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HEBREW UNION COLLEGE - JEWISH INSTITUTE OF RELIGION
California School

Premarital Counseling
Strengthening the Jewish Family in Formation

A Thesis submitted in partial
fulfillment of the requirements
for the double degrees

MASTER OF ARTS

IN

JEWISH COMMUNAL SERVICE

and

MASTER OF SOCIAL WORK

by

Daniel H. Bass

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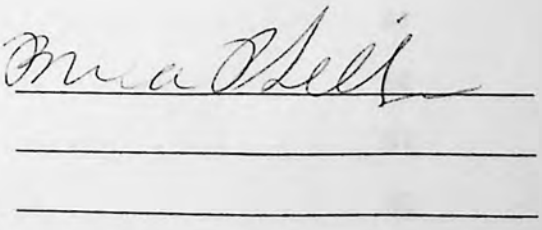
HEBREW UNION COLLEGE -

JEWISH INSTITUTE OF RELIGION

The Thesis of Daniel Howard Bass is approved.



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Introduction and Statement of Purpose

The Jewish community prides itself on communal strength and unity, yet the family is the major resource for assuring the continuance of a vital community.

The Jewish family plays a central role in Jewish life and communal activities. The literature emphasizes the importance of the family in Jewish life. For example, A. J. Heschel wrote, "The Jewish home is where Judaism is at home. It is where Jewish learning, commitment and sensitivity to values are cultivated and cherished. A Jewish family is more than a relationship. It is a way of life, of living in the first person plural."[1] The influence of the family touches on nearly every aspect of Jewish life. David Blumberg, in his article, "Jewish Family in Crisis," writes "the family is the transmission belt of Judaism - by means of the intergenerational conversation that takes place in the home. The vocabulary is one of ideas, and concepts, loyalties and values. It explains heritage and offers hope, encourages independence and promises continuity."[2] The family also meets the emotional needs of its members, serving as a secure base from which to learn the ways of the community. All of this has a great impact on the development and growth of Jewish identity.

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1. A. J. Heschel, cited by D. M. Blumberg, "Jewish Family in Crisis," National Jewish Monthly, 92:22, Spring, 1979.

2. D. M. Blumberg, Ibid.

Mayer writes, "The Jewish family was the fundamental unit of the social order. It determined right and wrong, made laws, administered justice and maintained divine worship...strong family solidarity was a matter of course."[3] Chaim Waxman underscores the role of the family and the formation of Jewish identity. "The family is the most important source of Jewish identification, and the major mechanism by which identification is transmitted."[4]

The leadership of the American Jewish community is increasingly concerned about the mental health of the family, and is interested in developing means by which to help and strengthen this vital resource. The extent of this interest is highlighted by the Council of Jewish Federation's recent decision to undertake a "two-year project aimed at encouraging Federations to develop effective community support systems on behalf of the 'healthy' as well as the 'troubled' family."[5] The CJF is not alone in its perception that the Jewish family is in need of help. For example, Shapiro writes:

> Jewish families are no longer what they used to be. Our family life was always a source of pride. It is what we thought distinguished us from others. Others thought the same. Now, in our quest to be Americanized, to be like others, sacrifices have been made, and one of them is family cohesiveness. Now we feel we're in crisis, at a loss for what happened.[6]

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3. E. Mayer, "Changing Family Patterns and Persistence of Tradition in the Jewish Community," Journal of Jewish Communal Service, 51:82-89, Fall 1974.

4. Chaim I. Waxman, "Centrality of the Family in Defining Jewish Identify and Identification," Journal of Jewish Communal Service, 55:353-359, Summer 1979.

5. Esther Lea Ritz, "Strengthening the Jewish Family," in General Assembly Papers, 49th General Assembly, Detroit, November 12-16, 1980.

6. Manheim Shapiro, "Changing Life Styles," Jewish Digest, 21(6), p. 15-21, March 1976.

The above observer cites the desire of Jews to acculturate as the reason for family breakdown. Not everyone agrees, and some do not fear the demise of the traditional family unit:

> From the point of view of those who believe in everlasting continuity of Jewish life and culture it would be patently contradictory to suppose that a change in any specific social institution would spell the end of a culture and a people, who, during their long history, have surely endured the alteration and even destruction of institutions that were at the time considered vital to cultural survival. Thus, a defender of and believer in the faith cannot possibly hang the destiny of his people on the continuity of a specific social form.[7]

This quote implies that marriage, like any other social institution, is expendable. This viewpoint is in sharp contrast to many in the Jewish community, who see the demise of marriage as the predecessor to the demise of the Jewish community.

Numerous factors contribute to the rapid rise in concern about the changing status of the Jewish family. The most apparent are the increasing divorce rate, declining birth rate, rise in the age of first marriage, the number of working mothers, single parent families, and alternative living arrangements.

A number of recent trends have been identified with these changes. The emphasis upon the individual, drive for self-actualization, rejection of historic social roles for men and women, anti-institutionalism, and the tendency to form transitory relationships rather than permanent affiliations are frequently mentioned as prime reasons for those changes leading to less cohesive family patterns.[8]

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7. E. Mayer, op cit.

8. Manheim Shapiro, "Changing Life Styles," Jewish Digest, 21(6), p. 15-21, March 1976.

Solutions for dealing with the breakdown of the family vary. There are those that stress holding onto what is known and familiar. For example, Nathan Glazer sums up this position with his familiar proclamation that "a funny thing happened on the way to developing a radical critique of the American family: it has turned out the old model was not so bad after all."[9] On the other end of the spectrum is the position advocating departure from tradition, which argues that cultural and ethnic survival of the Jewish people requires new and imaginative systems, ready to abandon the ways we have always known. For example, "It could be that in America today, Jewish ethnic and cultural survival may be quite independent of the traditional form of the Jewish family - 'modernization' of the traditional Jewish family may be necessary."[10]

If the family is to be recognized as central to Jewish continuity, then it follows that the marital relationship is particularly important as the sealant which binds the family together. There is no disputing this in the Jewish community, as substantiated by the fact that the vast majority of American Jews marry at least once.[11] Traditionally the Jewish community has accepted that a successful marriage is a developmental process and not one of chance or luck. Preparation and sound planning was the key. As written in the Talmud, "...a man should build a house, plant a vineyard,

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9. Nathan Glazer, "Rediscovery of the Family," Commentary, 65:49-56, March 1978.

10. E. Mayer, op. cit.

11. Manheim Shapiro, op. cit.

and then marry a woman."[12] Maimonides wrote that "it is the way of fools first to marry and then build a house and find a profession."[13] Admittedly these two quotes lose some strength because of their sexist overtone, but the message is: marital success depends on proper preparation and the existence of a solid foundation prior to actually beginning the formal marriage. In more contemporary language, "Marriage is ideally the union of two complete people, who unite not to fulfill needs or satisfy drives, but to exercise mutual growth through reciprocal concern for each other."[14]

Marriage and the family are two interlocked elements in Jewish life. The future of one may be linked to the other. There are different points of view as to the importance of either one in securing the survival of the Jewish people. The basic point is that both are still important, and creative ways of strengthening family life must be explored. For this reason, it is revealing that so little attention is given to helping the family in formation. For example, many workshops on strengthening the Jewish family were scheduled at a recent General Assembly of the CJF.[15] However, not a single session examined the transitional period from single life to married life. One can review periodicals addressing concerns in

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12. Talmud, Sotah 44a

13. Maimonides Hilkhot (De'ot 5:11)

14. Reuven P. Bulka, Divorce: The Problem and the Challenge, Tradition, 16:127-133, Summer 1976.

15. General Assembly Papers, op. cit.

the Jewish community and find little that is written on ways to help people adapt to married life. Aaron Rutledge, an advocate of premarital counseling believes that couples can derive benefit from premarital preparations:

> The time prior to marriage is one of the greatest teachable moments or opportunities for learning. A minimum of skilled help can affect changes that would take years to accomplish later, and basic ways of handling relationship problems can be developed for a life of meaningful interaction. Premarital counseling is the greatest education and clinical opportunity in the life of a person--there is still time to effect adult personality changes and at the same time invest in soon-to-be-born children."[16]

This is a bold statement in light of the paucity of empirical data. Nevertheless, Rutledge isn't alone. The growth of premarital counseling in the Catholic Church is quite significant.[17] In the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, 80% of the engaged couples attend at least one of a variety of programs offered regularly in a variety of languages. When considering that 12,000 couples are married in Catholic Churches in the L.A. Archdiocese, each year, 80% is no small figure.

It is important that the organized Jewish community do all that it can to facilitate family stability. Group premarital counseling is proving to be a popular model. It deserves attention in the Jewish community. Thus, premarital counseling, cojoint (one couple and a counselor) and group premarital counseling (five-ten couples and two counselors) and its application in the Jewish community was selected as the topic for this study.

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16. Aaron L. Rutledge, "An Illustrative Look at the History of Premarital Counseling," In J. A. Peterson (Ed.), Marriage and Family Counseling, (New York: Association Press, 1978).

17. "Preparation for Marriage Emphasized, "Los Angeles Times, 14 December 1980, sec. 1, p.1.

In order to facilitate a better understanding I will address the following questions:

1) How do professionals in the field agree or differ in their approach to premarital counseling?

2) What is the perception of the need for premarital counseling by those Jewish communal professionals (rabbis, social workers) likely to see couples with plans to marry?

3) How do couples benefit from premarital counseling?

4) What is the Jewish component (and potential component) in current practice?

5) Based on the research is there a need for an organized program of premarital preparation sanctioned by and under the auspices of the organized Jewish community?

The Jewish family has always been central to Jewish life. Because of this centrality, lifestyle changes in recent years have caused many to believe that the family is in danger of disentagrating. Not everyone is threatened by this possibility; some welcome this change. Nonetheless, most social observers feel that there will always be some kind of family unit to rely on. Among the many recommended remedies for strengthening the Jewish family, noticeably lacking are means to help couples prepare for married life. This study will explore premarital counseling in the Jewish community. How is it practiced, and how invested should the Jewish community be in this rather innovative method of marital preparation.

The study is divided into six chapters. Chapter 1 takes a more detailed look at marriage in the 20th century and provides a brief history of premarital counseling. Chapter 2 explains the methodology used for the study. Chapters 3 and 4 focus on the data drawn from the interviews with the informants. Issues such as the preparedness of rabbis and social workers to provide premarital counseling are discussed. Chapter 5 is a

summary of three group premarital programs that exist in the Los Angeles Jewish community, with views from the providers and non-providers of these innovative programs. The final chapter is a summary of the findings, with some concluding comments by the researcher.

Chapter 1

Literature Review

The Evolving Nature of Marriage

The Jewish family and the marital dyad have experienced some dramatic changes in the past few decades. An increasing amount of American Jews are abandoning the traditional marital scheme in which the husband is the prime breadwinner and the wife remains behind to run the household and raise the children. The purpose of marriage is also changing. Whereas the major reason for marriage was to reproduce, educate and socialize children, today the emphasis is on meeting the emotional needs of the marital partners. As David Mace writes, "fulfillment of life, growth as persons, development of our own unique and best potentialities is one of the basic purposes for marriage."[1] The eminent psychologist Carl Rogers adds, "A relationship between a man and a women is significant, and worth trying to preserve, only when it is an enhancing, growing experience for each person."[2]

Adjustments are also apparent in the manner in which men and women select partners. At one time Jewish marriages were pre-arranged by a matchmaker. The matches were determined by a variety of criteria, yet a close bond between the future bride and groom was not of prime importance.

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1. David R. Mace, "Preparation for Marriage: New Approaches," Pastoral Psychology, 24:9-16, Fall 1975.

