stress and communication in relation to intimate partnership success. They noted that stress impacts couples' communication patterns and relationship satisfaction. Communication and strategies to manage stress may be used in order to strengthen the couples' relationships (Ledermann et al., 2010).

More specifically to conflict, frequently arguing about a particular topic may damage the level of satisfaction and increase negativity within a relationship (Stanley et al., 2002). Additionally, a couple's tendency to resolve a conflict in a positive or negative manner is also related to relationship satisfaction (Schneewind & Gerhard, 2002). Furthermore, Schneewind and Gerhard (2002) acknowledged "the importance of a couple's relationship personalities as major determinants of their specific conflict resolution styles that, in turn, influence their perceived relationship satisfaction" (p. 69). *Relationship personality* was defined as: (a) general relationship competence, (b) empathy, and (c) relational vulnerability (Schneewind & Gerhard, 2002, p. 65).

**Summary.** Overall, communication and conflict patterns between partners are factors that impact intimate partnerships throughout the relationship course (Clements et al., 2004). There appears to be consistency in the literature on relationship satisfaction and stability related to communication and conflict resolution, as well as an emphasis on these topics in premarital program content (Halford, 2004). Although there is consistency, there appears to be a tendency to refer to communication and conflict

resolution or management in broad terms. Therefore, specific forms or aspects of communication and conflict resolution are often not specified. Identification of these aspects may be beneficial in addressing which communication or conflict resolution skills are most important.

**Values and relationship satisfaction.** Rosen-Grandon et al. (2004) researched the factors that may influence marital satisfaction and success. They discovered three main routes leading to happiness in marriage including: (a) love, (b) loyalty, and (c) shared values (Rosen-Grandon et al., 2004). The identified route, love, was defined through “respect, forgiveness, romance, support, and sensitivity ... communication and affectional expression” (Rosen-Grandon et al., 2004, p. 65). Loyalty referred to commitment in the relationship and also included aspects of the sexual relationship (Rosen-Grandon et al., 2004). The last route, shared values, indicates a marriage in which, “conflict is managed, gender roles are traditional, and high priorities are placed on religiosity and parenting” (Rosen-Grandon et al., 2004, p. 65).

In their research, they discovered that features of the relationship and interactions contribute to overall happiness (Rosen-Grandon et al., 2004). The factors that individual partners’ value and place importance upon influences satisfaction levels (Rosen-Grandon et al., 2004). Furthermore, the researchers discussed that partners may differ on their belief about which route is most important in reaching marital happiness, which may influence the partners interactions (Rosen-Grandon et al., 2004).

More specifically, in relation to values, Gaunt (2006) studied the role of similarity in values and relationship happiness. Having similar values as your spouse was connected to greater relationship happiness (Gaunt, 2006). Furthermore, negative emotions in the

relationship were positively affected by this similarity (Gaunt, 2006). Overall, there is an assumption that incongruities in partners' value systems will have negative impacts on intimate relationships (Gaunt, 2006).

**Other influential factors.** Premarital factors appear to impact intimate partnerships (Clements et al., 2004). Spouses that are satisfied and stable tended to have greater levels of satisfaction prior to being married as compared to those who were less happy before marriage (Clements et al., 2004). Hence, premarital interactional factors were found to have an effect on long-term relationship trajectories (Clements et al., 2004).

**Summary.** As described and reviewed above, there are several factors identified that researchers have suggested to improve relationship satisfaction and stability. The research on the topic of marital success factors indicated many overlapping themes. For example, in the reviewed literature, the skills relating to communication and conflict resolution appear to hold high importance in comparison to other factors such as various relationship skills (e.g., Clements et al., 2004; Epstein et al., 2010; Schneewind and Gerhard, 2002; Stanley et al., 2002). Given these overlapping themes as well as the focus of existing premarital programs on communication and conflict resolution (Busby, Ivey, Harris, & Ates, 2007; Markman et al., 2006), I would suggest that skills component of skill-based premarital programs is well established and fairly standardized.

In relation to teaching communication and conflict resolution skills, the role of the sexual relationship (i.e., Litzinger & Gordon, 2005) and stress (i.e., Ledermann et al., 2010) in an intimate relationship were acknowledged as important. Furthermore, the role of values is demonstrated in the research to be connected to relationship satisfaction (e.g.,

Gaunt, 2006; Rosen-Grandon et al., 2004), which aligns with the focus of the presented workshop manual. Finally, satisfaction and stability appear to be influenced by premarital factors (Clements et al., 2004).

**Conclusion.** In terms of understanding what factors lead to relationship stability and satisfaction, there seems to be no simple answer. Based on this literature review, there appears to be a lack of recently constructed theories on marital and committed relationship success. Furthermore, the literature in this area seems to be disconnected, as it is difficult to find cohesive themes. However, researchers have discovered several elements that contribute to both longevity and happiness in intimate partnerships including but not limited to healthy communication and conflict resolution. In relation to this project, there have been a few researchers that have identified the importance and role of values in promoting greater satisfaction in relationships (i.e., Gaunt, 2006; Rosen-Grandon et al., 2004). In conclusion, Epstein et al. (2013) provide a review and table, as previously mentioned, which may serve as a quick guide or reference to better understand factors linked to relationship stability and satisfaction throughout the literature (see Epstein et al., 2013, p. 300).

## **Part Two: Premarital Programs**

**History of premarital programs.** Premarital programs have been in existence for over 80 years. Beginning in the 1930s, structured premarital programs were created and offered (Carroll & Doherty, 2003). Although created in the 1930s, premarital programs did not increase in popularity until the 1970s (Carroll & Doherty, 2003). The popularity increase was in response to an increasing number of divorces in the United States, which fostered the creation of programs designed to decrease or prevent this trend (Carroll & Doherty, 2003).

Hunt, Hof, and DeMaria (1998) acknowledged that premarital programs originated from “the work of religious organizations, and evolved from the brief counsel often offered by religious marriage celebrants, such as priests, rabbis, and ministers, to marrying couples”, which transformed over time into the skill-based programs currently delivered (as cited in Halford, 2004, p. 559). More currently, premarital programs are often connected to religious institutions even into the present (Stanley, Amato, Johnson, & Markman, 2006).

**Terminology and definitions.** On a larger scope, premarital programs may be encompassed in a broader context or field known as *marriage and relationship education* (Hawkins et al., 2008). Within the literature, there are several terms used to refer to premarital programs such as premarital prevention programs (Carroll & Doherty, 2003); premarital education (Fawcett et al., 2010; Stanley, 2001); and marriage preparation (Childs & Duncan, 2012).

In this paper, I will use the term premarital program or workshop according to Carroll and Doherty’s (2003) definition. Their definition explained that many terms are



used "interchangeably in the literature and are all used to refer to . . . any type of formal, standardized approach to preparing premarital couples for marriage" (Carroll & Doherty, 2003, p. 105). Although these terms may be identified as interchangeable (Carroll & Doherty, 2003), there is a clear distinction between the roles of premarital programs as compared to therapeutic intervention.

**Premarital programs versus therapy.** It is important to understand the differences between premarital programs and couples therapy. Therapy and premarital programs are different and serve divergent purposes (Hawkins et al., 2008; Markman et al., 2006; Renick, Blumberg, & Markman, 1992). In terms of the participants, couples therapy is usually intended for those experiencing relational problems (Markman et al., 2006). In contrast, premarital programs were created to prevent discord in the future by providing marital education and teaching appropriate skills (Blanchard et al., 2009).

Furthermore, therapy is separate from premarital programming as couples therapy provides "intensive, one-on-one work between participants and professionals on specific personal problems" (Hawkins et al., 2008, p. 723). Whereas, learning and utilizing a set of skills as well as receiving information are typically the central content components of premarital or relationship education programs (Hawkins et al., 2008), often conducted within a group setting (Williams, 2007).

**Premarital program populations.** In the creation of a premarital workshop, acknowledging the demographic populations that attend workshops and participate in the research surrounding premarital programs is essential. The profiles of participants' ethnicity, socio-economic status, risk level, and religious affiliation will be explored.

***Ethnicity, socio-economic status and risk level.*** The majority of couples that attend premarital and relationship programs are primarily described as Caucasian and within a middle-class socioeconomic status level (Carroll & Doherty, 2003; Fawcett et al., 2010; Hawkins et al., 2008). Additionally, based on a meta-analysis it was found that, for research studying relationship education programs, the majority of couples would be considered low-risk in terms of relational discord (Hawkins et al., 2008). A separate meta-analysis on premarital programs indicated that the majority of couples were ranked for low levels of relational distress or problems prior to entering the assigned premarital program (Fawcett et al., 2010).

