

# **Efficacy of Marriage Education Classes: A Follow-Up Study of Former Participants in Twogether in Texas**

Debbie Farr, M.S.Ed.

Cory Kildare, M.A., CFLE

Amber McEnturff

Arminta Jacobson, Ph.D.

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Jennifer Acker

Melissa Shamburger

# Background



- Twogether in Texas
- Initiative of the state of Texas to Reduce the Divorce Rate
- Started September 1, 2008
- HB2683 –
  - Provided funding through 1% of the state’s TANF funds
- HB2685 -
  - Raised the state marriage license fee from \$30 to \$60.
  - If couple completes an 8-hour premarital education class approved through the Twogether in Texas program, then the couple will receive:
    - A waiver of the \$60 state marriage license fee
    - A waiver of the 72 hour waiting period

# Background



- Twogether in Texas
- The class MUST include:
  - Healthy Communication skills
  - Healthy Conflict management skills
  - The key components of a successful, healthy marriage
- The class MUST be at least 8 hours
- The class offered by trained instructors must be:
  - Skills-based
  - Research-based marriage preparation curricula



# Background



- Twogether in Texas

From September 1, 2008 to present

- 2,673 Service Providers throughout the state of Texas
  - As of Sept. 1, 2011, ALL are volunteers
- 17,302 classes led by volunteers (94.5%)
  - 18,300 classes total
- 141,469 people have been served through the TNT Program
  - (as of 3/16/2012)

# Background

The Regional Intermediaries for the

**Twogether in Texas**

Premarital Education Program

were the founding members

of the

**Texas Coalition for Healthy Families**

# Background

- **Texas Coalition for Healthy Families** is a network of organizations and individuals that provides services to strengthen families in Texas.



# Background

- There is a need to reflect how marriage education is impacting couples in Texas.
  - What demographics are we reaching in Texas?
  - Where does Texas rank in regards to the effectiveness of marriage education?
  - What % of couples are taking a class and deciding not to marry (compared to national statistics)?
  - After getting married, what % of couples remained married after the first year (compared to national statistics)?



# Methods



- Surveyed a sampling of past participants from marriage education classes throughout the state of Texas using electronic and phone surveys
  - Survey was conducted from December 2010 – January 2011
- 1,183 participants were surveyed
  - out of 108,000 participants who attended classes (from 9/1/2008 to 6/1/2010)
  - 1% sample size



# Methods

- Questions regarding:
  - Relationship status at time of workshop vs. time of survey
  - Cohabitation at time of workshop vs. time of survey
  - Employment
  - Health
  - Satisfaction
  - Conflict management Skills
  - Financial Status
  - Gain in Financial Skills
  - Gain in Communication Skills



# Prior research on marital programs

“Research indicates that providing couples with marriage/relationship education and communication skills enables the couples to communicate more effectively, manage conflict better and work in agreement with each other to improve the quality of family life” (Texas Health and Human Services Commission RFP for Twogether in Texas Healthy Marriage Program, 2007, p. 10).

“..couples who take advantage of various preventive interventions (marital preparation or enhancement) and various types of marital therapy receive measureable benefits in relationship satisfaction and positive change in their behavior patterns” (Cowan & Cowan, 2002, p. 747).



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# Contributions of healthy marriage

- Marital conflict was negatively associated with self-esteem for girls and boys when children's relationships with parents were poor (Amato, 1986)
- “..difficult and ineffective parent-child and marital relationships function as risk factors for children's cognitive, social, and emotional problems in childhood and adolescence” (Cowan & Cowan, 2002, p. 731).



# Research Questions

- Were the Twogether marriage classes effective overall?
- Does Twogether *marriage class efficacy* differ by gender, race, age, cohabitation status, and/or socioeconomic status?
- Does Twogether class efficacy score predict current relationship status (married, single, etc.)?