2. Carl Rogers, On Becoming Partners, (Delacorte Press, 1972), p. 10.

Compatability though, was a concern, and it was hoped that a mutually loving and caring relationship would develop over time. Such a method of marital selection suggests a couple of points. First, as previously stated, marriage was intended for purposes other than emotional gratification. Second, an enduring relationship is made and not given, directly implying that love is a result of and not a precursor to marital compatibility. To reiterate that some are reconsidering the ingredients for marital stability and satisfaction, Mace writes, "marriage in the past called for no special preparation on the part of the bride and groom. Today it does because marital success is dependent on maintaining interpersonal relationships, and this is a skill we are lacking in."[3]

If the subject of this paper, premarital counseling, is more than a passing phase, one can venture that in some respects the process of selecting mates has come full circle. Once, parents relied on matchmakers to select a spouse for their children, then marriages came to be "made in heaven," in which love conquered all. Today, people are taking a closer look at what makes for a successful relationship. This knowledge may help people in selecting a marital partner. There is already the belief that "marital happiness probably results more from conscientious mate selection than by chance. This may best be accomplished by learning more about the self and the partner through observing behavior, ranking values and discussing potential problem areas in marriage."[4] Though "conscientious" selection

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3. David R. Mace, op. cit.

4. J. E. Hinkle and M. Moore, "A Student Couples Program," The Family Coordinator, 20:153-158, 1971.

may one day be recognized, it is unlikely that the matchmaker will once again play a significant part in Jewish life. Freedom of choice will no doubt continue to be the preferred mode of operating. Nonetheless, simply knowing that objectivity can be very vital to a successful marital union may mean that an outside source, with no investment in the relationship between the man and woman, can help people assess the strengths and weaknesses of their relationship. There are some who ascribe to this notion, and as a result premarital counseling programs have developed across the country. Premarital counseling can be found in college classrooms, churches and synagogues, and mental health facilities.

Foundations of Premarital Counseling

Clergy were long involved in prewedding sessions with couples well before secular counseling professionals were on the scence. As far back as the 12th century, with marriage officially established as a sacrament, clergy developed a special relationship with premarital couples.[5]

The founding of the American Social Hygiene Association in 1914 marked the first formal effort outside the Christian Church to provide marital education for couples. The focus was sexuality and prevention of venereal disease. Planned Parenthood soon followed in 1921, and in time marriage clinics dedicated to family stability took root across America.

A prominent and early proponent of premarital counseling was Dr. Ernest R. Groves, and he selected the university classroom as his medium for marital

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5. Robert F. Stahman and William J. Hiebert, Premarital Counseling (Lexington Books 1981) p.6.

preparation. Combining formal study and group psychotherapy techniques, Groves attempted to help college students understand family dynamics, social adjustment in family life, and problems of personal relationships within the family.[6] The first credit course in marital preparation was taught by Groves in 1924 at Boston University. The course was called, "Preparation for Marriage and Family Living." Groves was also a prolific writer on family life, and his works included, Social Problems of the Family (1927), Wholesome Marriage (1927), American Marriage and Family Relations (1927), The Marriage Crisis (1928), and Wholesome Parenthood (1929).

Groves was not alone as a publisher of material on family life in those early days. Other prominent exponents included Durand-Weber, Nimkoff, Mudd, and Wortes.

With the rise in concern for the status and health of the family programs and institutes oriented toward the developing family appeared. The Merrill-Palmer Institute established one of the first clinical-education programs of preparation for marriage in 1932, and in 1942 held their first family conference, "Marriage and Family Life Institute." Another leading institution to take action was the University of Chicago, which held a major symposium on marriage and family issues, also in 1942.

In addition to the classroom setting, there are three other main providers of premarital counseling: the clergy, physicians, and mental health practitioners.

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6. Aaron L. Rutledge, "An Illustrative Look at the History of Pemarital Counseling," in J.A. Peterson (Ed.), Marriage and Family Counseling, New York: Association Press, (1978).

Clergy

By virtue of their role as marriage officiants in the community, rabbis, ministers and priests have traditionally been in an optimal position to practice premarital counselings.[7] Schonick reports that members of the clergy may provide most premarital counseling.[8] (There is a controversy concerning the extent to which clergy should be involved in counseling at all, and this issue will be examined in greater depth in a later chapter). The time of preparing for the wedding ceremony provides an excellent opportunity to explore with the couple many aspects of their present and future relationship. As Peterson attests, premarital counseling is "one of the promising movements to aid young people to prepare more adequately for marriage."[9]

The Christian community has been much more assertive in this realm than has the Jewish community. Recognizing that pastors feel ill-prepared to perform the premarital counseling adequately[10] an increasing number of the Catholic Church's dioceses and archdioces require that couples who marry in the Church to participate in premarital programs run by the Church. Additionally, many articles on premarital counseling have appeared

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7. Stahman and Hiebert, op cit.

8. Ibid.

9. Peterson, op cit.

10. "Preparation for Marriage Emphasized, "Los Angeles Times, 14 December 1980, sec. 1, p.1.

in such Christian leaning journals as Pastoral Psychology and the Journal of Pastoral Care. On the other hand, Jewish periodicals have paid relatively little attention to this matter. For example, the only periodical with a significant number of articles is the CCAR Journal, which has published approximately thirty-five articles since its inception in 1953.

Segments of the Jewish community have formally recognized the need for premarital counseling, and in a few instances implemented community-wide programs.[11] In June 1936, upon the initiative of Rabbi Sidney E. Goldstein, the CCAR committee on Marriage, Family and the Home was created. This committee recommended that "each synagogue should develop a program to include premarital conferences in which every young couple shall before marriage be instructed in the meaning of marriage and the foundations of the family in accordance with both Jewish ideals and the conclusions of current social science.[12] Since that first resolution the CCAR has repeatedly advocated the practice of premarital counseling.

In 1945 Goldstein published Marriage and Family Counseling, in which half of the book is devoted to the premarital conference. He listed ways couples can prepare themselves for marriage and family life.[13] He suggests that couples should:

a) acquaint themselves with the legal implications of the marriage

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11. For a more detailed look at some of these programs, refer to Chapter 6.

12. Stanley R. Brav, "Resources for Marriage Counseling," Journal of the Central Conference of American Rabbis, pp. 25-31, Oct. 1954.

13. Sidney E. Goldstein, Marriage and Family Counseling, (McGraw Hill, New York, 1945)

contract, the rights this contract guarantees to each and the responsibilities it imposes upon both of them.

b) learn the economic basis of marriage and the family.

c) study the biological elements in marriage and the family.

d) understand the psychological factors that enter into marriage and family organization.

e) comprehend the ethical principles of marriage and appreciate the spiritual ideals that lift marriage and the family to their highest level.

Even though premarital counseling has a history of official sanction from an influential body of rabbis, systematic practice is minimal, and enough so to be the concern of some. Rabbi Eugene J. Lippman stated as far back as 1951 that the Reform and Conservative Rabbinate showed "a certain insensitivity to all the ramifications of the rabbi's responsibility as officiant at wedding ceremonies in our day."[14] There may or may not be a greater sensitivity today, but there is certainly no greater sense of what to do or how to do premarital counseling, as will be discussed in Chapter 4.

Goldstein and Lippman are joined by others in their desire to have rabbis more involved with the couples they marry. Stanley Brav says, "The premarital interview is a challenge and an opportunity, so integral to our pastoral and educational ministry, so directly in accord with Jewish family ideals and values, that we rabbis, obviously, must rise to its blessed potential with ever increasing dedication."[15] He adds that "our (rabbis) availability as counselors in problems after marriage, and the

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14. Eugene J. Lippman, in Brav, Stanley R., Resources for Marriage Counseling op cit.

15. Brav, op cit.

need for such counseling to be undertaken prior to any rift that may prove serious, this, also, should be a part of the premarital experience."[16]

In an effort to ascertain to what extent rabbis have attempted to implement the resolutions of the CCAR, Rabbi Selig Selkowitz, while still a student at Hebrew Union College (Cincinnatti) distributed a survey/questionnaire among 462 rabbis (1954). Of the 200 rabbis replying, 77% reported counseling couples over and beyond the wedding arrangements. An average of 1.68 hours was spent in counseling and the primary topics discussed were the Jewish concept of marriage, psychological and sociological adjustment of mate to mate, dealing with in-laws, finances, religious responsibilities, sex in marriage, and children.[17] Though this amount of time spent with couples should not be regarded as insignificant, Morris suggests that clergy, in order to do an adequate job of counseling should spend a minimum of nine hours with each couple they marry.[18]

Other studies have been conducted over the past thirty years to determine the status of premarital counseling programs sponsored by churches (Mace, 1952; Wiser, 1959; Fairchild, 1959; Hill, 1968; Wright, 1976). These studies reveal two significant trends. First, the clergy feel that they are generally better trained to perform premarital counseling than in the past. Second, there is an upward trend in the number of sessions spent in premarital counseling. For example, Wright found that

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16. Ibid.

17. Selig Salkowitz, "Toward a Course of Study for Young Adults on Preparation for Jewish Marriage (Hebrew Union College, Cincinnati, March 1954).

18. J. K. Morris, Premarital Counseling: A Manual for Ministers, (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1960).

over ten per cent of his respondents were conducting approximately six premarital interviews with couples. The average was, however, three sessions. These trends indicate that premarital counseling is more than a perfunctory ritual to perform, but rather an opportunity to do some serious assessing and educating.[19]

Physicians

It appears that only isolated pockets of physicians regard premarital counseling with any importance. Frequently, however, they have little time for this matter, as the physical exam is required to take place within 30 days of the wedding. Nonetheless, Aaron L. Rutledge, in his article, "An Illustrative Look at the History of Premarital Counseling," reports that the average physician is lacking in ability to consult on sexual aspects of man-woman relationships, emotional issues, and that little is discussed in the premarital physical.[20]

Mental Health Practitioners

According to Aaron Rutledge, mental health practitioners (psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers, and MFCC's) are neglecting an excellent opportunity to provide preventive counseling with their failure to implement premarital counseling in significant numbers. He lambasts the mental health field as a whole by stating they all "talk a good line of prevention, but cries of overload limits inactivity."[21] He believes

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19. Walter R. Schummand Wallace Denton, "Trends in Premarital Counseling," Journal of Marital and Family Therapy, Oct. 1979, p. 24.

20. Rutledge, op cit.

21. Ibid.

the field is neglected by clinicians because it "poses some unusual stresses and calls for continuous adaptation of the more typical unilateral therapeutic training. It runs counter to the psychoanalytic format of seeing only one patient, lest the transference be contaminated. It calls for an understanding of the dynamics of pair-interaction, that unique entity, 'the marriage.' All of this is compounded by the almost lack of specific training in premarital counseling in the graduate schools of the nation."[22] Rutledge's bitterness and sense of despair is quite apparent. It is his contention that premarital counseling can be quite valuable, yet this tenet is not recognized by the vast majority of trained clinicians. Rutledge feels that "if all clinicians would devote one-fourth of their time to intensive premarital counseling, they could make a greater impact upon the health of this country than through all of their remaining activities combined."[23] Part of the problem, according to Rutledge is that clinicians are trained to employ their skills as problem solvers, and not as problem preventors. Their clients come with a set of problems to resolve, and this serves as the starting point for most therapists. Another stumbling block is the general belief, reinforced by the graduate training institutions, that no specific knowledge is required to be a competent premarital counselor. Rutledge and other advocates of premarital counseling believe otherwise, so it remains their task to convince their peers of this. One avenue is the journal published by the American Association of Marriage Counselors, Marriage and Family Living.

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22. Ibid.

23. Ibid.

The mental health literature is just beginning to deal with this topic. The social work literature in particular, has published very few articles. The articles that have appeared tend to evaluate specific premarital counseling methodologies rather than present arguments for or against the concept. A couple of examples are, "Counseling Engaged Couples in Small Groups (Freeman)," and "Experiments in Group Premarital Counseling (Glendening and Wilson)."