***Religious affiliation.*** Couples attending premarital programs are primarily considered to be religious (DeMaria, 2005; Stanley et al., 2006). Stanley et al. (2006) contacted 2,323 participants in selected states in the United States of America to conduct a survey on many factors as well as outcomes related to participation in premarital programs. In their results, it was found that attending a premarital program was significantly more likely for those couples that were married at a religious location (Stanley et al., 2006).

***Summary.*** Based on these findings in the literature, the demographic similarity in the populations that primarily attend premarital programs and research studies is evident. Participants are commonly identified as religious, low risk, White, and middle-class individuals.

Arising from the findings of this literature review, the proposed premarital workshop is targeted towards those couples with a secular orientation. Given that religious couples often have high accessibility to premarital programming (e.g., Stanley

et al., 2006), the importance in reaching couples that identify as non-religious is supported. Another rationale can be found in the reported increase in Canadians who identify as non-religious and decrease in church participation over time (Lindsay, 2008). In 2011, Canadian statistics indicated that over 7.8 million Canadians identified themselves as non-religious (Statistics Canada, 2011b). Overall, there appears to be a gap in providing premarital services to couples that do not identify with a religious group.

Cultural factors such as socio-economic status, ethnicity, education level, sexual orientation, and relationship distress levels must be considered when facilitating or creating a premarital workshop. It is recommended that the program facilitator use professional judgment to adapt and make necessary adjustments to the proposed workshop in order to account for cultural factors. In considering these factors, the facilitator will likely better address the needs of the specific populations who are receiving the services.

**Existing premarital programs.** Premarital programs are typically skill-based (Markman et al., 2006), with a strong focus on strengthening skills that have been discovered to decrease the risk of marital dissolution (Blanchard et al., 2009). The other common form of educative programs, is assessment-based (Halford, 2004). The majority of premarital programs primarily follow a cognitive-behavioural theoretical approach (Hahlweg & Richter, 2010; Markman et al., 2006), which are typically “made up from a mixture of four components: awareness, feedback, cognitive change, and skills training” (Halford et al., 2003, p. 390). Overall, skill-based premarital programs typically place a strong emphasis on skills such as communication, conflict resolution, and problem

solving (e.g., Busby et al., 2007; Carroll & Doherty, 2003; Fawcett et al., 2010; Hawkins et al., 2008; Markman et al., 2006; Williams, 2007).

Among the most highly researched skill-based relationship programs within the literature are: (1) Markman, Floyd, Stanley, and Storaasli (1988) “Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program” (PREP); (2) Halford, Moore, Wilson, Dyer, and Farrugia (2004) “Couple Commitment and Relationship Enhancement” (Couple CARE); (3) Guerney (1997) “Relationship Enhancement” (RE); and (4) Miller, Miller, Nunnally, and Wackman (1992) “Couples Communication Program” (CC) (as cited in Halford, 2004, p. 560).

**Review of existing premarital and marital programs.** As discussed above, Halford (2004) article provided four commonly researched and identified couple programs. Other researchers discussed many of the acknowledged programs as well (e.g., Jakubowski, Milne, Brunner, & Miller, 2004; Silliman & Schumm, 2000). In the following section, I will review the literature to provide brief descriptions of each program. Furthermore, I will summarize the effectiveness of the programs as described and empirically studied in the premarital literature. For the scope of this project, I will focus on these four programs because these programs appear most frequently in the literature on skill-based premarital programs.

However, I acknowledge that there are numerous premarital programs available, many of which have not been as readily researched. Hence, they will not be discussed in this review. The programs are not reviewed in any specific order. Although these programs are not all exclusively premarital programs, as they do not solely focus on service to premarital couples. However, each program would be considered under the

broader *marriage and relationship education* classification. They are all for intimate partners, are skill-based and seek to improve relationship success, which encompasses couples' satisfaction and stability factors.

***Prevention and Relationship Education Program (PREP)***. PREP is a premarital program based on cognitive-behaviour therapy (Markman et al., 2006). PREP is often delivered in a 12-hour program format, which is typically referred to as *skill-based* (Markman et al., 2006). Additionally, PREP is primarily offered in a group format for premarital partners (Markman, Rhoades, Stanley, & Peterson, 2013). Renick et al. (1992) emphasized that “Markman, Stanley, and Floyd began the development of PREP, a preventative intervention program designed to teach premarital couples the skills associated with marital success” (p. 142). As outlined, some of the main themes of the program are on communication, enjoyment in the relationship, problem solving, and the role of spirituality (Renick et al., 1992).

***PREP Evaluation***. Overall, PREP is one of the more researched relationship programs (Jakubowski et al., 2004). Furthermore, PREP has been acknowledged as an effective program (Jakubowski et al., 2004). Markman, Renick, Floyd, Stanley, and Clements (1993) discussed a longitudinal study, studying the PREP program including 114 couples, which was part of a research project by Markman, Duncan, Storaasli, and Howes (1987) (as cited in Markman et al., 1993). Initially in their study, they included a total of 25 couples that finished PREP, while 47 couples were control participants, and 42 couples were not interested in the PREP program (Markman et al., 1993). At the 4-year point, “only 1 (4%) of the intervention couples had broken up prior to marriage whereas 10 (21.3%) of control couples and 11 (26.2%) of decline couples had done so” (Markman

et al., 1993, p. 72). Furthermore, those participants that engaged in PREP had increased in communication ability when compared to control participants (Markman et al., 1993). In conclusion, participating in PREP was beneficial for couples over a long-term period (Markman et al., 1993).

A more recent study on PREP conducted by Schilling, Baucom, Burnett, Allen, and Ragland (2003) also used a longitudinal method, studying two different treatment groups to evaluate the effectiveness of weekend PREP on communication and marital stability. Initially, 65 couples participated and were asked to select the PREP group or premarital education offered within their religious organization. Schilling et al. (2003) assessed for communication skills, relationship adjustment, psychological evaluation and interaction patterns. The study included a pre- and post-test as well as longitudinal assessment periods at year-intervals for up to 5 ½ years (Schilling et al., 2003). Overall, Schilling et al. (2002) concluded that PREP was effective in “increasing [couple’s] positive communication and decreasing their negative communication” (p. 49). Unexpectedly, Schilling et al. (2002) discovered that “increases in female positive communication predicted an increased risk of distress onset for both genders” (p. 49). However, they discussed that this was not the same for males.

***Couple CARE.*** The Couple CARE program was derived from PREP as well as another variation Self-PREP (Halford, Moore, Wilson, Farrugia, & Dyer, 2004). The program utilizes a skill-based video, a manual or workbook, and telephone check-ins with a mental health professional to provide a more convenient method for couples (Halford et al., 2004). In terms of content, the Couple CARE program “emphasizes the development of effective couple communication, relationship commitment, realistic relationship

expectations, and shared positive couple time” (Halford et al., 2004, p. 470). The Couple CARE program entails six lessons that partners progress through at their own pace over a period of time (Halford et al., 2004).

*Couple CARE Evaluation.* There is limited research providing evidence for effectiveness for the Couple CARE program, therefore efficacy remains relatively unknown (Jakubowski et al., 2004). Halford et al. (2004) conducted a study with 59 couples that researched the effectiveness of the Couple CARE program. Each couple was randomly selected to participate in either a waitlist control group or the group receiving the Couple CARE program (Halford et al., 2004). Each couple was assessed based on their participation and evaluation of the program, relationship improvement, and communication levels (Halford et al., 2004). In their results, participants were found to be content with the program. Additionally, they discovered that couples had a “significant, but small decrease of relationship instability after Couple CARE” (Halford et al., 2004, p. 474). However, participating in this program did not impact communication skills (Halford et al., 2004).

***Relationship Enhancement (RE).*** The RE program was developed by Bernard Guerney (Guerney, 1979). The emphasized skills of the RE program from Guerney (1991) include: “empathic, expressive, discussion/negotiation, problem/conflict resolution, facilitation (partner coaching), self-change, other change, transfer generalization, and maintenance” (as cited in Accordino & Guerney, 2003, p. 162). Jakubowski et al. (2004) explained the RE program is typically provided to participants in an entire day format or a weekly format totaling 20 to 30 hours.