# Efficacy Scale

- Demographics
  - Gender, race, age, income
  - Relationship status, cohabitation status, length of marriage
  - Employment status, government assistance, health status

- Efficacy – scale computation

$$\alpha = .913$$

## Since the workshop:

- We have noticed improvement in our financial situation
- Our communication about money has improved
- We are better able to solve problems in our relationship
- Our commitment to relationship has improved
- Our relationship with our children has improved.
- Our overall relationship has improved

# Results – Overall Efficacy

- Average Class Efficacy = 4.03 ( $SD = .75$ )

## Distribution of Responses for Class Efficacy Scale Items

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Not Sure	Agree	Strongly Agree
<b>Financial Situation (<math>n = 955</math>)</b>	2.9%	14.5%	17.9%	45.5%	19.2%
<b>Communication about Money (<math>n = 996</math>)</b>	2.5%	8.4%	7.5%	56.5%	25.0%
<b>Problem Solving (<math>n = 1034</math>)</b>	1.9%	4.4%	6.0%	53.7%	33.9%
<b>Commitment (<math>n = 1018</math>)</b>	1.9%	4.7%	5.7%	46.6%	41.2%
<b>Relationship with Children (<math>n = 518</math>)</b>	2.5%	4.8%	13.1%	45.6%	34.0%
<b>Overall Relationship (<math>n = 1040</math>)</b>	2.0%	4.0%	4.2%	46.0%	43.8%

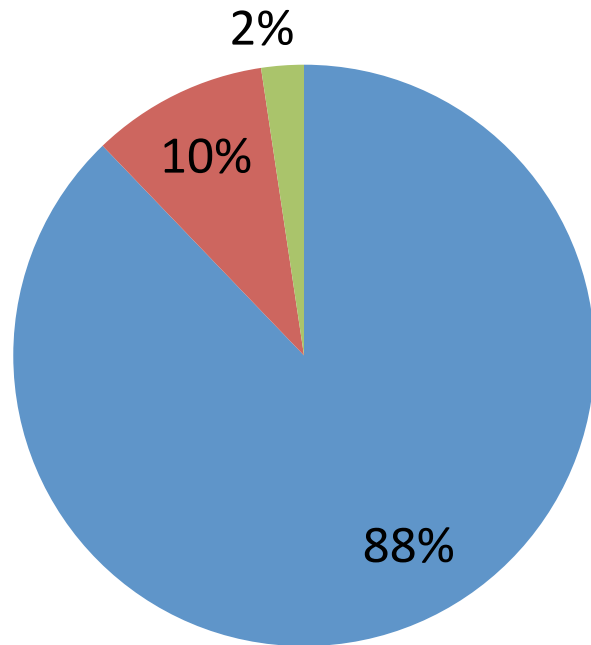
# Results – Changes in Relationships

- 71% of participants indicated a progression in status (i.e., dating to engaged, dating to married, engaged to married)