Program Evaluation

Until recently evaluation of premarital programs was not common. Evaluation designs have tended to rely on couple's self-report of satisfaction, and to a lesser extent on pre- and post-tests scores. More recently there has been the integration of pre- and post-test designs with experimental and control groups in order to compare results. The self-report evaluations yielded more positive responses, while the other designs showed mixed results. Some studies revealed gains in communication skills, while others showed no significant gains. Overall, post-wedding counseling is being more widely accepted as another part of premarital programs.[24] Research indicates that there is no evidence to substantiate claims of premarital or post-wedding counseling having long term effects; even the evidence that counseling is effective over the short term is mixed. Baum discovered in a follow-up study twenty-one weeks after the completion of his program that all positive gains made by the couples

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24. M. Elkin, "Premarital Counseling for Minors: The Los Angeles Experience, "The Family Coordinator, 1977, 26, 429-443.

disappeared, and all participants returned to pre-treatment levels.[25] It is apparent that while advocates of premarital counseling are strong believers, research has thus far been inconclusive as to the effectiveness of participating in such programs.

Studies have also been conducted to determine which technique best prepares participants for intimate relationships. The research tends to indicate that the methods which focus primarily upon facts, theories and surveys tend to have little direct relationship to actual functioning of the marital interaction. Courses which operate along a functional line, incorporating therapeutic techniques, particularly when professional counseling is available as needed, have a direct bearing upon marital interaction.[26] The methodology which avoids lectures and instead involves the couples is likely to be more effective.

Schumm and Denton, after an evaluation of trends in the field, conclude that much remains to be done before the effectiveness of premarital counseling is accurately evaluated. There needs to be more training of premarital counselors, more scholarly research, guides to premarital practicum, systematic evaluation, and above all we need to learn more about relationship development and the needs of couples at various stages of development.[27]

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25. M. C. Baum, "The Short-term, Long-term, and Differential Effects of Group Versus Bibliotherapy Relationship Enhancement Programs for Couples, "Doctoral Dissertation, The University of Texas at Austin, 1977. Dissertation Abstracts International, 1978, 38, 6132B-6133B.

26. Schumm and Denton, op cit.

27. Ibid.

Chapter Summary

Premarital counseling found its roots in the early years of the 1900s. Formal efforts at preparing people began in the college classroom. The format was based on the belief that both information sharing and personal self-exploration was vital to the preparation process. Popular courses over the years the trends indicate that the bulk of the premarital counseling occurs in clinical settings, and much less so in the offices of doctors and mental health practitioners. Among the clergy, the Catholic and Protestant community has developed a much more regimented program of premarital counseling than has the Jewish community. Jewish communal leaders have written about the necessity of offering this service, but if the literature is any indicator, the call has not been heard. Research reveals that the mental health field has a long way to go before premarital counseling is accepted as a valid method of preventive mental health. The most effective methodology is not yet known, nor is it clear how beneficial premarital counseling can be. Family researchers acknowledge these facts, and advocates of premarital counseling are starting to actively study ways of refining this type of counseling methodology.

CHAPTER 2

METHODOLOGY

Selection of Sample

The goal of the selection process for this study was to solicit opinions, ideas, suggestions and experiences from professionals in the Jewish communal service field. This broad sample facilitates understanding the full spectrum of perceptions and knowledge about premarital counseling. Only with this overall understanding will it be possible to formulate and implement a position based on consensus.

The selection criteria was broadly defined. I had a great deal of flexibility in determining how I would select my sample and who would actually be selected. While desirous of having a broad base to draw data, parameters were still necessary. I opted to divide the informants into four categories. These categories were: rabbis, social workers (private clinicians and social workers employed by Jewish Family Service Agencies), and facilitators of premarital counseling programs in the Los Angeles area. Each sector varied in educational background, specialization, age, and number of years employed as professionals in the Jewish community. Some had been working for just two or three years, others had recently retired after many years of distinguished service. This was true for all categories. Of the rabbis who had retired, one did so because of age, another because of a career change. In this particular instance, the change was to the field of marriage and family counseling; providing invaluable insights from the vantage point of a rabbi and a therapist. A few of the other rabbis had also received some advanced training in

psychology and counseling. One rabbi, while still employed with a synagogue, was licensed to work as a private therapist. The two private therapists interviewed also had divergent professional interests. One served as the adult educator at a large synagogue; the other was a facilitator of one of the premarital counseling programs. Of the social workers interviewed for this study, none had dual professions, unless it was in the capacity of having a private clinical practice on the side. Aside from the aforementioned private therapists, the facilitators of the premarital counseling programs were all rabbis. One had training as a therapist, two did not. This did not keep them from being heavily involved in their individual programs, nonetheless their roles were quite different than that of a trained therapist.

Sixteen informants were selected for interviews. The selection process was arbitrary in that the only requirement for selection was to be working in the Jewish community. The only informants purposefully selected were those directly involved in premarital counseling programs. This numbered three out of the sixteen.

Organization of the Field Work

Once the informants were selected, contact was established through an introductory letter (Appendix A) and a follow-up phone call approximately two weeks after the mailing of the letter. Appointments for the interview were made at the time of the phone call. Most interviews were conducted within a week or two of the phone contact. On a few occasions a wait of a month was necessary. I did not discover any appreciable advantages or disadvantages in the process or content of those interviews that had a longer break between the setting of the interview and the interview itself.

While I found that everyone was interested in the study and enthusiastic about being interviewed, several expressed concern that their lack of knowledge about premarital counseling would minimize their usefullness as respondents. Once I explained that this factor would not be a deterrent, their anxiety decreased considerably.

Interviews would be conducted in the informants' offices, as this is the site where they generally meet with the couples they counsel. I was able to conduct all but two interviews in the informants' offices. These two were conducted in the homes of the informants. For the most part I didn't sense any significant variance between the two settings--the home and the office. There was a greater likelihood of periodic interruptions when the interviews took place in an office, and the private homes offered a more relaxed atmosphere. Overall, the informants gave me their undivided attention throughout the entire interview regardless of the setting. On few occasions the sessions were interrupted by a phone call, thus temporarily interferring with the flow of the discussion. I found that we were able to pick up where we left off with minimal trouble. The interruptions were frustrating, however, and I hope that actual counseling sessions would go entirely uninterrupted.

As noted earlier, interviews were conducted in the informants' offices in order to get a feel for the ambience which greets each and every person who visits the office of a rabbi or therapist. I sensed some distinct differences, particularly between the offices of the rabbis and the social workers offices of JFS. Without exception, the rabbi's offices provided a much more comfortable milieu. Their offices could be likened to a study in a private home; booklined walls, comfortable furniture, etc. The JFS

offices on the other hand, were much more spartan in nature (and perhaps by design). A rabbi's office serves many purposes, whereas the office of a social worker with JFS uses his/her office, for just one purpose, and that is to provide therapy. Their offices may need to be comfortable enough so as to adequately provide the tools to carry out their tasks, but need not be elaborately decorated. I was also struck by the obvious Jewishness of the rabbi's office, while this was not always the case with any of the social workers. Whatever the reason(s) for the difference in style and decor, the difference was most notable. While these are subjective observations, I am not presuming to imply that either setting is a better place to carry out counseling; there may be no correlation whatsoever. But neither can this possibility be discounted.

Each interview was done on an individual basis, lasting anywhere from forty-five to ninety minutes. The average duration was one hour. With the exception of those informants who had a particular commitment to premarital counseling (5 of the 16), most everybody was a bit reticent about speaking forthrightly at the outset of the interview. I found that their lack of familiarity with the subject matter was the contributing factor for this reticence. As the interviewed progressed, they became more comfortable with the topic and felt more at ease in general; as a result their verbosity and directness increased considerably. I soon discovered that professionals don't like to admit their ignorance about a particular subject. To prevent the tendency to wax eloquently I had to be very explicit about the purpose of the study and the parameters of the subject to be discussed. For example, in one of the earlier interviews, one informant was rambling on about all he knew about premarital counseling.

After about ten minutes he stopped short and asked that I reiterate exactly what I meant by premarital counseling. It turned out we had different definitions; so much so that had the correction not been made much of his very valuable insights would have been left uncovered.

All of the informants appeared to enjoy the process of being interviewed. They expressed interest in the study, were curious about who else was being interviewed, and wanted to know what I intended to do with the results once the study was concluded. Many asked to have a copy made available to them upon its completion. While pleased and honored to have generated such interest, I am well aware of the costs involved in printing the study, so I was obliged to inform them that two copies would be available at the library of Hebrew Union College.

Interview Guide (see Appendix B)

The interview guide was purposely open-ended in content and format. Being an exploratory study the guide was intended to generate a broad range of opinions and experiences rather than specific, narrow responses. While I had a general outline to follow, not all questions were covered in every interview, and depending upon the flow of the dialogue, unexpected topics were occasionally raised and discussed. For example, one informant, after completing approximatley half of the interview informed me that since she was not a proponent of traditional family life (i.e., husband, wife, kids...), she was having a very difficult time completing the interview. As a result, for the remainder of the interview she shared with me her views on the Jewish community and its relation to the greater community at large. A strict adherence to the interview guide would have prevented such an informative discussion from occuring.

The interview guide begins with an explanation of the study and its purposes. As mentioned previously, it was necessary to be very explicit regarding this matter during the actual interview. The remainder of the instrument is divided into the following four sections: respondent's knowledge of premarital counseling and counseling in general; the counseling session as conducted by the informant; the need for premarital counseling and future trends; the Jewish component and its relation to their practice. Each section has an introductory question followed by additional probes designed to elicit a clearer picture of the informant's world as counselor and Jewish communal professional.

The initial questions were designed to provide an awareness of the informant's background, training and experience as a counselor. The author hoped that these questions would also help illuminate their personal commitment to professional development as a provider of human services.

The questions concerning the counseling sessions were included to elicit each informant's perceived role as a counselor, differences in style, and specific experiences each had as a premarital counselor.

The third section focuses on marital preparation in general, and explores potential ways and means the Jewish community can best serve the preparatory process. The question as to whether or not the Jewish community should embrace premarital counseling in an organized manner is broached.

The Jewish component questions are intended to determine what role Judaism/Jewish issues and values play in structuring the counseling sessions. Are they even discussed, what are the Jewish issues? How an

informant responded to these questions also indicated his/her self-perception as Jews who work in and for the Jewish community.

Chapter 3

Premarital Counseling: It's Place in the Jewish Community

Though there may not be a great deal written on premarital counseling or education in the Jewish community, there are those who by virtue of their professional status are likely to come into contact with engaged couples, and accordingly are in a position to do premarital counseling.

The professionals in the Los Angeles Jewish community most likely to counsel engaged couples are rabbis, social workers in Jewish Family Service agencies, and the organizers and promoters of the three pre-marital education courses that now exist under Jewish auspices. This last group will be examined in a separate chapter, as its structure and setting is quite different from the rabbinic and clinical model.

Rabbis and social workers in JFS agencies are more likely than other Jewish communal professionals to have professional contact with engaged couples. Their responsibilities dictate this since the rabbis are the principal functionary to officiate at Jewish weddings, they meet with the majority of the couples before the wedding ceremony. The rabbinic informants explain that the rabbi will typically meet with the couple at least once and preferably two or three times prior to the wedding. The particular rabbi is selected as the officiant for a variety of reasons. The informants relate that the most influential factors are: the couples' own familiarity with the community, the reputation of a specific rabbi or synagogue, parental influence, the recommendation of a friend, or in some cases a synagogue is selected randomly out of the phone book. This last reason can disturb the rabbi's view of his role. A young assistant rabbi

at a large synagogue in the San Fernando Valley told me that "most couples I marry opt for the synagogue and not for me. This has an impact on the connection between myself and the couple. I see myself as just one of the many people the couple has to see in the period before the marriage." The implication is that rabbis like to feel that they play a special part in the couple's decision to wed.