*RE Evaluation.* RE has been recognized as an effective program (Jakubowski et al., 2004). Ridley and Sladeczek (1992) conducted a research study on the premarital RE program. Initially, the participants included, “27 couples [that] participated in the RE group” and 30 couples that were selected into a “lecture/discussion group” (Ridley & Sladeczek, 1992, p. 149). Overall, the RE program was found to be more effective than the control lecture/discussion group (Ridley & Sladeczek, 1992). Additionally, in their meta-analysis Accordino and Guerney (2003) acknowledged that “the studies performed on RE have demonstrated, with medium to large effect size, that RE can be an effective intervention in helping couples, families, and other populations attain better communication and relationships” (p. 165).

*The Couples Communication Program (CC).* The CC program, also known as the Minnesota Couples Communication Program (MCCP; Nunnally, Miller, & Wackman, 1975), is a 12-hour skill-based relationship program (Nunnally et al., 1975; Wampler & Sprenkle, 1980). The MCCP was "initiated in 1968 by a small group of researchers, theorists, and therapists from the University of Minnesota Family Study Center and the Family and Children's Agency of Minneapolis" (Nunnally et al., 1975, p. 63). The program is typically offered in a small group setting to couples over the course of a month (Nunnally et al., 1975). In relation to the targeted skills, the MCCP has many foci for content including self-awareness, listening skills, and communication skills (Nunnally et al., 1975).

*CC Evaluation.* As compared to the other programs, CC has been extensively researched and is considered an effective program (Jakubowski et al., 2004). Butler and Wampler (1999) conducted a meta-analysis on 16 studies evaluating the CC program.



Based on their results, the CC program was found to increase relationship satisfaction, initially after the program, but significantly decrease in effectiveness over time (Butler & Wampler, 1999). In terms of communication, the results were generally significant but to a minimal extent (Butler & Wampler, 1999). Overall, a decline in the benefits of the CC program was discovered over time (Butler & Wampler, 1999).

### Overview of existing programs.

Table I

#### *Summary of Reviewed Premarital Programs*

<b>Program</b>	<b>Website</b>	<b>Format &amp; Duration</b>	<b>Cost</b>	<b>Main Skills Taught</b>	<b>Level of Empirical Validation</b> (Jakubowski et al., 2004)
PREP	<a href="https://www.prepinc.com/Content/About-Us/What-Is-PREP.htm">https://www.prepinc.com/Content/About-Us/What-Is-PREP.htm</a>	Group format Usually 12 hours (Jakubowski et al., 2004)	\$675 USD for PREP 7.0 (Retrieved from: <a href="https://www.prepinc.com/main/Calendar.aspx">https://www.prepinc.com/main/Calendar.aspx</a> )	a. Communication b. Conflict resolution c. Problem Solving d. Relationship enjoyment e. The role of spirituality  List taken from: (Renick et al., 1992)	High
Couple CARE	<a href="http://www.couplecare.info/CcareProgram.htm">http://www.couplecare.info/CcareProgram.htm</a>	At home format Approx. 12 hours over 6 weeks (Halford et al., 2004)	Unknown	a. Self-change b. Communication c. Intimacy and caring d. Managing differences e. Sexuality f. Adapting to	Low

				change List taken from: (Halford et al., 2004, p. 472)	
RE	<a href="http://www.nire.org/about-nire/nire-staff/bernard-guerney/">http://www.nire.org/about-nire/nire-staff/bernard-guerney/</a>	Group format Usually 20 to 30 hours (Jakubowski et al., 2004)	\$450 USD for the two-day program (Retrieved from: <a href="http://www.nire.org/workshop-schedules-mastering-the-mysteries-of-love-workshops-for-couples/">http://www.nire.org/workshop-schedules-mastering-the-mysteries-of-love-workshops-for-couples/</a> )	a. Empathic b. Expressive c. Discussion/negotiation d. Problem/conflict Resolution e. Facilitation f. Conflict management g. Self-change h. Helping-others Change i. Generalization j. Maintenance  List taken from: Guerney (1991) (as cited in Accordino & Guerney, 2003, p. 162)	High
CC	<a href="http://www.couplecommunication.com">http://www.couplecommunication.com</a>	Group or individual couple Usually 12 hours (Nunnally et al., 1975)	Varies	a. Communication b. Listening c. Self-awareness d. Esteem  List taken from: (Nunnally et al., 1975)	High

**Summary.** As indicated previously, relationship skills such as communication and conflict resolution or management are common features of skill-based programs. With the exception of Couple CARE, these programs are often facilitated to couples in a group setting and considered to be effective based on targeted research studies

(Jakubowski et al., 2004). In terms of differences, these programs have slight distinctions in the emphasized relationship skills and the format or duration.

Content that focuses on values and meaning is not fully explored in any of the reviewed skill-based programs. Furthermore, the material in each of these programs appears to be simplistic in relation to the complexity of satisfaction and stability in committed relationships. The teaching of relationship skills appears to be advantageous (Epstein et al., 2013). However, without values and meaning content, there is no emphasis placed on the skills or relational factors that individual couples place importance upon.

**Overall review of program evaluations.** Overall, there are findings of moderate effectiveness in the literature on the empirical effectiveness of existing premarital and marital programs (Fawcett et al., 2010; Hawkins et al., 2008). Through a meta-analysis that included published and non-published studies, Fawcett et al. (2010) discovered that premarital programs produce sufficient levels of efficacy for improving communication skills in couples. However, concluded that there is not “good evidence yet for a positive effect of premarital education on relationship quality/satisfaction” (Fawcett et al., 2010, p. 235). Additionally, there is an overall lack of empirical confirmation for the long-term efficacy of these skill-based programs (Fawcett et al., 2010; Halford, 2004; Hawkins et al., 2008).

Although many of these programs are often regarded as efficacious (Halford, 2004; Jakubowski et al., 2004), there is a space for improvement in the field and a need for movement towards programs that result in greater statistical significance and effectiveness (Busby et al., 2007; Childs & Duncan, 2012; Fawcett et al., 2010; Hawkins

et al., 2008). Given this, the presented workshop is provided to be a stand-alone workshop or a supplementary extension to any of the well-established skill-based or educative programs.

**Premarital assessments and inventories.** A significant element, which is often included as a component of premarital programs, is the assessment process (Larson, Newell, Topham, & Nichols, 2002). Williams (2007) acknowledged that premarital programs frequently use some form of premarital assessment tool. Many researchers throughout the literature supported the use of and/or acknowledged beneficial factors related to utilizing assessments and inventories in premarital programs (Halford, 2004; Halford et al., 2003; Larson et al., 2002). Three assessments that are highly regarded and utilized in premarital programs are: (a) PREmarital Preparation and Relationship Enhancement (PREPARE) by Olsen (1996); (b) Facilitating Open Couple Communication, Understanding and Study (FOCCUS) by Markey, Micheletto, and Becker (1997); and (c) RELATionship Evaluation (RELATE) by Holman, Busby, Doxet, Klein, and Loyer-Carlson (1997) (as cited in Halford, 2004; Larson et al., 2002). An assessment and comparison of these assessments indicated that they each “have evidence of internal consistency, reliability, content validity, and predictive validity” (Larson et al., 2002, p. 234).

Premarital couple assessments or inventories serve several purposes including: (1) to provide information about the strengths and weaknesses within a couples relationship (Hawkins et al., 2004; Williams, 2007); (2) to provide specific knowledge to couples about their partnership (Williams, 2007); and (3) to allow couples the opportunity to discuss their results (Williams, 2007). Given the importance of premarital assessments, I

will provide a brief summary of the above three inventories as described by Larson et al. (2002).

**PREPARE.** Olson (1996) PREPARE assessment is comprised of a 195 items used to determine the strengths and weaknesses of a couple's relationship (as cited in Larson et al., 2002). The following is a description and appraisal of Olson (1996) PREPARE assessment by Larson et al. (2002). PREPARE "assesses four personality traits: assertiveness, self-confidence, avoidance, and partner dominance" (as cited in Larson et al., 2002, p. 236). In addition, many aspects of the couple's relationship are covered (as cited in Larson et al., 2002). The inventory results in a 15-page document with the outcomes of the assessment (as cited in Larson et al., 2002). Overall, PREPARE is described as a thorough and easily used premarital assessment (Larson et al., 2002).

**FOCCUS.** Larson et al. (2002) also provided an explanation and assessment of Markey, Micheletto, and Becker's (1997) FOCCUS inventory. The FOCCUS premarital tool is 156 items, which is characteristically and extensively used in within religious organizations (as cited in Larson et al., 2002). FOCCUS includes subscales measuring "matches of personality, lifestyles and friends, communication and problem-solving skills, bonders and integrators, such as religion, values, and readiness for marriage, and summary categories, such as key problem indicators, and family-of-origin issues" (as cited in Larson et al., 2002, p. 236). Given the aim of the proposed premarital program is to provide a service to those primarily outside of the non-secular realm, the religious nature of the FOCCUS assessment is not best suited for the proposed workshop.