# Cohabitation and Engaged Couples

Engaged and Cohabiting



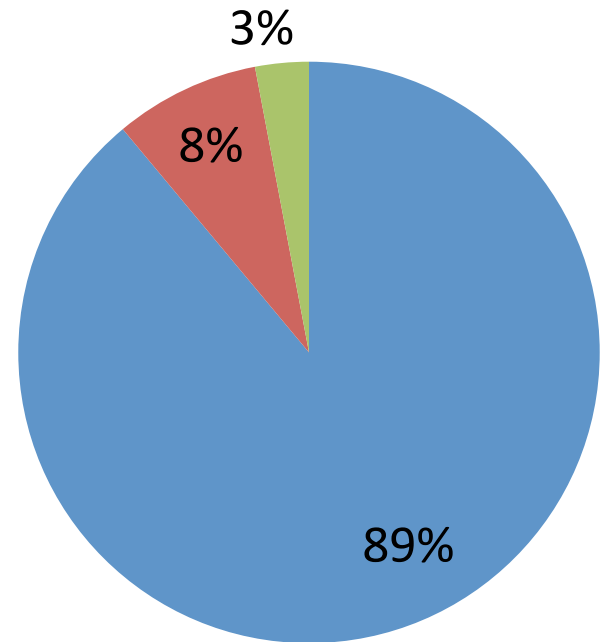
■ Married

■ Still Engaged

■ No Longer Engaged

n = 550

Engaged and Not Cohabiting



■ Married

■ Still Engaged

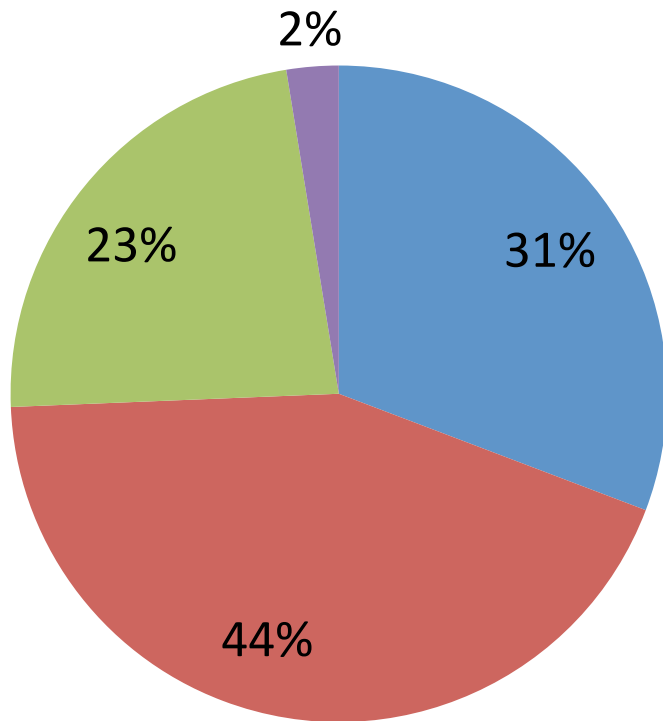
■ No Longer Engaged

n = 235



# Cohabitation and Dating Couples

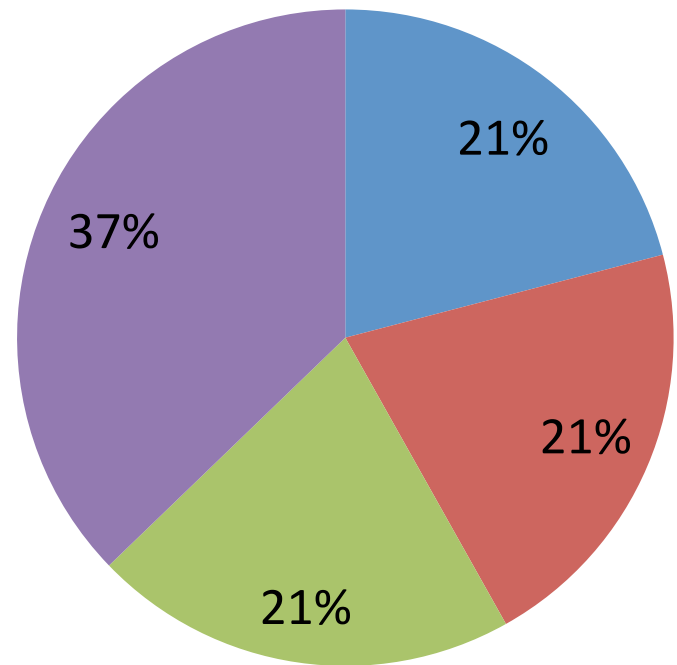
## Dating and Cohabiting



■ Married      ■ Engaged  
■ Still Dating      ■ Not Together

n = 39

## Dating and Not Cohabiting

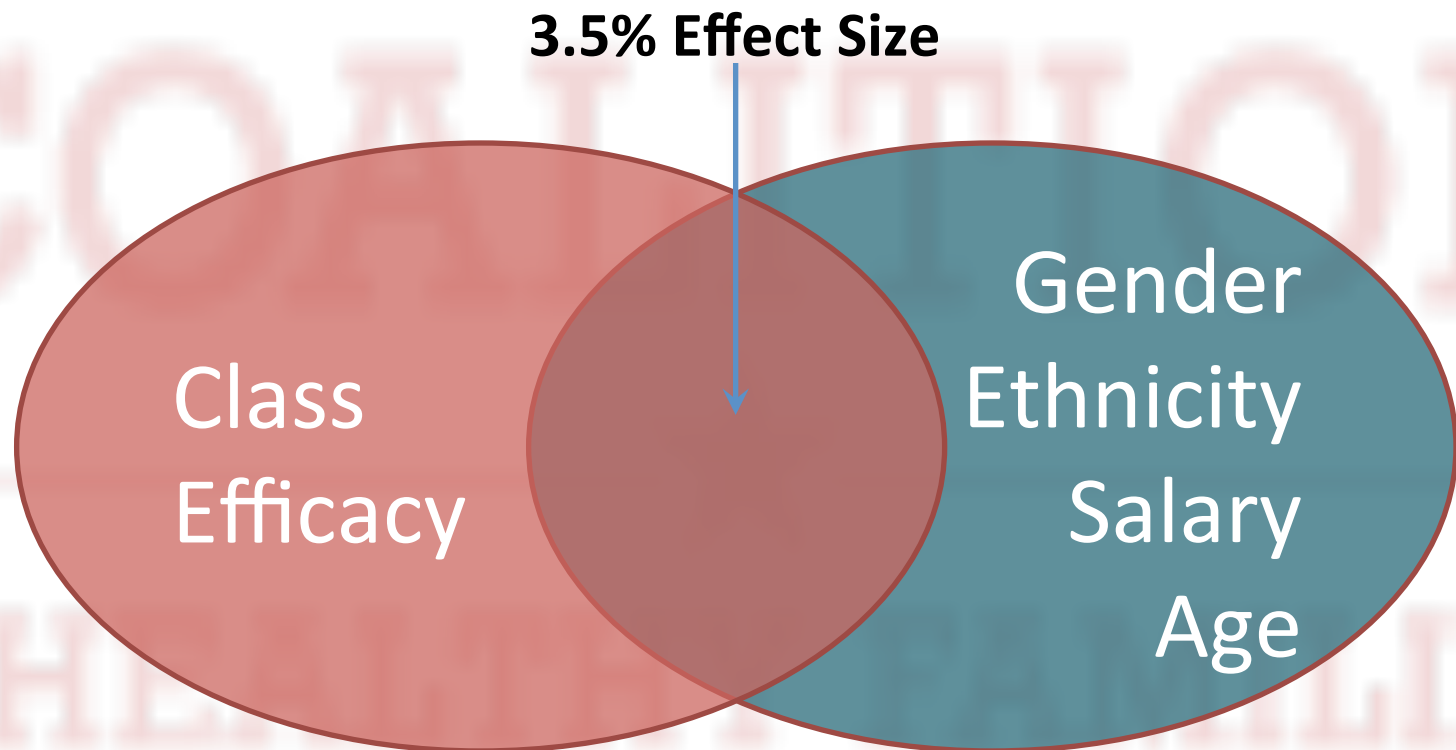


■ Married  
■ Engaged

n = 43

# Results – Efficacy Regression

- Demographics have a statistically significant impact on class efficacy:  $F(648,11) = 2.12, p = .018$



# Predicting Current Relationship Status

- Multinomial regression analysis
- Current relationship status predicted by class efficacy score?
- No significant impact.



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# Implications for future research and marriage education program development

- Inclusion of financial stability/education (including employment security) in new Marriage/Fatherhood Grants
- Overview of the Empowering Families Project at The Parenting Center
  - How is it the same?
  - How is it different?



# Discussion & Future Research

- Overall, classes were viewed as effective
  - No statistically significant differences by race, age, & SES.
  - Dating non-cohabiters less likely to progress.
- We could not predict current relationship status using class effectiveness
- Family systems theory – impacts from other micro and macro systems not measured
- Future research should investigate long-term relationship outcomes.

# Q&A

- QUESTIONS?
- THANK YOU!