The rabbi has an opportunity to raise a variety of issues with a couple, but it is important to make clear that the couple does not come to the rabbi for this purpose. The rabbi desirous of being more than a functionary finds this situation limiting and distressing since couples don't expect a rabbi to probe into personal areas of their life together. A social worker on the other hand deals with existing problems. As a result, the clinical social worker rarely has the opportunity to do pre-marital counseling. Only on sporadic occasions had any of the social work informants counseled couples for the expressed purpose of providing pre-marital counseling, nor did they recall counseling many couples at all in before they were married. One therapist explained, couples "are seeing life through rose colored glasses, and are just not recognizing or even concerned about problems in their relationship, nor are they particularly concerned about learning ways to improve on the relationship before they marry." Those therapists who had seen an engaged person in therapy did so on an individual basis and the therapy focused on intrapersonal concerns not related to the fiancee. In other words, the individual in therapy just happened to be engaged, and was not in therapy as a result of being engaged. One of the few clinicians interviewed who has counseled engaged couples observed that those who seek premarital counseling tend to have

cohabitated previously in marriage or otherwise, and are in treatment regarding issues that remain from the earlier relationship or to prevent problems from reoccuring. It appears that prior marital experience will influence a person's or couple's decision to seek premarital counseling.

Accordingly, the vast majority of social work clinicians see couples after they are already married, and after the problems have arisen. A social worker with JFS of Los Angeles for five years related her own experiences. "I haven't had a whole lot of couples. The ones I have had problems for a long time...they came as a last resort so they can say, 'see, we've even tried counseling, and not even that worked.' Again I've had a few couples who were real motivated, they came in a crisis... couldn't get pregnant, or some sort of loss brought them in." This statement was fairly typical of the other clinicians interviewed. So, whereas a couple will seek out the rabbi to perform a life-cyle ceremony, they will seek out a social worker to help them solve problems. In turn, their responsibilities in terms of the immediate request are quite different.

What do rabbis and social workers know about premarital counseling and how qualified are they to as practitioners? With the exception of the people directly involved with premarital programs, the informants know very little about premarital counseling/education as an entity unto its own. At the start of each interview every interviewee was asked to say what they know about premarital counseling. Invariably they had a difficult time being concise and specific. Common replies were, "I know I haven't been very specific," "what would you like me to talk about," "or I hope I can be helpful, because as I explained on the phone it's not something I'm specifically involved with." It appears then that unless a

person makes a commitment to be a "specialist" in premarital counseling, the likelihood of a rabbi or social worker being familiar with premarital counseling theory and practice is quite slim. The literature makes a similar claim, and the data from this study concurs.

The Service Providers

The Rabbi

While rabbis are frequently put into the position of acting as personal advisors/counselors with their congregants, their ability to adequately fill this role is questioned both by rabbis and trained clinicians alike. Most rabbis do not receive a thorough education in psychology, but by virtue of their visibility and communal authority they are sought out for help and have but little choice to serve as personal guides to some extent. This is particularly true in terms of marriage. One rabbi has written that "of the many problems that are brought to the rabbi those concerned with marriage are the most numerous."[1] While conceding that rabbis do and will likely always see people with personal problems, one executive in a JFS agency expressed his concern about a rabbi's ability to deal with or even recognize what the problem really is. "Rabbis do not know how to recognize problems. I frequently get referrals after the rabbi has been counseling someone for "x" number of weeks. The situation has gotten out of hand. They then turned to the agency to dump the person."

The fact that rabbis receive very little training in psychology at any one point in their career does not imply that it is not a source of

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1. Samuel Glassner, "Marital Counseling," CCAR Journal, Central Conference of American Rabbis, June 1953, p. 23-27.

concern to rabbis, or that the rabbinate in general does not recognize the importance of exposing their students to psychology and therapeutic techniques. As one rabbi writes, "Counseling is an all-important, although heretofore neglected feature of the rabbi's work, and he is obliged to use his best training, experience and skill to help people cope with their problems."[2]

Apparently, however, lack of training has not minimized a rabbi's sense of his own ability to serve as a counselor? On the whole every rabbi expressed confidence in his ability to counsel, recognize limits, and know when to refer people on for more intensive therapy. On only one occasion did I hear a rabbi voice any insecurity about his ability to counsel. "I have an interest and a need for training in counseling as a part of my work. I received very little in seminary, and not enough is offered for clergy in this city, and there should be. I feel that my instincts are good, and I am sensitive, but I am also aware how undertrained I am." It is noteworthy that a person with little training in counseling and human dynamics can feel comfortable about his ability to serve in that capacity. Some informants shared their insight into this paradox. A non-practicing rabbi who is now a full-time therapist said that he feels most rabbis don't realize how undertrained they really are, since he said it wasn't until he was trained as a therapist did he learn how to recognize problems and what to do with the information once he had it. Some of the social workers interviewed seem to believe that rabbis

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2. Bernard Kligfeld, "A New Look at Rabbinic Counseling," CCAR Journal, Central Conference of American Rabbis, October 1969, P. 59-68.

simply don't like admitting their weaknesses in a particular field. Both rabbis and social workers also intimated that territoriality is an issue. For example, referring a person on for further counseling might be interpreted as a slant against that person and in turn hurt the rabbi's reputation in the community. One rabbi said, "I have to be very careful when and how I refer people on, so as not to insult them or make them feel that I don't care about them."

A number of the rabbis interviewed have either been in therapy or have received some kind of training in therapy beyond what is offered in the seminary. It follows that they feel more comfortable and adept in the role of counselor. One, a recent graduate of the Jewish Theological Seminary had a year internship at one counseling agency and then spent an additional year at another counseling center. He explained his comfort as a counselor this way. "I don't feel inadquately prepared to deal with people in an interpersonal, intimate way." He went on to say, "I recognize that this is an important component of my work, which is why I pursued the additional training." A striking contrast that I noticed between the rabbis that have some training in counseling and those that don't have any training is their approach in structuring an interview with a couple. While the better trained was more adept at explaining what he was hoping to accomplish, the less trained frequently said that they tend to go by their "gut" feelings or "instincts."

A second issue raised by rabbis is the extent to which rabbis should even serve as counselors, regardless of their sophistication and skill level. The two most common reasons given are time limitations and the inevitable conflict that arises when a rabbi tries to wear too many professional hats; that the rabbi's role would not be clear. Robert C. Katz

explains, "The rabbi is essentially a pedagogue and not a physician. He cannot be both a guide and a psychotherapist. He can counsel, though within limits. He should be able to recognize when to refer on, and this requires knowledge."[3] Katz clearly distinguishes between the rabbi as counselor and the rabbi as therapist. One of the study's informants echoes Katz's sentiments. "A rabbi should be therapeutically oriented, but he should not be a couple's therapist." Another, who has training as a therapist argues that "rabbis should be adequately prepared to be a good counselor, but not a therapist. They should be good assessors, and good referrers." This particular rabbi, however, is more concerned with the rabbis knowledge about life in general than he is about role confusion. He said, "in marriage counseling rabbis do not know enough about marriage to know what to ask, nor do they know how to evaluate answers. Rabbis unfortunately do not know how to translate all of their intellectual knowledge into interpersonal experience. There is no relationship between the religion and the life."

A discussion on the rabbis role as counselor can go on endlessly, and perhaps it is worthy of additional research. For this researcher it is sufficient to recognize that communal workers in the Jewish community realize and accept that rabbis do and will continue to serve as personal counselors. If this is indeed the reality, the relevant question is how and from where will rabbis receive training in counseling?

One rabbi goes so far as to suggest that specialists in rabbinic counseling should be trained, particularly since the "role of clergy as

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3. Robert L. Katz, "The Rabbi Asks: On Rabbinical Counseling," CCAR Journal, Central Conference of American Rabbis, January 1962, p. 45-51.

counselor is being enhanced by increasing cooperation between religion and psychiatry. Catholic and Protestant churches have the religious counselor specialist. Jewish seminaries have not yet done this, yet the rabbi is always expected to act as a counselor."[4] A more typical attitude is expressed by Folkman. "The rabbi ought to be aware of limitations and training, and at the same time be as competent a counselor as possible; as counseling historically has been a rabbinic role. The rabbi ought to have modern counseling techniques at his disposal, and the training and education to recognize the severity of personal problems."[5] Many of the rabbinic informants said they could benefit from additional training, and that they would like to see the rabbinic seminaries offer more intensive and extensive classes on rabbinic counseling. One such advocate is a graduate of and faculty member at Hebrew Union College, Los Angeles. He nonetheless concedes that practicum courses of this nature would create special problems for this institution, "as the school is having a difficult time being both an academic and a professional institution." He did suggest what he would like to see in terms of rabbinic training in counseling. "I would want an on-going rabbinic training program. And I think if it was well done and brief, there would be enough interest among the rabbis in the community to get a program going. We are para-professionals and we should get thorough training to at least acquaint us with resources, techniques and options." Though this may be just one rabbi's opinion, it certainly suggests that if

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4. Henry E. Kagan, "The Role of the Rabbi in Counseling," CCAR Journal, Central Conference of American Rabbis, June 1953, P. 15-22.

5. Jerome D. Folkman, "The Rabbi Asks: On Rabbinical Counseling," CCAR Journal, Central Conference of American Rabbis, January, p. 45-51.

a rabbi senses the need he/she would welcome an effort by the community to train rabbis in counseling techniques. In the meantime, until such a program develops rabbis have to depend upon their own initiative. A local Jewish Family Service executive agrees on the need for additional training, but believes that the best place and time for the training to take place is while a rabbi is still in the seminary. It is his experience that rabbis are not interested in getting the training once they are ordained rabbis. "We need to train rabbis in school, otherwise they won't take the time to learn, and yet people turn to rabbis for the answer, regardless of the answers they have. The assumption is that rabbis know communication skills, yet they don't, and the institutions should consider this fact. Something has got to be in the curriculum."

The Social Worker

The matter of a social workers qualification to act as a premarital counselor is not as clear. It is accepted that clinical social workers have advanced training in therapy, but what they don't have is training in this particular sphere, and as indicated earlier the experts in the field believe that it is necessary. Their premise is that most therapists are trained as genericists and not in any specific area, which means that they may not understand the nuances of, for example, working with a couple as opposed to doing individual therapy. The data from this study reveals that those therapists who have experience in premarital counseling understand and appreciate the importance of acquiring additional knowledge in order to function as a competent premarital counselor. On the contrary, those with little or no experience feel that they have the necessary skills and knowledge.

At this point we shall turn to the next issue: what actually goes on in the premarital counseling session?

Chapter 4

The Premarital Counseling Session

The Rabbi's Goals

Rabbis tend to be limited in the scope of the discussion in the premarital session by the time and expectations of the couple. A rabbi spends anywhere from one to three hours on the average with a couple. The breadth and depth of the ensuing discussion depends on two variables; the interest, desire and skill level of the rabbi, and the couple's willingness to share personal information with someone who frequently is a total stranger, or nearly so. Additionally, couples are more concerned about the actual preparation of the wedding ceremony than they are in an analysis of their relationship. As one rabbi acknowledged, "before marriage couples are not interested in talking with me about the issues. They have a specific goal in mind, and that goal is marriage." This kind of an attitude serves as a constant reminder that the rabbi is viewed as a functionary in the wedding process and not as someone with special interest and concern for the couple.

Though rabbis encounter resistance they are not necessarily detered from trying to discuss a variety of issues above and beyond the wedding itself, which is accepted as a vital part of the discussion. However, the rabbis revealed that their major concern is to acquaint themselves with the couple so that the ceremony will be enjoyable, meaningful and memorable for all. Regarding content, some rabbis allow the couples to determine the flow of the discussion. For example, one rabbi says "the main reason for our getting together is for the purpose of creating a relationship before the wedding ceremony. I have no hidden agend when I begin

to talk with a couple. What I discuss is greatly dependent upon the kind of couple I am meeting with." Another rabbi adds, "My agenda when a couple comes in to discuss their marriage depends on the agenda of the couple...at what stage they are in." A rabbi with many years of experience in the rabbinate states, "When seeing couples my role is not so much as an educator, or as a counselor. It's important for me to be there to listen, be emphathic, to establish rapport with the couples. I'm not about to save marriages, but I can establish rapport, make a nice ceremony, make friends, show concern about the couple, particularly since so few of the functionaries do at the time of marriage."