**RELATE.** The final assessment, is entitled RELATE. The RELATE inventory is highly grounded in research on early indicators that result in success and satisfaction in

marriage (Busby, Holman, & Taniguchi, 2001). Originally, RELATE was created by Holman, Busby, Doxey, Klein, and Loyer-Carlson (1997), which includes 271 questions (as cited in Larson et al., 2002). RELATE “measure[s] factors in four broad areas: personality characteristics, similarity in values, family background, and relationship experiences (e.g., couple communication skills)” (as cited in Larson et al., 2002, p. 237). In their evaluation, Larson et al. (2002) described RELATE as “the most comprehensive and the least expensive” (p. 237). Additionally, Larson et al. (2002) noted the simplicity in the use of this assessment. Based on the evaluation of RELATE and the inclusion of assessment sections on values as well as skills (as cited in Larson et al., 2002), the RELATE assessment will be recommended for use in the proposed program.

**Factors in the creation of a premarital program.** In the premarital program literature, existing programs as well as assessment tools are often highlighted. However, there is an important section of literature, which focuses on factors that should be considered in the creation of a premarital program. I will provide a brief review of literature in this area and emphasize the components that are considered to be most influential in the creation of a program. Therefore, Hawkins, Carroll, Doherty, and Willoughby (2004) research will be used and discussed in terms of the presented workshop.

Hawkins et al. (2004) identified six factors in creating a relationship program including: content, intensity, methods, timing, setting, and target. Content, intensity, and methods will be discussed further given the relevance of these factors. The other factors include timing, setting, and delivery (Hawkins et al., 2004), which were less relevant to the characteristics and creation of the proposed premarital workshop specifically. Timing

referred to when in life the couple should engage in a relationship program, the setting referred to whereabouts the program is held, and delivery acknowledged ways of getting information to those in the larger society (Hawkins et al., 2004).

**Content.** Hawkins et al. (2004) in relation to content described that, “relationship skills have been the primary emphasis of most marriage education efforts” (p. 547). In terms of skills, it has been identified that although programs may have some distinctive aspects, the majority of the content is alike (Busby et al., 2007). However, content is an area that has been proposed as needing further consideration (Fawcett et al., 2010; Hawkins et al., 2008).

In the creation of a premarital program, careful consideration of the content within the program is essential. Given the levels of effectiveness that were found empirically for existing premarital programs (e.g., Fawcett et al., 2010), I would agree that the skill-based component is important but may not be sufficient in fostering an impactful premarital program for couples that increases short and long-term relationship satisfaction and stability (Fawcett et al., 2010). Furthermore, content including discussion of life meaning and individual values is an area that has not been found in existing skill-based premarital programs and indicates a gap that would benefit from further development and research.

**Intensity.** Another focus is on the intensity of the program as described by Hawkins et al. (2004), which primarily refers to the length of time and investment required. Intensity is a component of premarital education that is often examined. Having sufficient intensity in a program is critical (Hawkins et al., 2004). Stanley et al. (2006) conducted a study, in which they discovered that relational conflict between couples

decreased as the premarital programs hours “increased from 1 to 10 hours” whereas “satisfaction increased gradually as premarital education increased from 1 to 20 hours” (p. 122). Similarly, Hawkins et al. (2008) completed a meta-analysis that found programs between 9 and 20 hours were more effective than those that were more or less lengthy. They suggested that a medium intensity program such as this would be the most advantageous (Hawkins et al., 2008).

Based on these results and recommendations, the proposed workshop will range from 4 to 5 hours, which will often be in addition to the length of the skill-based program. However, the program facilitator is advised that flexibility may be used to increase the program hours, providing couples with an extended time-period for reflection.

**Methods.** The third factor described was the methods of conducting a premarital program (Hawkins et al., 2004). The method refers to the way in which the premarital program is conducted. It is proposed that the “teaching process itself might be as crucial to the educational experience as the content” (Hawkins et al., 2004, p. 549). In Carroll and Doherty (2003) meta-analysis of premarital programs, the range of methods used in many programs was outlined including: “group presentations and discussions, structured and unstructured group and couple experiences, and a combination of both presentation and experiential methods” (pp. 110-111). In the presented workshop facilitators will use a combination of methods including a presentation, instructional information, individual couple activities, handouts, discussion time, and in some cases an online assessment process.



**Conclusion.** Throughout the literature on premarital programs and marriage and relationship education, the historical and religious background of these programs is revealed. Alongside religious roots, the demographic profiles of samples attending or engaging in research on premarital programs were explored, which demonstrated similarity in program and research participants on factors such as socio-economic status, risk level, ethnicity, and religious affiliation.

Additionally, the literature addresses many existing programs. In this literature review, I discussed existing programs such as: PREP, Couple CARE, RE, and the CC program. Similarities and distinctions between the programs were considered. Given this review, the main components of each program were highlighted and a brief section on the empirically discovered effectiveness of each program was discussed. In addition, a summary of meta-analyses on premarital programs was provided to capture the overall effectiveness of existing skill-based programs. This summary indicated researchers acknowledge room for improvement in premarital programs, especially related to improving relationship satisfaction for couples and program effectiveness (Fawcett et al., 2010; Hawkins et al., 2008), which is significant given the important purpose of premarital programs.

Furthermore, premarital assessment tools were discussed. Based on the described literature the RELATE tool is the recommended inventory for use in the presented premarital workshop. Access information for the RELATE assessment will be provided in the manual portion of this project. Lastly, factors in creating an intimate relationship program were presented. This knowledge demonstrates the importance of considering various elements of a program including the presented material, the duration or length of

the programs and the way in which the material is presented (Hawkins et al., 2004). The content, intensity, and methods described are foundational to premarital programs and were kept in mind through out the creation of the presented premarital workshop.

The third-part of the literature review considers the proposed workshop framework, specifically the meaning and value-based component. In this section, I highlight the definition and role of meaning, review the literature based on value or meaning-based therapeutic work, discuss individualization and meaning as well as provide an explanation for how meaning will be integrated into the presented program.

### **Part Three: Meaning and Values**

For this project, a crucial content component that is the focus of the manual for the proposed premarital workshop is meaning or values. The terms meaning and values are used interchangeably. In the presented premarital workshop, helping individuals within the partnership to better understand their personal meaning as well as acknowledge and respect their partners' are the main goals of the meaning portion. In other words, the manual component will include content that increases each persons understanding of their personal and their partner's beliefs, values, interests, and aspects of life upon which they place importance. As previously noted, a premarital workshop fully addressing the meaning element from a preventative, educative and/or skill-based approach cannot be identified in the literature.

The definition and concept of meaning will be further discussed below. This discussion is intended to further help facilitators understand the meaning and values concept from logotherapy and Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) perspectives. Subsequently, I discuss meaning and premarital programs, which includes literature on relationship satisfaction and incorporating meaning into the workshop. Lastly, I identify the beneficial aspects of utilizing the meaning concept in premarital programs such as individualization of the program.

**The concept of meaning.** Meaning and values are common discussion themes in relation to therapy. Two theoretical approaches to psychotherapy that focus on the meaning and values concepts are logotherapy and ACT. As discussed in the second part of the literature review, premarital programs are differentiated from couple's therapy. However, reviewing literature within therapeutic theories may be beneficial in

understanding the concepts and benefits of meaning and values as well as provide research-based evidence suggesting the efficacy of these approaches.

***Logotherapy.*** The “meaning” concept is derived from logotherapy. Logotherapy is a type of psychotherapy that was created by Viktor Frankl (i.e., Frankl, 1967a). Schulenberg et al. (2010) described logotherapy as the process of “values identification, clarification, and prioritization, such that individuals have a greater understanding of their own unique, personally meaningful values hierarchy” (p. 96). Furthermore, logotherapy focuses on the alignment between an individual’s values and their actions (Schulenberg et al., 2010). Overall, from a theoretical or philosophical perspective, meaning is important as it provides people with the opportunity for fulfillment or purpose (Frank, 1967b). Furthermore, meaning may serve as a motivating factor (Frankl, 1967b).

In discussing Spore’s (2008) model for premarital therapy, which focused on the logotherapy meaning concept, Schulenberg et al. (2010) discussed that logotherapy can be utilized by counsellors through “enhancing the communications and interactions of each partner, helping them to individually and collectively identify, clarify, and prioritize values, and to derive a greater sense of meaning in their lives (individually and as a couple)” (as cited in Schulenberg et al., 2010, p. 96).

***Acceptance and Commitment Therapy.*** ACT, is the other therapeutic approach that focuses on values. ACT was created by Hayes, Strosahl, and Wilson (1999) and is another approach to therapy that has values incorporated into the process (as cited in Peterson et al., 2009). Peterson et al. (2009) conducted research with two pairs of couples experiencing relational distress that each participated in twelve sessions of ACT. In this research, ACT was described as being used to “help clients behave in ways consistent

with their personal values” (Peterson et al., 2009, p. 436). ACT was found to be beneficial for working with couples experiencing relational difficulties (Peterson et al., 2009). In the authors’ results, they discussed that the participants in their research had self-reportedly found the values component to be valuable in terms of improving satisfaction within their relationships (Peterson et al., 2009).

*Discussion.* As discussed, in both logotherapy and ACT, the meaning and values components are beneficial in terms of relationship enhancement. Given the importance of these areas in each of the reviewed therapies, values and meaning should be significant for premarital couples as well. Peterson et al. (2009) found that couples’ had increased awareness of what is important to their partner upon completing an ACT research study, which the participant’s thought was involved in improving their relationship happiness. Furthermore, having divergent values in an intimate partnership may strain the couples’ relationship health (Schulenberg et al., 2010).

Based on this review of the literature, there does not appear to be research directly connecting the importance of values work in a preventative premarital workshop. Furthermore, there was limited accessibility to research exploring meaning and values in relation to the premarital demographic. However, one central purpose of relationship programs is to “help romantic couples form and sustain healthy marriages and relationships” (Hawkins et al., 2008, p. 723). Throughout this project literature review, the positive impact of values and meaning on relationship satisfaction becomes evident (e.g., Gaunt, 2006; Peterson et al., 2009; Rosen-Grandon et al., 2004; Schulenberg et al., 2010). Therefore, values work appears to be in alignment with the overall goal of premarital and relationship programs. Furthermore, in a meta-analysis that studied the

effectiveness of premarital programs, researchers found that existing premarital programs are not significantly increasing couples' satisfaction (Fawcett et al., 2010). This finding identifies a gap in the field of premarital programs. Addressing meaning and values may provide the needed increase to this area, therefore improving and enhancing the overall efficacy and purpose of premarital programs.

**How does meaning and values fit into premarital workshops.**

*Theoretical Approaches.* Understanding meaning in relation to premarital programs is important. Fabry (1981) and Frankl (1985, 1986, 1988, 2006) acknowledged that the concept of meaning within logotherapy could be used in positive association with other therapeutic or theoretical approaches (as cited in Schulenberg et al., 2010). Based on this knowledge, incorporating the meaning concept into a skill-based premarital format would likely be beneficial. However, changes must be made to shift the meaning and values concepts from therapy-based into an educative program.

*Incorporating Meaning.* Given that adjustments were made to shift these therapeutic concepts and approaches into an educative workshop, how meaning or values are incorporated into a premarital program is an area to further consider. In Schulenberg et al. (2010) there are several therapeutic tools presented to explore meaning with couples. Based on their description, tools that facilitate the meaning concept involve "identifying and clarifying values and developing personally meaningful values hierarchies" (Schulenberg et al., 2010, p. 99). Therefore, in the presented workshop manual each activity used in the meaning portion of the premarital workshop will aim to increase participants' meaning based on this above description.

In the presented workshop manual, changes are demonstrated through the use of a psycho-educational approach as well as through the dyadic work between couples using structured exercises without a direct facilitator. This ensures the workshop is not couples therapy or a group that is heavily process-based, which would lessen the educative nature of the program. Overall, each of the exercises will seek to be beneficial for each individual participant as well as the couple dyads attending the workshop.

***Relationship Satisfaction.*** Relationship satisfaction is an additional reason why meaning and values are appropriate for premarital programs. Given one of the primary goals of premarital programs are to increase relationship stability and satisfaction over time, research demonstrating that meaning and values increases relationship satisfaction provides support for the presented workshop. In the first section of this literature review, two studies were explored that spoke to the role of values in relation to improved relationship satisfaction. For example, with the ACT approach, couples disclosed that the values component of the therapy was beneficial to their relationships in terms of happiness (Peterson et al., 2009). Additionally, within logotherapy, meaning is thought to be a primary factor in relationship enhancement (Schulenberg et al., 2010).

Furthermore, Steger and Kashdan (2013) conducted two studies on life meaning. In the first study, the researchers discovered “unstable meaning in life was related to less well-being and more distress . . . also report less of a sense of being connected to people around them” (Steger & Kashdan, 2013, p. 108). In the second study, they found that “people with more unstable meaning reported less relationship satisfaction” (Steger & Kashdan, 2013, p. 110). These findings provided further evidence for the inclusion of a meaning component in premarital programs.

**Individualization and meaning.** As previously noted, premarital programs are typically delivered in a group setting (Williams, 2007). In addition, skill-based premarital programs are often structured to provide all participants with the same material (Halford, 2004; Markman et al., 2006). In alignment with these typical premarital program structures, Busby et al. (2007) noted that, “a group format makes it even more difficult for couples to receive unique attention and intervention that fits their needs” (p. 289). Additionally, skill-based premarital programs might need to become better suited to the individual couples attending the programs (Halford, 2004).

In the proposed premarital workshop, I included two ways of improving the levels of individualization including utilizing assessments and the meaning component. As previously stated, assessments enhance this aspect by providing participants in premarital programs with specific information regarding their relationship (Williams, 2007). Furthermore, Carroll and Doherty (2003) acknowledged that assessment could be used to individualize the skill-based program.

The second individualization method includes the meaning component. In Melton and Schulenberg’s (2008) article on logotherapy they stated that, “the challenge to the individual is to find that unique meaning for him- or herself” (p. 34). In further support, Schulenberg et al. (2010) suggested that, “logotherapy is a particularly well-suited and sensitive approach in that it guides couples in their search for what makes a personally satisfying relationship” (p. 101). Based on these statements and the provided definitions of meaning, the individualized aspect of meaning becomes clear.

The learning that takes place for each person and couple in the presented manual can be reflected upon and used in the skill-based premarital program that couples may



attend, which I believe will provide a greater sense of individualized learning.

Additionally, the proposed workshop integrates information on values with a significant amount of individual couples work, which enhances the sense of individualization as couples are discussing their relationship specifically.

**Conclusion.** In this section of the literature review, I discussed meaning and the definitions surrounding this concept. Additionally, I reviewed how meaning and values fit within the premarital program framework. Theoretical approaches to therapy, such as logotherapy, may be used in association with other approaches, which fits the format of the present workshop. However, given that the workshop is not intended to be couples therapy, I explored how adjustments can be made to these concepts in order to make the workshop appropriate for the educative nature of premarital programs.

Subsequently, values and meaning are correlated to relationship satisfaction, providing support for the creation of a meaning and values-based premarital workshop (i.e., Gaunt, 2006; Peterson et al., 2009; Rosen-Grandon et al., 2004; Steger & Kashdan, 2013). This provides a further explanation into how values correspond with the purpose of premarital programs. Finally, I considered a perceived deficit of pre-existing relationship programs, lack of individualization (Busby et al., 2007; Halford, 2004) and how the meaning concept could improve or benefit existing premarital programs. Meaning may individualize programs by having exercises that have the couple solely focusing on their individual relationship.

Overall, meaning and values may serve as valuable premarital workshop material. The focus on values-based content may also serve as a desired enhancement or ‘add-on’ to the several available skill-based premarital programs. Therefore, facilitators of skill-

based premarital programs are encouraged to use the presented workshop manual to improve the services being provided. However, the manual may also be used as separate and individual workshop for couples.

**Chapter Four: Workshop Manual**

**A Meaning and Values-Based  
Premarital Workshop**

**-- Workshop Manual  
Introduction --**



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## **Manual Introduction and Overview**

### **Introduction**

Premarital programs are aimed at reducing the risk for divorce and marital dissatisfaction in couples (Carroll & Doherty, 2003). Given the high rate of divorce in Canada at 40.7% over a 30-year time frame (Statistics Canada, 2008), premarital programs may be beneficial as the programs offer a preventative approach for couples (Markman, Stanley, Jenkins, Petrella, & Wadsworth, 2006). Researchers have recognized that the content of premarital programs need continuing effort to increase effectiveness (Fawcett, Hawkins, Blanchard, & Carroll, 2010), therefore reducing couples' relationship dissatisfaction to a greater extent.