While concurrently recognizing the importance of being available to talk about issues of concern with the couples, the rabbis that tend to take a more passive stand believe that the rabbi's authority is vested in his ability to influence the tone of the wedding; and that this power does not go past the ceremony. One rabbi, who no longer considers himself a practicing rabbi describes this role very succintly. "As a practicing rabbi I did not feel that it was in the best interest of the profession to even probe into any underlying issues that a couple might be dealing with. Get them married, make them feel Jewish, and don't rock the boat."

In contrast a few of the rabbis indicate strong preference for an active involvement, seeing themselves as more than mere officiants in a life cycle event, rather as professionals who have a responsibility to themselves, the couple and the community. One rabbi explains his position this way. "The vast majority of the couples I marry have been living together, and I want to be certain that they understand the phenomena of marriage, since there seems to be more of a transition than we may think

for these types of couples. My experience indicates that roles begin to shift, relationships begin to take on different kinds of coloration, and it is at this point that we have to be concerned." From the perspective of this rabbi then, even though many couples choose to live together before marrying, marriage itself has its own dimensions and the couples need to be aware of this. He sees it as his role to at least initiate this awareness process, since in his experience he has discovered that "many people do not probe and explore issues that need to be, thus it is valuable to have someone else serve as the catalyst." A rabbi with a similar stance says "My message is simple. Marriage is a serious and important endeavor. One should think about it in depth, the rabbi should think about his involvement with the couple, and this evaluation and examination begins with the first encounter." He adds, in very clear terms, "the marriage system needs to be consciously designed, couples need to begin thinking about priorities in their life together, and they need to develop skills for interpersonal communication." While all of the rabbis don't agree about their role as the wedding officiant, they do concur that marriage as an institution is in danger. Some prefer to be more vocal about this than others.

Other than personality differences, there does not appear to be any distinguishing characteristics between those that are more forceful and those that let the couples essentially direct the tenure of the discussions. One rabbi who advocates a more passive stance has quite a bit of experience in counseling people, while another has not. The same goes for those rabbis who advocate more directive behavior on their part. If anything, it is left up to the rabbi's discretion how he/she wishes to

interact with premarital couples. There is no right or wrong position to take.

Issues Raised in Counseling

There is general agreement as to the issues discussed. In the course of the interview the rabbis discuss the status of the relationship between the couple, past histories, reasons for marrying, Jewish backgrounds, parents and future in-laws, sexuality, goals for the future, plans for children, and so on. Two other issues that receive more attention in this area are divorce and intermarriage, since both are on the upswing in the Jewish community. In the case of divorce the discussion focuses on the ex-spouse, children, and establishing roles as stepparents. In terms of intermarriage, the issues covered depend on the rabbi's willingness to perform the ceremony in the first place. One rabbi who does officiate at such ceremonies, does so only under certain circumstances, "such as a commitment to raise the children Jewishly...and even if there isn't this commitment I try to at least meet with the couple once, as I may be the last link the couple has with the Jewishly community. I want them to know that at least somebody cares for them."

In the course of the discussion rabbis have an opportunity to view the way couples interact with one another. While all of the social work informants and a majority of the rabbis agree that rabbis are not trained to evaluate in depth the emotional health of an individual or a relationship, to judge is quite natural. It is important to understand how rabbis determine the status of a relationship, what it is they look for, and what they do with the information once they make the evaluation. Judging by

the data there doesn't appear to be any consistency. Some rabbis prefer to avoid making any judgements at all, while others feel that it is their responsibility to make an assessment. Some are torn over whether or not to tell a couple about any misgivings they may have, while others feel, if not them, then who. Part of the conflict stems from the fact that some of the rabbis feel confined in their role in this situation. They are there to marry, not to critique.

In the words of one rabbi, "the main interest was to see that two Jewish people got married, to keep people happy and then teach them the great wonders of Judaism." This same rabbi, now retired, recalled times when he sensed when a relationship was not fundamentally sound, but he chose not to say anything to the couples. This was always a dilemma with him. He recalls telling his wife about these misgivings, but since he did not see it as his place to intervene, he opted for silence. A younger rabbi, just a few years into the rabbinate adds, "It is not my role to probe a great deal into a relationship. Though I have counseling skills I have to be very selective in the way I choose to use what I know, especially with engaged couples. It is not the time to break up the atmosphere of good feelings which surround the couple." He has had on occassion encountered situations requiring counseling past the "limited chitchat which normally goes on." One situation involved tensions between the parents and the couple, another focused on differences between the way in which the bride and groom expressed their Jewishness. On other occasions he has come across what he terms "bad couples" and was in a moral dilemma about saying something or not. So far he has chosen not to say anything. In each of the above instances, he says that the "wedding turned out to be beautiful, so maybe I was wrong."

When trying to assess possible problems in the relationship the rabbis look for lack of communication, being on different wave lengths, realism of expectations, and evidence of tension when discussing certain issues. The rabbis tend to rely on their experience and "gut feelings" when making their assessment, yet there is the realization that it is difficult to assess the health of a relationship. One rabbi admitted "I have learned generally by experience how to identify when a relationship may not be good, but I have also learned that it is difficult to judge whether a marriage will succeed or not. There are simply too many variables." The solution for this rabbi is to refer the couple to a professional therapist. "I won't hesitate to refer them (the couple) on for counseling. Therapy is not my role, though I have found myself in that situation before." Other rabbis find it necessary to refer a couple for therapy, when in the words of one "issues come to the surface that are more profound and require more time than I can devote." One rabbi adds, "When I refer I have to be careful not to have it look like rejection. It's a question of showing them love and concern and stating that just as I sought therapy for myself, they should too. He believes it important they know that he has been to a therapist, to recognize that it's an important part of growing, and that it just isn't 'sick people' who go to therapy." He has found that sometimes the advice is heeded, at other times it is not. It is clearly the choice of the couple.

The Effects of Counseling

There is always the possibility that the rabbi's intervention could influence the status of the relationship, particularly if the people have second thoughts about getting married. Is this a concern of the rabbis?

As indicated earlier, some prefer not to play such an influential role, but others are not as conflicted. "I would rather have the relationship fall apart now due to my intervention than in ten years," confided one rabbi who values an interventionist approach.

On occasion a few of the rabbis have chosen to or wanted to refuse to marry a couple either because of an outright dislike for them, or out of concern for the future success of the marriage. Sometimes they have utilized the option to refuse to do the ceremony, most of the time they haven't. One rabbi shared two experiences he had with couples that he felt should postpone or even cancel their marriage plans. They were two very different situations, as were the decisions of the couples. One couple delayed their wedding for a year, and are still married. The other couple, much to the rabbi's misgivings, went ahead with the wedding, and two weeks later the groom commited suicide. Another rabbi recalled one incident when he felt so uncomfortable about a relationship that he didn't want to marry the couple, but his senior rabbi took the stand that it is not for the rabbi to judge. He later learned that after six months the man was in jail and the woman was in a psychiatric institution after consistent wife abuse. He said that he is much more outspoken now, basically because he is no longer in a subservient position. Even if it means resentment and requesting another rabbi to officiate he lets couples know whenever he is picking up "bad vibes". As far as he is concerned it is better to articulate what he senses and to be wrong later than to not articulate anything at all. As a result he has found that more times than not the couples are appreciative and acknowledge that there is an issue that has not yet been faced.

In summary, rabbis vary in their approach to handling the actual premarital counseling session. There is the rabbi who focuses on establishing the relationship and allows the couple to determine the tenure of the discussion, and there is the rabbi who feels it is his duty to educate and inform the couple about the status of marriage today and what they need to do to improve the likelihood of their marriage being a success. Regardless of the approach, the range of topics which are discussed are quite similar. When it comes to judging the health of the relationship some rabbis prefer to avoid doing this, others, once again feel that it is their responsibility to help the couple establish patterns for success early on, and this means letting them know of problem areas or concerns that seem apparent. Should a rabbi opt to tell a couple that he won't marry them? This seems to happen only on rare occasions when the rabbi feels that there are some very serious problems that require immediate attention.

The Social Workers' Goal

The social workers interviewed for this study indicated that they have rarely counseled couples specifically for marital preparation. Nonetheless, in light of their clinical training, expertise, and availability as a potential resource at some point in the future, the data obtained from them is vital and worthy of consideration. Therapists help individuals, couples, or families after the onset of a crisis, thus they have information that may help determine what can be accomplished when counseling couples on ways to prevent difficulties from becoming problems. One social worker with a Southern California Jewish Family Service agency has counseled many couples married 40-50 years. She feels many are struggling

over such things as unrealistic expectations, and what marriage should be like. In her estimation, were people helped to anticipate the realities of marriage, and helped to think through what they want, they might be off on a better footing and learn how to work out problems. Were she to ever counsel an engaged couple she would like to see them "express expectations, discover discrepancies, see if the discrepancies are negotiable, and then also discuss issues such as money, which is something people really don't know about." She added that "marriage has to be deromanticized, communication skills need to be taught, and expectations, fantasies and dreams need to be shared."

Changing roles and societal norms and values are also issues that should be discussed and identified with couples. "It's important that today's couples enter a relationship as equals, and understand how to design the relationship as equals, and understand how to design the relationship so they will be seen as equals to one another," said one young social worker with JFS. In her view, "Many women of previous generations did not see this as an expectation, so in turn they did not demand it."

A number of the social workers commented that lack of access to normative information has been a prime source of problems, especially for women. Many people seem to be ignorant about the normative stages of life and human development, and one worker emphasizes "how much of a bearing this ignorance plays in the success and happiness of a relationship." The point seems to be that if counseling and education was available in earlier years couples may have discussed that the things they were arguing about were simply issues people argue about and have little control over. Many problems are to be expected and are not indicative of serious problems. The problems become serious because of people's inability to handle them.

With regard to handling problems the social workers were of a common agreement that relationships survive as a result of learning how to cope with problems, and that coping skills can be taught. "The durability of a relationship depends upon compromise, negotiations, risks, flexibility, and change without a build-up of resentment," said one informant. This person adds, "With risk comes investment, but when one person does all of the risking, the compromising can prove to be too much to bear. However, these skills can be taught and practiced, as there is plenty of information for couples to work with what is pertinent to their own relationship." Another nicely summarizes the gist of what the majority of the social workers envision as the goal of premarital counseling, "Helping people develop a style and process for managing problematic issues when they arise is necessary." Another says, "working on balancing the relationship is a goal of counseling...to gain a deeper understanding of dynamics, roles." A social worker with years of experience at a social JFS agency says, "What can be done in a premarital counseling course is that all of the issues can be raised, but the issue isn't so much the content that is discussed as much as letting people know that they aren't alone, that they aren't isolated." In her eyes "premarital counseling is particularly valuable in that couples can begin to normalize many of the tensions that develop in the early years of marriage." One informant, who is both a Jewish educator at a large conservative synagogue and a private therapist says she would like to pass on the "understanding that the world isn't perfect, that to get what you want from it means compromise." In focusing on humankind's ability to make changes in their lives, she emphasizes that "people need to learn that people have the capacity to live in an imperfect world, and it is our choice to improve on our lives."

Issues Raised in Counseling

A wide variety of topics were mentioned that should be explored by engaged couples before marriage. Parenthetically, the majority of the clinicians interviewed adhere to a non-directive style of therapy which enables the client a lot of leeway in determining issues discussed. For this very reason most of the informants believe that a group approach is better for educating because the responsibility for the discussion would chiefly be in the hands of the facilitator. Topics range from dealing with daily living concerns, such as budgeting, dual career families, the difficulties in trying to juggle being a wife, a mother, a professional, and an individual, to focusing on attitudinal processes that can significantly impinge upon or strengthen the relationship. This may mean dealing with areas of compatibility, time management priorities, value and role differences, differences in style, communicating, childrearing, and so on. One clinician, after giving a detailed explanation of what he does in his counseling sessions with couples, confides that he has reservations about teaching skills if people aren't committed to incorporating and utilizing what it is they are taught into their daily practice. "As I am doing all of this I wonder about commitment and whether or not it can be taught. With commitment comes the willingness to wade through a lot of pain and frustration if the belief is there that in the end it will all be worth it." Expanding on this thought he sayed, "All the skills in the world aren't going to make a bit of difference if people don't have the desire to use them. A relationship can't be mechanized, as if circumstance 'A' calls for behavior 'B'." Another person with a similar perspective adds, "It isn't just a matter of teaching people how to be honest,

it's emphasizing the value of honesty, the need to risk, the importance of sharing. I guess I have to say that I believe people have many of the basic skills...that it is a matter of being willing to use what is known."