Meaning and values are the focal point of the presented workshop. From a logotherapy perspective, meaning is significant as it may lead people to live more fulfilling and purposeful lives (Frankl, 1967b). Meaning and values have also been found through research to be connected to enhanced or improved relationship satisfaction (Peterson, Eifert, Feingold, & Davidson, 2009; Schulenberg, Schnetzer, Winters, & Hutzell, 2010; Steger & Kashdan, 2013).

### **Workshop Manual Objectives**

There are three main objectives in presenting this proposed premarital workshop manual: (1) to provide a premarital workshop manual to qualified facilitators to be used independently or as a supplementary extension for a skill-based premarital program; (2) to create a meaning or values-based workshop component with information and exercises for couples; and (3) when suitable to enhance the common skill-based premarital program

structure with the possibility of increasing long-term relationship satisfaction and stability.

### **Workshop Objectives**

There are four main objectives for facilitators to strive for in terms of the participants of the workshop. Facilitators are presenting the material with the expectation of: (1) increasing awareness of values; (2) teaching ways to integrate values into daily living; (3) teaching ways for partners to support each other in their values; and (4) guiding participants to recognize and gain awareness of the similarities and differences in relation to values and meaning within their partnership.

### **Program Structure**

The program manual will be structured into a one-day workshop. The workshop is designed with the intention of being delivered to couples, prior to them entering a skill-based premarital program. In providing the values-based manual first, the participants will have an opportunity to learn on a personal as well as an individual couple level. The material of the presented one-day workshop manual is to be facilitated over a 4 to 5 hour time period. The content is focused on the meaning-based component, therefore the included exercises and information aims to increase each persons understanding of their own and their partners' values and meaning in life. The program sections contain information and material that the program facilitator will present to the attending premarital couples. Additionally, there will be multiple exercises and instructions for the facilitator to lead and engage each of the couples in during the workshop. It is encouraged that facilitators seek to actively engage participants in each section of the workshop.

Prior to the workshop, couples should be informed of the recommended assessment tool. The RELATE inventory for couples can be found at <https://www.relate-institute.org>. Holman, Busby, Doxey, Klein, and Loyer-Carlson (1997) RELATE assessment includes sections that address values (as cited in Larson et al., 2002), which makes it a good fit with the focus of this program. All relevant information as well as the assessment can be found at this website address. If the existing skill-based program recommends a different assessment or inventory, the facilitator should select the inventory that best suits the participants' needs. Provided that the assessment tool is not directly related to the content of this workshop, the use of an assessment tool is optional but recommended.

### **Program Facilitators**

Qualified professionals should facilitate the proposed premarital workshops manual. The workshop manual is intended for a facilitator that is qualified or certified to provide a skill-based premarital program. Professionals may include counsellors, therapists, psychologists, social workers, etc. This is suggested in order to ensure couples are receiving premarital services from individuals that are competent in providing counselling-related services.

### **Program Audience**

The term *premarital or premarital couples* in this manual, refers to couples in the stage of pre- or beginning a commitment. This may include formally engaged couples or couples in the beginning stages of a committed or common-law relationship. Furthermore, the proposed workshop is targeted towards a secular population, as many existing programs or those who are typically attending premarital programs are

religiously associated (DeMaria, 2005; Stanley, Amato, Johnson, & Markman, 2006).

The meaning and values component may be particularly important for couples that identify as non-religious, as values may not be as clearly defined within the relationship.

It is recommended that the program facilitator consider other cultural factors, such as socio-economic status, sexual orientation, ethnicity, etc., prior to delivering the program. In tailoring the workshop, the facilitator will provide a more effective and impactful premarital services to the attending couples.



# **A Meaning and Values-Based Premarital Workshop**

## **-- Workshop Manual -- Meaning & Values**



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Created by: Hailey Lane Marcotte

### Manual Overview

Item	Materials	Time	Facilitator Instructions
Workshop Advertisement Poster	Poster Template		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Complete advertisement an appropriate amount of time prior to the workshop date</li> <li>• Use template to provide the public with information</li> <li>• Please input your personalized information (i.e., location, time, facilitator(s), etc.)</li> </ul>
Workshop Set-up			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Follow Instructions</li> </ul>
Welcome & Ice Breaker Activity	n/a	10 minutes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Follow Instructions</li> </ul>
Introduction to Meaning Why Meaning is Important	Powerpoint Presentation	~20 minutes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create powerpoint from slide descriptions</li> <li>• Present material</li> <li>• Answer participant questions</li> </ul>
List of Values (Provide one to each participant in the workshop)	Handout	~5 minutes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide participants with this handout prior to workshop activities</li> </ul>
Circles of Meaning Activity	Blank Handouts and Coloured pens	~45 minutes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Instructions</li> <li>• Provide materials</li> <li>• Facilitate activity</li> </ul>
<b>BREAK TIME</b>		~20 minutes	

Values Activity	Website Handouts, Discussion Handout	~45 minutes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Instructions</li> <li>• Provide materials</li> <li>• Facilitate activity</li> </ul>
Goals and Life Meaning Activity	Blank Handouts	~45 minutes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Instructions</li> <li>• Provide materials</li> <li>• Facilitate activity</li> </ul>
Integrating Meaning Activity	Blank Handouts	~45 minutes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Instructions</li> <li>• Provide materials</li> <li>• Facilitate activity</li> </ul>
Evaluation Sheet	Handout	~5 minutes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Instructions</li> <li>• End of Workshop (thanks to participants)</li> </ul>
<b>END OF WORKSHOP</b>		Total: 4 hours	



### **Workshop Set up List**

*In a suitable location (based on participant numbers and ability to access monitor/screen for powerpoint) set up the following for the day of the workshop:*

- Set up chairs in a circle (for the presentation portion of the program)
- Arrange tea, coffee, water, and any snacks for participants
- Arrange sign-in table
- Prepare copies of all handouts
- Prepare any necessary materials
- Set up powerpoint presentation

## Welcome & Ice Breaker Activity

*Facilitator welcomes those attending the workshop and invites everyone to sit in the circle, while sitting next to their partner. Briefly introduce the workshop including but not limited to:*

- **Title:** Meaning and values-based premarital workshop
- **Housekeeping:** location of washrooms, coffee/tea, and fire exit
- **Agenda:** See overview (page 51 & 52)
- **Participant Guidelines:** address topics such as confidentiality, respect, etc.
- **Introduce Ice Breaker Activity**

### Ice Break Activity Instructions:

- Ask for a volunteer to begin
- Have everyone in the circle take turns and state:
  - a. *Their first name*
  - b. *One thing they appreciate about their relationship with their partner*  
*(encourage participants to choose anything such as a characteristic, a quality, a mutual interest, a behaviour, etc.)*

## **PowerPoint Presentation Material**

*(Please use this material and material from the literature review portion of this project to create a PowerPoint presentation for the workshop – not all information needs to be placed on slides, but it should be addressed in some way)*

**Slide 1:** *Title page*

**Slide 2:** *What is meaning?*

- Meaning refers to beliefs, values, interests, and areas of importance
- Another definition: “values identification, clarification, and prioritization”  
(Schulenberg et al., 2010, p. 96)
- In this presentation, the terms meaning and values are used interchangeably

**Slide 3:** *Why are values important to your relationship?*

- Acting in ways that are in alignment with your values can be beneficial in terms of relationship improvement (Schulenberg et al., 2010)
- Increased meaning was also found to be associated with increased satisfaction in intimate relationships (Steger & Kashdan, 2013)

**Slide 4:** *How do I do this?*

- Increasing your awareness of your own values and/or meaning as well as awareness of your partners’
- Learn ways to integrate your values better into your life
- Identify ways you can support and acknowledge your partners’ values and have yours supported by them as well
- Recognize the similarities and differences in you and your partners’ values

- All of these make up our primary focus and are the goals or objectives of this supplementary workshop

**Slide 5:** *Brainstorming Values*

- 1) Ask the group to list and brainstorm values
- 2) If the participants are having difficulty, the facilitator may provide some examples
- 3) After brainstorming is complete, please hand out the List of Values worksheet (provide the participants with a few minutes to review the list and have each participant highlight or circle the five values that are most important to them)
- 4) At this point, have couples break out of the circle format and into their individual couple pairings



## LIST OF VALUES

*(There are many values so please include any other values that are not identified in this list)*

Family	Friends	Passion	Love
Money	Education	Work	Honesty
Relationships	Loyalty	Religion	Spirituality
Commitment	Security	Trust	Sexuality
Connection	Confidence	Happiness	Physicality
Nature	Intellect	Genuine	Independence
Calmness	Humor	Creativity	Uniqueness
Closeness	Respect	Awareness	Power
Opportunity	Adventure	Self-Perception	Other-Perception
Dedication	Dependence	Leadership	Giving
Control	Teamwork	Intimacy	Community
Fun	Motivation	Travel	Communication
Success	Self-Esteem	Health	Mentorship
Freedom	Interest	Openness	Privacy
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____

## Circles of Meaning Activity

Time:

Activity Component	Time Allotment (approximate)
Activity Instructions	5 to 10 minutes
Handout Completion	15 to 20 minutes
Discussion	15to 20 minutes

This exercise was adapted from a solution-focused activity for premarital therapy that helps clients identify resources (Murray & Murray, 2004). The author of this project adapted the activity initially in November 2013, to help clients identify their meaning, values, and beliefs, which they then share with their partner.