The Effect of Counseling

Like the rabbinic interviewees, the social workers and private therapists realize that their intervention could have a significant impact on the status of a relationship. While not relishing the possibility of being a factor in the termination of a relationship, they accept this possibility and explain it as a function of their job. Their role is to help people bring about change in their lives, and with change comes new ways of relating. If their intervention results in a relationship breaking up, these therapists at the least feel that all parties involved are better off. "Though I would like to see Jewish people marry and have children, it's not important at all costs. How great is it to have Jewish children from a broken home? I'd rather see the relationship break up that much earlier as opposed to 3-5 years down the road. It's unfortunate if I contribute to the demise, but that's too bad. On the other hand, I can't predict the success or failure of marriages, I don't know that secret." This therapist is not alone with this perspective. Others indicated that as Jews they are torn about the possibility of seeing Jewish marriages break up before they even begin, but that it is preferable that they end before people are seriously scarred emotionally. "As a Jewish professional I would rather see people married into a happy and satisfying relationship than a poor marriage." This person adds, "that as far as 'breaking up the relationship,' that's the decision of the couple's, the purpose of therapy is to help people decide for themselves." It is clear that the majority of therapists take the stance that they are the

facilitating agents for change, and not the force for change. So, it is expected that one avenue people choose is to go in different directions with their lives. According to these informants, such decisions are a dissappointment from a Jewish perspective, but from the therapeutic perspective it is acceptable and expected.

Assessing the Relationship

Clinical social workers are trained (as are all therapist) to assess, evaluate and devise a plan of action in accordance with their diagnosis. Not to do so would only be an impediment to the helping process. Clinicians are less confused about the role they would play when all indications are that the couple is having serious problems. It is the therapists' role to raise issues, point out inconsistencies and examine options. "When I see a problem in couples I point it out that there may be something to take heed of," says one clinician. However, unlike some of the rabbis the clinicians firmly state that they would not tell a couple to postpone or cancel a wedding. It is not within their capacity or professional ethics to be so imposing, nor do they have the influence of a rabbi. "I can't tell people not to marry, but I do have an obligation to explain that such and such may be an issue in the future." This person concludes by saying, "As a clinician I have nowhere near the power the rabbi could have, such as the power to refuse to marry a couple. I simply do not have this power."

Jewish Issues in Counseling

One would expect that rabbis are prone to bring up what they consider to be Jewish issues when talking with couples, while the therapist is apt to discuss only those issues that are raised by the client. If Jewish

issues are not of concern, there is no reason to discuss them. The data gathered from the informants tend to coincide with this assessment.

As the rabbi defines it a Jewish issue may be continuity of the family, Jewish life, children, affiliation in Jewish institutions, adult education, and even the tenure of the wedding ceremony itself. The rabbis indicated an awareness that their role as rabbi could pose a threat to a person or couple that was tentative with their Jewish commitment, so a rabbi has to be careful about being too forceful in imposing their own values onto the couple. "It is not my role to impose anything upon the couples. I give them ideas and thoughts, options...but what they choose for their own life, what Jewish values they choose to incorporate into their own marriage is entirely up to them." Another rabbi feels that he has to deal with the issue of Judaism in a very gingerly fashion. He wants to bring the couple closer to Jadaism, but he prefers a "soft sell", since so often these people are not synagogue goers. It is enough to let them know that his and the community's services are available when the time comes. Though it is safe to say that rabbis expect to and are expected to discuss issues of Jewish significance with the couple, they nonetheless have to be aware of the type of people they are talking to and how receptive they would be to their message.

Those therapists that would like to see (and see the need for) Jewish issues discussed with Jewish couples stress that something so value laden does not belong in a therapy session. This is another reason why they believe it best to educate couples in a group setting that is more directive and controlled than is a therapy session. A few of the therapists had some very clear ideas on what they would like to see discussed.

"Certainly something as basic as Jewish holidays...and learning how to make them a part of their own home, instead of seeing them as something to do in their parents' home," said one. Another said that Jewish issues "can be broadly defined as anything that strengthens the commitment to Jewish survival. It can be expressed in a number of ways...how to live in a non-Jewish world, Jewish survival issues, and Jewish pride." One of the social workers expressed a real conflict for her when talking about Jewish issues, because a "Jewishly conscious therapist will be pushing marriage itself, which is not my role." To her a Jewishly conscious therapist has a "strong stake, a strong commitment to Jewish education, to traditions, to religious observance, and to having children, which I don't have a big stake in." Though this clinician said that she believes strongly in Jewish continuity, it doesn't depend so much on religious observance or having children as it does on what goes on in the rest of the world. As she said, "if nuclear bombs go up it won't be doing us any good if we're sitting in synagogue, having children, and sending them to Hebrew school. Though this particular person appears to be in the minority, apparently not everybody is as committed to educating and teaching people to the ways of living a "more Jewish life." No doubt there are more like her who share similar, if less vociferous positions.

Chapter Summary

When comparing rabbis and social workers some significant differences stand out. First they are approached by couples at different stages and generally for entirely different reasons. The rabbi is approached to help plan for and officiate at the wedding. The social worker is sought out with problems in the relationship. This fact alone dictates different

roles for the rabbis and social workers. A rabbi can attempt to assess a relationship, but being that he/she is not sought for this reason, the power to influence the course of a relationship is diminished. As the interviews reveal, some rabbis tend to be more assertive in this regard than others, but they too realize they are limited by the specific task at hand, the wedding ceremony. Social workers, on the other hand, rarely counsel couples prior to their marriage. This naturally limits their influence as premarital counselors. But becaue of their experience in counseling couples with marital difficulties, they have a sense of what should be looked at by couples before marriage if they want to prevent marital disharmony. The rabbis and social workers share similar thoughts on issues to raise in counseling. The difference arises with what is to be done with the information gained from the discussion. The rabbis are torn between keeping perceptions to themselves and enunciating what they use, for better or for worse. The social workers, trained to help facilitate change, are less careful about revealing their perceptions.

As far as discussing Jewish issues, the rabbis feel more comfortable than the social workers. Here the roles are reversed; Judaism, Jewish values, and Jewish ways of living are a rabbis domain and not the social workers'. It may very well be that this reluctance on the part of the social worker is related to their own sense of Jewishness and the importance Judaism plays in their life.

The next area to be discussed focuses on actual programs in the Los Angeles area that have been designed expressly for the purpose of educating (primarily early to late 20's) Jewish couples about marriage. In addition to gaining an understanding of the rabbis' and clinicians'

viewpoints on the possibility and viability and worthiness of programs, the proponents and organizers of these programs will have an opportunity to reveal their own views and experiences.

Chapter 5

Group Premarital Counseling Programs in the Los Angeles Jewish Community History

As of this writing (Spring 1981) there are three known premarital education programs in the Los Angeles Jewish community affiliated with established institutions. One, "Workshop on Jewish Marriage," is sponsored by Yeshiva University of Los Angeles (UYLA), another, "Making Marriage Work", by the University of Judaism (UJ), and the third (as yet unnamed) is co-sponsored by Jewish Family Service of Los Angeles (JFS) and a local reform synagogue. Each program began within the past three years through the initiative of one or two individuals who recognized the need for and later sought out institutional support to establish a credible base from which to develop a premarital education program. The program at UJ is the longest running, (March 1978) and the JFS/synagogue group is the most recent, starting in the Spring of 1981. The programs are jointly facilitated by trained therapists and rabbis, with the exception of the program at YULA, which does not utilize trained therapists.

While the overall aim of improving a couple's preparedness for marriage is consistent with the goals of each program the developmental history and perspective is not quite the same for each. Some of the facilitators began their involvement as a result of professional experiences in settings other than where premarital counseling is done, another was trained as a family/marital therapist with an emphasis in premarital counseling, while another developed an interest because of her experiences as a therapist with JFS. The rabbis relied on their perspectives and observations of community trends that they developed as professionals in the community.

For example, one rabbi got involved in this field because of his academic training in psychology and sociology, which he said keeps him attuned to certain trends. A particular experience that he highlighted occurred when he was asked to participate in various Jewish marriage institutes and programs organized by the orthodox community. What bothered him about these programs was "the tendency to put all of their marriage enhancement eggs in the mikvah basket, and were not addressing enough of the issues relating to marriage." One of the therapists started in this field for the reason that very little had been written on the subject and as a result of a course she was teaching at a local university on education for marriage. She became very interested in the students' expectations for marriage, and in her mind "I could see how distorted they were." A short while later she started a course for couples with a rabbi at a synagogue and she found the course to be "an emotional high." She added that she is still in contact with the three couples that are still married (out of four couples) from that group, and they still talk about the value of the course. A rabbi who has been toying with the concept of premarital counseling in L.A. for about eight years originally was moved to enter this field when he discovered that the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Los Angeles requires every couple applying to be married by a priest to have at least eight hours of premarital counseling. He eventually teamed up with a family therapist to run the previously mentioned group in 1973 that has now led to the program at UJ.

Most of the facilitators spoke in broad terms when discussing trends and reasons for pursuing premarital counseling. A number of points stand out.

1) Couples are beginning to see that marital happiness is not necessarily a given and are looking for ways to help increase their chances of happiness.

2) Twenty to thirty years ago expectations were much clearer. Each partner knew exactly what was expected. Today there are no longer any rules. Each couple has to make up their own rules and regulations, which makes it a more complicated situation.

3) Marriage until the last century was an economic arrangement, and love was not much of an issue.

4) People today are realizing that more than love makes a marriage go, and if this is the case they best learn as much as possible before getting married.

5) Couples today are aware of the facts and risks, are more realistic and motivated to seek the means to learn things that will help make marriage succeed and last.

Each facilitator stressed that in addition to helping people learn about marriage, premarital educating conducted under the auspices of the Jewish community is a great opportunity to help young Jews connect with other like-minded Jews that they orginally may not encounter in their daily lives, particularly if their involvement with the Jewish community is on a minimal level. Such a program can give these Jews a sense of belonging to the Jewish community.

Expectations/Goals

As mentioned earlier their broad goal is improving preparedness for marriage. Since these types of programs are so novel and evaluation research is at a paucity expectations are minimal. The hopes and aspirations are high yet they are tempered out of a sense of reality. As one program leader said, "My expectations are not overly grand, but they are realistic. I see some validity in the program, but I am unable to say conclusively that the program has any long term effects." He added, "Only time will tell if there will be a correlation between lowering of the

divorce rate and such premarital programs. Perhaps society and life stressors play a larger role that realistically could not be touched upon in such a short time. Another group leader pointed out that premarital counseling is not a cure-all. It is just an attempt to help the transition process and give couples a clear understanding of what is to come and how to cope."

Even though there are accepted limitations these people wouldn't be involved unless they have a commitment and a sense of purpose. In other words, they do have some objectives.

The rabbis tend to speak in broad generalities. "A good program should substantially increase the chance for success of a marriage, not prevent divorce," said one rabbi. This rabbi made it clear that Judaism accepts divorce if a relationship is going to be thoroughly unsatisfying, thus he does not expect none of his graduates to never divorce. Another rabbi said that his goals are to strengthen the marriage and to strengthen the community, clearly indicating that he sees a strong correlation between the success of the two institutions. It is his belief that "The Jewish family has held together so as to provide the individual the love so needed in an unloving world, and we're living in a very unloving society."

The therapists, perhaps as a result of their training, spoke in more specific terms. Problem solving techniques and communciation skills appear to be the foci. "Most couples don't know how to do problemsolving, and this is one of the things they begin to learn in a program," said one. "I think people who will have gone through the program will have learned how to resolve and work out problems, how to communicate, how to deal with the other people in their lives. They will be given the tools that can

help make their marriage successful, and not just turn around and walk away as they might have done," stated another. The therapist with JFS "concentrates on the ways in which expectations in marriage and prior expectations can become a trap, because if we go into a marriage expecting things to be a certain way, it almost never turns out that way." To emphasize this point she said that "we have to open people up to the process of communication about these expectations, and when this is done they can come off of the clouds and be a little more human in their views, and in turn be more satisfied and content with themselves and the relationship."

Content

The actual content of each program is tempered by the training, orientation and capabilities of the group facilitators. Publicity from two of the programs as well as personal statements from the leaders help illuminate this point.

The program offered by YULA is called "Workshop on Jewish Marriage." An advertising brochure identifies the program as a comprehensive seminar limited to twelve engaged and/or newly married couples that is not designed for troubled marriages but is designed to get marriage started on the right foot. Among the topics to be discussed are self-respect and mutual-respect, falling in love versus learning to love, Jewish insights on marriage and love, and partnership in parenting.

The program presented by UJ is called "Making Marriage Work." Some of the course objectives include exploring the meaning of love, examining the institutes of marriage, analyzing expectations, techniques in communication, effective problemsolving, the wedding, sexuality, money management, and child-rearing.

Judaism and Jewishness receives a lot of attention in the group sessions. The rabbis appear to have a clear sense of how they want to deal with this matter and expressed less ambivalence than the therapists. For example one therapist said she is dedicated to supporting the Jewish position, but not professionally. "That is not our role to teach Judaism, but it is our role to teach that there is a Jewish community out there... and that it cares about it's people." A common discovery is that there is a lot of confusion about what it means to be Jewish and to have a Jewish home. Plainly the couples are struggling with how Jewish one can/should be. The rabbi that works with the YULA program indicated that the Jewish values on marriage...even the religiously trained people don't learn this as a student. He concentrates on norms in Jewish marriage, experiences from his own marriage, and sociological trends in the Jewish community. The rabbi with the UJ program emphasizes the value and support provided by being a part of the Jewish community. "In the discussion on Judaism the couples can be conditioned to the importance of relating to a community, to share values, so that some of our groups have formed havurot in order to have a place to share common values. Both the individuals and the couple is strengthened as a result, because they're in a community of shared values. Specifically the discussion touches on a number of issues: how do they look upon themselves as Jews; Jewish experiences (education, camp, Israel, parental influence); the life cycle; the wedding ceremony and associated rituals; the Jewish attitude toward sexuality. His objective in incorporating the Jewish content is to show the couples how Judaism and a Jewish way of life can serve to strengthen and stabilize their marriage, because he believes that one of the chief reasons divorce is so

high is that so many Jews are rootless, detached from their culture. "If people were part of a community their would be less emphasis on meeting everybody's own needs, which is in vogue today," he said.

Reactions to the Programs

Reactions from the informants reveal that the experience benefits the couples, the community and also the group leaders. Overall assessments are quite ecstatic. One of the co-leaders of the UJ program outlined several things that the program has done. First, it has alerted the couples to what is entailed in marriage. Second, it has made them aware of the fact that if you run into a problem there is nothing wrong with going to a professional for help. Third, it has also brought a sense of community for isolated couples, bringing on a sense of belonging for many, and lasting relationships for others. She stressed that this result of the programs is a very important side effect. It was, as she said, "quite revealing to learn that these people need friends and friendship circles, particularly in the formation stage of the relationship when the couples want to find people both can relate to." The co-leader of the JFS group also discoverd that the premarital programs can serve as a network to develop new friends. She discovered that every couple she has talked to whether interested in the course or not is interested in this network. As far as what the program has provided she related that "above all the group process had allowed for communication that would never have occured otherwise. In such alienated times this sense of sharing and belonging is so very important." She couldn't stress the value of the group process enough. "One of the beauties of the group process was that people were able to share, to discover that they were not alone in their fears...the group became a real support system."

Need for Evaluation

All of the facilitators recognize that an evaluation process must take place in order to validate the value of premarital programs. Each program has an evaluation period at the end of the course to determine the participation satisfaction with the concept, structure and benefits of the program. It is necessary, however, to conduct a more scientific and longer running evaluation to accurately assess the worth of participating in premarital counseling.

Future Directions

Each program leader has aspirations for expanding the dimensions of their program in order to reach and effect additional Jewish couples. They all believe that they offer a worthwhile service and would like to have as many people as possible take advantage of what they feel is a memorable and worthwhile experience. In assessing future growth of the programs there seems to be agreement that complete cooperation of the rabbinic community is needed, and the general feeling thus far informants is that such a plateau is not yet in reach. Two possible reasons are territoriality and the non-recognition that outside sources can influence the course of a couple's marriage. One rabbi who feels that more would be happening if there was broad support of the rabbinic community suggested that "rabbis are naive in their own right about the survivability of marriages. There is denial on their part to the realities of marriage and the possibility of their having some influence on the couples they marry before the actual marriage." One informant is convinced that territoriality is really a big piece of the problem, "as most rabbis are not really interested in moving people out of their synagogues and out of their

reach." It is her belief that the best way to advance premarital counseling is to go after the individual synagogue and try to run the groups out of as many synagogues as possible. In her words, "A course at UJ does not have the same drawing power for the rabbis as it may for the couple." Another said, "In terms of expansion it is my sense that the way to go is to decentralize, to involve rabbis to urge couples to take this course, and that the best place to hold them is at temples and synagogues and with the involvement of the pulpit rabbis." The UJ facilitators, while frustrated with the lack of organized support of the rabbinic community concede that progress is being made, and that many of their referrals to the program are coming from rabbis in the area. This particular program has also received a grant from the Jewish Community Foundation, making Los Angeles, the first community in the United States to provide an opportunity of premarital guidance for every Jewish couple. So, notwithstanding, the need for constant publicity of the program, support is evident and apparently growing.

GROUP PREMARITAL COUNSELING: WHAT THE NON-PROVIDERS SAY

While most of the informants speak enthusiastically about the concept of group premarital counseling, a few expressed reservations about its worth and value. In brief, the resistance comes on three levels. First, some believe that it is unrealistic to have couples confront hypothetical issues prior to the actual marriage. Second, one informant voiced her disdain with the institution of marriage and the traditional family in general. Third, there are those who believe that the timing of premarital education is in error if it is instituted with engaged couples. The more appropriate point is before a mate has been selected, reason being that

couples don't have adequate time and are too wrapped up in their own prenuptial bliss to seriously examine their relationship. Some of the skeptic's comments follow.

"Sure a premarital program is worth a try...what's there to lose." Another said, "We haven't changed anything with programs, millions of articles, institutes, and seminars." And, familial problems are not simple, and repair efforts aren't much more than patch jobs. It's more important to look for the root cause of problems." One lukewarm supporter, a rabbi, said, "I'm not possessive of the people I marry. If there is a program of value, and they're interested, why not?" He added, "But that doesn't mean I would discontinue our sessions together."

Another reluctant supporter replied, "Depending upon the program, I think a premarital experience for a couple could be very helpful, but it all depends upon the couple and the make-up of the group. I do not feel that a sixty year-old couple would benefit by participating with a much younger couple."

The more avid suporters, on the other hand, are quite clearly drawn to this concept. For example, "I certainly see a strong need for premarital programs because I think people need to tackle certain kinds of issues before marriage and start to counteract some of the messages that society has given about what marriages and relationships are all about." Some of those messages mentioned are the likelihood of marriages to end in failure and the acceptance of serial relationships as a way of life.

Another said, "With a program like this so much can be gained. I see it as so positive, and I can't think of any negative drawbacks that would prevent a community from having a program such as this."

And, "It would be a time to explore issues not ordinarily looked at by people. As an added dividend, therapy may become less foreign and threatening to people."

Or, "The more we do to help focus attention on learning skills and insights the better. Life cycle crises are a time for great personal growth. The more people do to prepare for something the stronger the commitment. The same can be said for marriage preparation."

These informants believe that both couples and the community can benefit from premarital counseling. For example, one said, "Premarital counseling can be a time to smooth the transition from single life to married life. It can help people make adjustments that they've never encountered before." Another conjectured, "It can give people the opportunity, in a safe place, to experience open, honest communcation. They can learn that it does feel good to be open with a partner, that there are rewards that come with such behavior, and that the relationship really can grow only when risk-taking occurs. Sitting still may be safe and comfortable in the short run, but in the long run it can be a trap for destruction." Judging by the above statements it appears that these informants believe that people in general are ill-prepared and lacking the skills that make for a successful marriage. The therapists interviewed, and most of the rabis tend to agree with this proposition.

Communal benefits come in the form of actual community involvement in marital preparation for its young couples, and a hopefull decreased divorce rate, which is a trend everyone wold like to see take place.

One rabbi, in addition to seeing benefits for the couples and the community, anticipates group premarital counseling as also benefiting the

rabbi. "The program approach gives the couple a chance to share with others like them, and it enables the rabbi to accomplish a goal (premarital preparation) without having to use his/her own time." With respect to the community, he said, "hopefully the community will benefit from a lower divorce rate, more meaningful marriages, marriages with greater Jewish content, and more affiliation for young adults." At his temple for example, couples that participate in a premarital program are given one year of free membership.

The data suggest that premarital counseling on a group level is a worthy and applicable endeavor. If this is so, why has it not been instituted on a grander scale. Judging by the following comments, a variety of reasons exist:

"The reason such a program has not yet been pursued is because people don't develop preventive steps as much as they pursue something once it's reached a critical stage. On the one hand there's a great surge for marital and divorce counseling, but not a great surge to take preventive steps. Perhaps if it were more formalized there would be more interest."

"Premarital counseling is not happening in part because marriage is not perceived as a crisis, and people and institutions respond to crises."

"Premarital counseling is an important issue not yet identified by the profession as one. Everybody is crying about the divorce rate, single-parent families, the breakup of family life, yet no on wants to look at where we can intervene and maybe create more successful relationships."

"Unfortunately the Jewish community has no commitment to programs that service the personal needs of individuals. There is more interest in meeting communal needs than the spiritual and emotional needs of the individual and the family."

"While Judaism has always seen a balance between the community and the individual, this is no longer so. The community has become all important. Part of the problem is the reluctance to recognize that Jews do have personal and family problems. We want to believe that all moves quite smoothly, so to recognize our problems would shatter age-old myths that Jews have taken great pride in."

The preceding statements lead one to believe that the Jewish community is a reactive rather than active community; dealing with problems after the fact instead of trying to prevent them. (The Jewish community is not alone in this matter, as the tendency on the part of most everybody is to wait until the crisis arises before attempting to ameliorate the problem). On another level, there is concern that the Jewish community is too concerned about meeting communal needs as opposed to the individual needs of the people that make up the community. Finally, the Jewish community is hesitant to admit that there are serious problems within its ranks for fear of threatening a self-image that is based on unity, cohesiveness, stability, and mutual cooperation among all.

CAN PREMARITAL COUNSELING BECOME AN INTEGRAL PART OF THE JEWISH COMMUNITY..

Since most of those interviewed expressed a positive attitude toward premarital counseling, they were asked to suggest means of introducing, developing and garnering support for premarital programs (specifically in the L.A. area). They were also asked for their opinions on the necessity to make such programming mandatory for all couples that wish to be married by a rabbi.

The best way of expanding and generating interest in this kind of programming is to get the broadest base of support possible. This means

support of the organized Jewish community (i.e., synagogues, Federation, centers, JFS), and to offer the program in as many locations as possible. It was mentioned that this last point is particularly significant, since so many people live in the outer regions of Los Angeles County and are thus resistant to come into Los Angeles proper. Some of the actual suggestions put forth by the informants follow.

"This kind of program needs to be in the community, for it is the only way of gaining power," said one. He added, "Individual efforts alone will never be able to gain the needed support. The more involved the better."

Another said, "Nobody has the winning formulation in terms of creating relationship-type programs. The more the better. it can be community centered, synagogue centered...wherever and whatever works."