Instructions:

### **Step 1: Filling in the Circles**

Give each individual a handout and have the couples refer to the handout throughout the description of the exercise. There are three layers to the circle: the external, interpersonal, and intrapersonal factors layers. Have all couples fill out their handouts at the same time (but separately).

#### External Factors:

- Start with the external factors layer
- Each client will fill in this layer with a words or small sentence
- Ask the clients to think of things outside of themselves (externally) and their intimate relationship that they find important or that they hold high value in
- Examples could include: successful career, finish bachelor degree, have strong friendships, financial stability, travel, volunteering, etc.

#### Interpersonal Factors:

- Next, move onto the interpersonal factors layer
- Ask the clients to write in factors in their intimate relationship that they value or find important

- Examples could include values or characteristics: stability, commitment, trust, respect, honesty, communication, etc.
- Or examples could include goals or life stages: get married to partner, have children with partner, move in together, etc.

Intrapersonal Factors:

- Now have the clients complete the intrapersonal layer
- Ask the clients to write down factors that they value or find important intrapersonally (within themselves)
- Examples could include: independence, being caring, being authentic or genuine, having passion, being adaptable, having high self-esteem, etc.

**Step 2: Understanding Various Levels of Importance**

Now that each individual has completed filling in their handout give each client three crayons, colored pens and/or felts (all different colors). The colors will either represent, the most meaningful/important (e.g., green), moderately meaningful/important (e.g., blue), and somewhat meaningful/important (e.g., purple).

- Have each person fill in their handout following the above guidelines

**Step 3: Derive Meaning and Share with your Partner**

Now that you have a completed handout for each individual in the couple, one at a time the partners will ask each other questions to understand the meaning or values behind each of the answers in their partner's handout (ask questions, such as, why is that important to you?). The person asking the questions first should also ask about the varying levels of importance (such as, why was having financial stability more important to you than volunteering?)

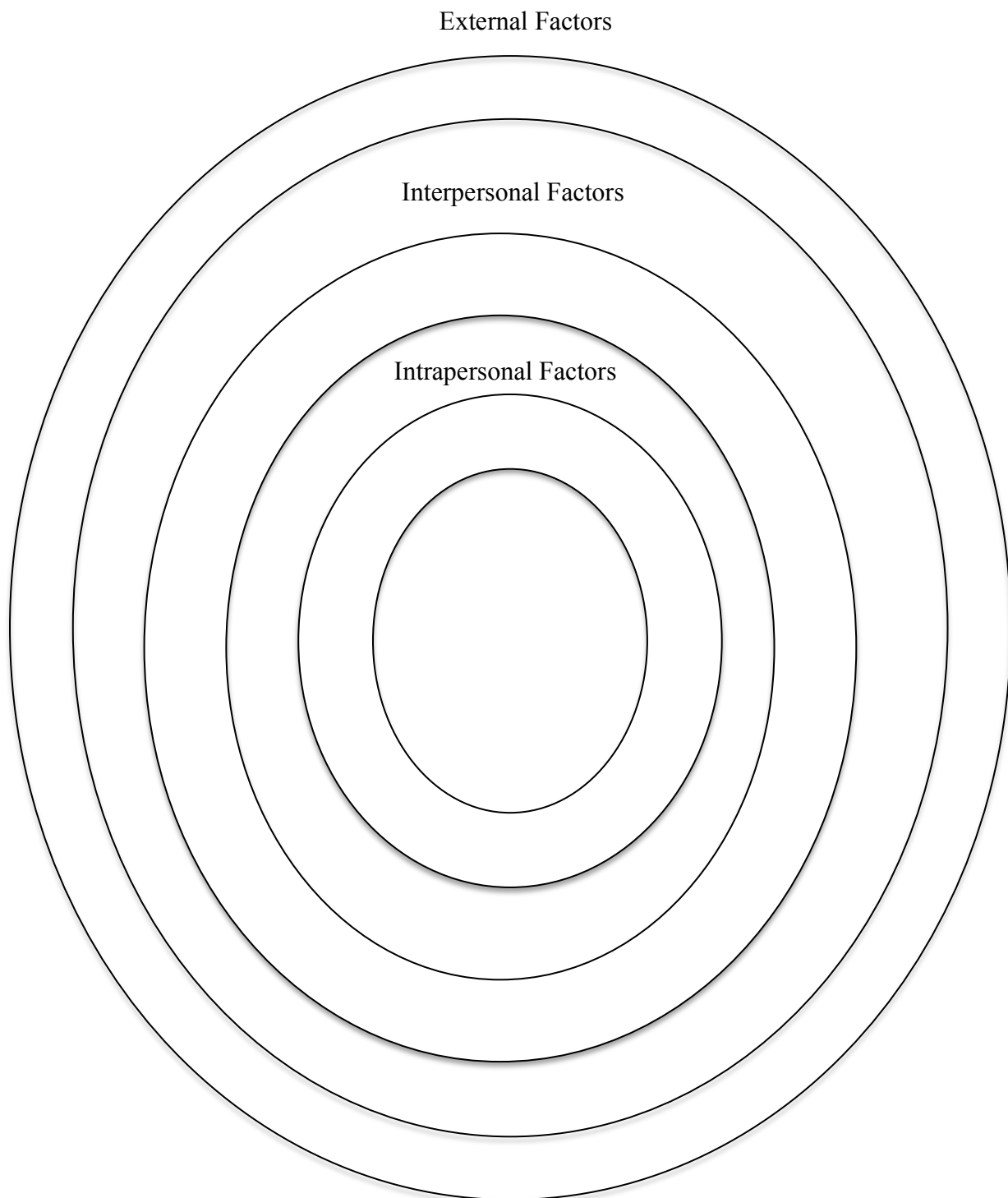
- This will help the clients' gain deeper understanding into the meaning behind the values they included in their circles.

Repeat for the other partner.

At this stage, each person will have a separate handout identifying his or her values and meanings. Have the couple share and compare their handouts with their partner. The facilitator can be involved this discussion.

- Identify any shared meaning the couple may have
- Identify any differences, help each partner understand, acknowledge, and potentially validate the meanings within their partner's life

### Circles of Meaning Activity Handout



Adapted from:

Murray, C. E. & Murray, T. L. (2004). Solution-focused premarital counseling: Helping couples build a vision for their marriage. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, 30(3), 349-358. doi: 10.1111/j.1752-0606.2004.tb01245.x

### Values Activity (based on Acceptance and Commitment Therapy)

Time:

Activity Component	Time Allotment (approximate)
Activity Instructions	5 minutes
Handout Completion	10 to 15 minutes
Discussion	15 to 20 minutes

The next activity can be located on <http://psychology.tools> website. This worksheet provides information and allows the participants to rank their values. The specific link for the free worksheet is:

<http://media.psychology.tools/Worksheets/English/Values.pdf?>

I recommend that in the workshop, the facilitator present the information to participants on page 1. In addition, provide the couples with instructions to complete this worksheet individually without input from each person's partner. Upon completion, each individual should share his or her worksheets with each their partner.

Encourage the couples to take both partners' worksheets home as a reminder of each participant's values as well as each participant's partner. This worksheet can also serve as a greater conversation piece for the couple at a later time.

On the following page, there is a handout you can provide each person with to provide him or her with discussion ideas related to completing this worksheet.

## -- Ideas to Support your Discussion with your Partner --

Ask or discuss the following to help you and your partner discuss the worksheet you completed.

*Say aloud to your partner:*

- “Tell me more about your most valued area (the area you rated the highest)”
- “When I saw your values sheet, one thing that surprised or stood out to me was \_\_\_\_\_. How do you think I could better support you in that value?”
- “Some values that stood out to me on your worksheet were \_\_\_\_\_, because I appreciate, love, connect with and/or admire \_\_\_\_\_.”
- “Some of the values that you identified as important that I find to cause difficulties in our relationship are \_\_\_\_\_. How do you think we could work at reducing the negative impact of those challenges?”
- If there are few or no similarities, “what are some ways you could support and acknowledge your partners’ values while respecting and acknowledging your own?”
- “How did you feel looking at some of your differences in values? How might these differences impact you in the future?”
- “What do you think about our similarities in our values found on the worksheet? Do we have many? How does it feel to look at those similarities?”
- Please include any other relevant or important areas in your discussion

### Goals and Life Meaning Activity

Time:

Activity Component	Time Allotment (approximate)
Activity Instructions	5 to 10 minutes
Discussion (for partner #1)	15 to 20 minutes
Discussion (for partner #2)	15 to 20 minutes

The following activity is taken and adapted from the self-portrait activity (Redekopp, Day, Magnusson, & Durnford, 1993), used as a career counselling tool (as cited in Redekopp, Day, & Magnusson, 1995). The self-portrait activity can be used as a way to help individuals identify life meaning (K. Bernes, personal communication, October 25, 2013).

Each individual in the program will be supplied with his or her own blank handout. The handouts will be discussed between each couple in the workshop. The first person in the couple dyad will begin asking their partner questions (following the instructions), and filling in their partner's handout based on the discussion. Upon completion or based on the time limit, the partners will switch roles.

Steps:

1. Pass out a handout to each person
2. Explain that first person in the couple dyad will begin asking their partner questions, and filling in their partner's handout based on the discussion. Upon completion or based on the time limit, the partners will switch roles
3. Direct couples to follow the handout as the instructions are clearly indicated, including the questions asked by each partner

Adapted from:

Redekopp, Day, Magnusson, and Durnford (1993) as cited in Redekopp, Day, and Magnusson (1995)



## Goals and Life Meaning Activity Handout

### Current and Future Goals

1) What personal goals do you have? (For yourself, career, education, friendships, etc.)

- 
- 
- 
- 
- 
- 

2) What goals do you have for our relationship?

- 
- 
- 
- 
- 
- 

### Meaning & Values

Go through each goal listed and ask your partner “why is that important to you?”  
(It is okay to not have an answer for each goal)

List your partners answers or highlights from this discussion below

- 
- 
- 
- 
- 
- 
- 
- 
- 
- 
- 

Adapted from:

Redekopp, Day, Magnusson, and Durnford (1993) as cited in Redekopp, Day, and Magnusson (1995)

### Integrating Meaning Activity

Time:

Activity Component	Time Allotment (approximate)
Activity Instructions	5 minutes
Handout Completion	15 to 20 minutes
Discussion	20 to 30 minutes

The following activity is intended to bring the learning taken from the first activities together. In addition, this activity will give couples an opportunity to acknowledge their understanding of their personal meaning as well as their partners' and how they can support and respect each others values and/or meaning.

Each individual in the workshop will be supplied with his or her own blank handout. Couples will fill out the worksheet separately first and then be given time for discussion.

The handout consists of questions and/or reflections that will address areas such as:

- Personal values and/or meaning
- Partners' values and/or meaning
- Respecting and supporting each others values and/or meaning

## Integrating Meaning Activity Handout

For couples, each individual partner will complete his or her own handout. The answers can be based on the previous meaning-based exercises. After completion, you will be given time to discuss with your partner.

### **My Values:**

**List your most prominent or important values:**

(What did you learn about yourself in this portion of the workshop?)

**List or draw ways you could integrate these values into your life and actions?**

**List ways in which your partner could support and respect your values:**

(Try to be specific.)

**My Partner's Values:****List your partners' most prominent or important values:**

(What did you learn about your partner in this portion of the workshop?)

**List ways that you could support your partners' values and/or meaning?**

(Try to be specific. For example, "One of my partners' values I noticed through out the past exercises was the importance he or she placed on education. I will make an conscious effort to be supportive and positive about his or her choice to go back into college").

My overall satisfaction level for this workshop was:

5	4	3	2	1
Very Positive	Quite Positive	Neutral	Quite Negative	Very Negative

I feel that I better understand my personal meaning and values after the workshop:

5	4	3	2	1
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

I feel that I better understand my partner's meaning and values after the workshop:

5	4	3	2	1
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

**Comments:**

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## **Chapter Five: Strengths, Limitations, and Future Research**

This chapter outlines the project author's perceived strengths and limitations of the project, "A Meaning and Values-Based Premarital Workshop". In addition, recommendations and areas that may benefit from future research will be explored. Overall, this project and workshop manual is presented in the hopes of increasing awareness of the premarital program field and stimulating exploration around improving such programs ability to further increase couples' relationship satisfaction and stability. In creating the presented workshop manual, I aim for qualified facilitators to use the material to provide premarital couples with knowledge and exercises that emphasizes the importance of values in relationships. This may include solely focusing on values and meaning or adding upon the commonly used skill-based framework to provide a more comprehensive service. For the premarital couples that may attend the presented workshop in the future, the objective is for participants to mutually increase their understanding, awareness, and ability to acknowledge their partner's values.

### **Strengths of the Project**

The first recognized strength of this project is the inclusion of a three-part literature review. By incorporating each section, the reader is provided with literature on premarital programs. In addition, the other two sections of the review, offer better understanding of literature on factors related to marital success and stability as well as meaning or values in relation to intimate relationships.

Another strength of this project is the integration of premarital workshop content that can act as a supplement to existing skill-based programs. As indicated in the literature review, this is in alignment with the need to enhance existing premarital



programs according to Fawcett et al. (2010). A supplementary meaning workshop has the potential to enhance the current efficacy level of existing skill-based programs.

Therefore, this project and workshop manual is delivered with the intent of strengthening the well-researched skill-based models of premarital programs. Furthermore, with the inclusion of content related to meaning and values, this project is aimed to improve the individualized learning aspect of premarital programs that can be found to be an area of improvement for existing skill-based programs (Halford, 2004).

The final strength of this project is the incorporation of a detailed meaning and values-based workshop manual. The detailed manual will allow qualified professionals to facilitate the workshop to premarital couples individually or alongside a skill-based premarital program or skill-based therapeutic service. The manual provides facilitators with presentation material, handouts, exercises, and relevant information needed to lead couples in this values-based workshop.

### **Limitations of the Project**

The first limitation is the exclusion of primary research. Given the project guidelines, the University of Lethbridge Faculty of Education does not require primary research, but such research may be beneficial. Without the primary research component, the contribution of the meaning and values-based component to a skill-based program or as an individual workshop is unknown. Therefore, the improvement to the level of efficacy by supplementing the skill-based model with a meaning and values component remains relatively undetermined.

In alignment with the previous limitation, another identified constraint of this project is the limited research found on meaning and values work with couples, especially

premarital couples. In fact, there were only two main influential research articles used in this component of the literature review (i.e., Peterson et al., 2009; Schulenberg et al., 2010). Consequently, it appears that this is an area that is moderately unacknowledged in the research literature.

### **Areas of Future Research**

There are several areas of future research or consideration that may be taken into account based on this project. Firstly, future research could be conducted on the effectiveness and enhancement of the standard skill-based premarital program when supplemented by the meaning and values workshop material. If research were conducted in this area, a longitudinal method with an experimental or quasi-experimental design involving treatment and control groups may be used.

Another area of future consideration is seen in the term *premarital*. As evidenced by the fact that trends in marital statistics are changing (Statistics Canada, 2011a). One notable change is seen in the greater number of common-law couples currently as compared to the past (Statistics Canada, 2011a). In 2011, the percentage of common-law couples was 19.9%, compared to the 6.3% in 1981 (Statistics Canada, 2011a). Therefore, premarital program research field may consider increasing the spectrum of individuals that access the programs. One way to accomplish this may be through increasingly acknowledging those couples that are not formally engaged, but rather in the beginning phases a committed partnership. Furthermore, premarital programs and research should be made accessible and promote more wide spread demographic populations to include a wider range of couples at different stages and levels of commitment.

The final future consideration is for researchers and premarital program developers to strive to create programs that increase relationship satisfaction and success and are relevant for non-religious couples. Programs are often attended by religious couples (Stanley et al., 2006), therefore there is a portion of the population that is under-utilizing premarital programs. Promoting premarital services for non-religious couples and determining their effectiveness would be worthy of further research. Therefore, a future research idea may be conducting a study to determine whether non-religious couples desire participation in premarital programs and how programs influence them in terms of relationship satisfaction and stability.

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