One advocate stressed that when promoting such a program it is imperative to state that people don't have to have problems in order to participate. This is a problem common to many preventive programs, as people tend to think that if they don't perceive a present or potential problem there is no need to seek out ways of preventing future problems.

While communal suport is recognized as vital, one young social worker pointed out the difficulty in getting across-the-board support. "I do know that there has been a history of non-cooperation between the major institutions of the Jewish community. it needs to be broken through, particularly in this day and age when money is drying up. We need to pool our resources."

One rabbinic informant feels that this non-cooperative stance is already being dealt with. He cited the Task Force on Young Married, which

he depics as "probably the best vehicle to encourage communitywide involvement. It would create a level of consciencousness as it can highlight and publicize the programs."

In another vein, one JFS employee emphasized the importance of having all programs connected with JFS because of the specialized training and social workers have in clinical and group work.

There is agreement that premarital counseling programs need to be broad-based and available to anyone in the community, but there is divergence of opinion as to how forthright the community should be when it comes to encouraging couples to participate. Some of the informants favor the idea of making it mandatory, while others are strongly opposed to such a tact. Those who favor the stronger stand cite the Catholic community as an example for the Jewish community to follow.

"Catholics have much more power over their parisioners than we do. We're embarressed to be that way. The Jewish community does not tell people how to do anything...instead we deal after the fact. We have a responsibility and an obligation to be more forthright. Rabbis should not marry a couple unless they participate in a program. We're willing to do it for converts, why not for all marriages."

Another asked, "Why are we embarrassed to be so forthright? Is there any Jewish value attached to this hesitancy. For so many years Jews had the rigid code of living to abide by; customs were adhered to with minimal complain and rebellion. We're facing a new reality now. Jew assimilate, there are fewer restrictions imposed, and we find that people are fading away. Now we're in a quandry as how to respond. Perhaps we need to be more assertive, picking up where the old customes left off."

A rabbi who prefers the position of mandatory participation also conceded that such a position has its limitations. "I would like to make premarital counseling mandatory, but it's not feasible because I believe most couples would just turn around and walk out. It would make sense only if 90% of the rabbis recommended it and an accompanying structure to implement it was available.

On the other side of the coin we have these views.

"Premarital counseling should be made available to everyone, but I'm not sure about making it mandatory. Every rabbi should be made to encourage and support this. Nonetheless, mandating it could be trampling on personal and individual rights."

Said another, "I wouldn't go so far as to make it mandatory. Maybe there isn't any risk involved, but it just doesn't seem fair to do. However, it is a marvelous idea, and I support the concept totaly."

There are obviously two conflictual positions being put forth. One stresses the obligation of the community toward its members, and associated with this obligation is the desire to be a strong socializing agent. Within this framework are found the advocates of mandatory participation. The position contrary to this emphasizes individuality and personal choice, such that any responsibilities that are imposed by another agent are an imposition on an individual's personal rights. This issue of individual versus the community is a source of constant concern in the Jewish community, and in this particular topic the matter deserves to be explored in greater length; particulary if premarital counseling proves to be a successful tool in the building of satisfactory relationships.

This chapter attempted to present some of the issues concerning

premartial counseling programs. The experiences and perspectives of those who now manage and facilitate existing programs were presented. The viewpoints of those who could have an impact on such programs (the gatekeepers who provide and refer) were also touched upon. Support for premarital programming is evident and yet at the same time restrained. Three organized programs exist at the time of this writing. The organized Jewish community is providing some financial and institutional aid, and based on data gathered for this paper, there appears to be some support of other Jewish communal professionals, rabbis and social workers in particular.

Chapter 6

Summary

This thesis began with an overview of the role of the family in Jewish life. The Jewish family plays a, if not the central role in the formation of Jewish identity, values, cultural heritage, etc. Due to a variety of indicators, such as a significant increase in the divorce rate, intermarriage, fewer children being born, and alternative life styles, the Jewish community is very concerned about the future of the Jewish family.

A number of changes are believed responsible for these trends. The emphasis upon the individual, drive for self-actualization, rejection of historic social roles of men and women, anti-institutionalism, and the tendency to form transitory relationships are frequently mentioned as reasons for the changes leading to less cohesive family patterns.

The question to ask now is: Will the family survive, and if so, what form will it take? Of those whom write on family life, some prefer the traditional family strucutre, others are ready to accept radical changes. Throughout the years various methods have been tried to strengthen the Jewish family in America. One area left unexplored (until quite recently) is premarital preparation to help the family in formation. There is some evidence indicating it is a worthwhile endeavor, so with this in mind, the focus of this paper was premarital preparation in the Jewish community. A number of points and questions were to be examined throughout the study. The first area was the status of premarital preparation in the United States.

In the early 20th century experts in the field of family life realized that the institution of marriage was in a transitional period;

marital roles and responsibilities were changing. The process of selecting a marital partner was also changing. Whereas marriages were at one time prearranged by parents or a matchmaker, individuals themselves determined whom they wanted to wed. Today, in the last quarter of the 20th century, people are fully aware that while the self-selection process for a marital process is preferable, the likelihood of the marriage failing is very great. As such, couples are interested in feeling assured that they are doing all they can to strengthen their relationship. The aid of a third party is recognized as a valuable tool to accomplish this. Premarital preparation may be that tool.

There are many avid supporters of premarital preparation for engaged couples. To their dismay, permarital counseling and preparatory programs is more the exception than the rule in this country.

Three groups are the main providers of premarital counseling. They are the clergy, physicians, and professional mental health workers. The clergy have been the most actively involved. They are in an optimal position to provide premarital counseling. The Christian clergy are much more commited than rabbis. The Catholic Church is particularly involved.

A growing number of the Church's diocese and archdioces require couples who wish to marry in the Church to participate in premarital programs sponsored by the Church. Additionally, articles appear quite regularly documenting such programs. On the other hand, only isolated pockets of the Jewish community have introduced premarital programs, and Jewish publications have paid scant attention to the matter.

In all fairness, the Jewish community recognized long ago the need for some kind of premarital counseling. In 1936, under the initiative of

Rabbi Sidney E. Goldstein, the CCAR committee on Marriage, Family and the Home was created. Premarital counseling was highlighted as a valuable helping tool. Since that first resolution the CCAR has repeatedly advocated the practice of premarital counseling.

Even though premarital counseling has a history of official sanction in the Jewish community, systematic practice seems minimal. There is little data to suggest there is a greater sensitivity to the importance of this practice today. To the credit of the rabbinate, an effort has and is still made. Just a few other sectors in the Jewish community can make this claim.

Evaluation of premarital counseling programs is a relatively recent undertaking by social researchers. Existing reserach has revealed some predominant trends in the field of premarital counseling. Some of them are:

1) The four approaches most common to premarital counseling are the generic education approach, therapeutic counseling, instructional counseling, the enrichment approach.

2) Post-wedding counseling is now a larger part of overall premarital programs.

3) Evaluation research done so far fails to prove that premarital or post-wedding counseling has any long term effects.

(4) The most pressing issues that need to be addressed are the lack of training in religious and secular graduate programs, the lack of systematic evaluation, and the need for better understanding about relationship development and the needs of couples at various stages of their relationship.

Based on the data from these studies, a marital preparation program will be most effective if it draws on couples and not non-couples, includes post- as well as premarital sessions, and is done in a small group format. Additional studies indicate that the use of videotape is helpful in assessing

non-verbal communication and stimulating discussion. It is unfortunate that the validity of premarital counseling has not yet been verified. Additional research, of a much longer nature, is simply needed to evaluate the long-term effects of what in reality is a short-term program designed to have long-lasting impact.

The remainder of the thesis looks at premarital counseling in the Jewish community (specifically Los Angeles), focusing on rabbis, social workers, and three premarital preparatory programs for Jewish couples.

In the Jewish community, rabbis, and social workers at JFS agencies are the most likely providers of premarital counseling. However, data from this study reveal that couples rarely seek out either rabbis or social workers for this purpose. The rabbi is perceived as a religious functionary who is sought out to perform the wedding, and the therapist is sought out to help solve problems that have already arisen; generally after the marriage has begun. According to the informants, neither rabbis or social workers receive training in premarital counseling. In fact, there is concern as to whether or not a rabbis is qualified to do any type of counseling, as they receive little if any training during their years as rabbinic students. Even with this fact, most of the rabbinic informants feel comfortable doing limited counseling. Most admit they have limited counseling skills, yet are prepared and willing to refer people to the appropriate source if therapy is needed. Some of the social work informants expressed disagreed on this point, saying that they rarely receive any referrals from rabbis, and when they do, it is only after they have created additional problems for the people concerned. Some of the social workers believe that the rabbis do not know how to recognize when a person is in need of therapy themselves, something they are not trained to

do. It is evident that the social workers and rabbis disagree here. It may well be that rabbis make substantial referrals, only to private therapists, and not JFS agencies.

A number of the informants (both rabbinic and social work) stressed the importance of providing additional training for rabbis in counseling and psychodynamic theory. There is some dispute as to the best time to implement such training. A number of the rabbis feel the most opportune time is after they have completed their studies in the seminary, while some of the social workers feel training should be incorporated into the curriculum at the various rabbinic seminaries. This researcher believes that such a program should be instituted at the time the rabbis feel they would most benefit. Additional research needs to be done to ascertain this fact.

While the social workers have advanced training in the theory and practice of therapy, they have no training in premarital counseling (individual or group). The expertise to provide is available, so introductory orientation programs could be implemented easily. The interest and time is all that is necessary. However, since the present trend is toward group programs, every social worker (and rabbi) need not be an expert in premarital preparation. Rather they need to be sensitive to the importance and availability of premarital preperatory programs, be commited to making a concerted effort of providing referrals to existing programs, and know when a referral is necessary.

All of the informants were asked to reveal information about the structure and content of their sessions with couples for whom they are providing premarital counseling. Most if not all of the rabbis try to

conduct some discussion with couples about their future marriage. As previously mentioned, it is not always easy as the couples are not seeking out this type of service. To accomplish this, some rabbis prefer a more aggressive style than others. The more aggressive feel it is their duty to prepare couples for marriage, while others feel their influence begins and ends with the wedding ceremony. The less aggressive allow the couples to direct the flow of the conversation, the more aggressive opt for a more directive approach. The data reveals that regardless of approach, similar subjects are discussed in the few (1-3) sessions the rabbis have with couples. Divorce, sexual relations, children, affiliation, and divorce are the predominant topics.

The rabbis are frequently the only contact couples have with the organized Jewish community prior to, or even after their marriage. Do the rabbis feel they have a responsibility to intervene if they sense that they will be officiating at a wedding which seems doomed to failure? There was disagreement on this issue. Not surprisingly, some express their misgivings about the relationships, others prefer not to. Experience, and seniority in the congregation appear to be two key factors which determine a rabbi's willingness to intervene or not. Those who do intervene find that the couples are generally appreciative of the feedback, though they may not always seek out help or postpone the wedding as the rabbi suggests.

In contrast to the rabbis, who see many of the couples in the Jewish community prior to their marriage, social workers in Jewish Family Service agencies rarely have the opportunity to provide premarital counseling, unless they are actively involved in an existing program. Nevertheless,

they have valuable ideas on the subject. Their experiences with married couples who have sought out therapy give them insight into ways to promote healthier marriages. Some of their suggestions on issues to be covered are expectations, communication skills, flexibility, importance of compromise, and negotiation skills. It is their belief that general awareness of the dynamics of marriage will be a great help for soon-to-be-married couples. Specific topics of discussion would cover daily living concerns, such as budgeting, dual career marriages, role differences, childrearing, sexuality, etc. One social worker raised a very important point: We can teach all we want, but unless couples are motivated to learn and commited to change, little can be done until after the problems have already arrived.

The rabbis and social workers disagree on the role of the Jewish component in counseling. The rabbis see it playing an active role. Their discussions with couples will focus on things such as Jewish life for married couples, children, affiliation, adult education, and the wedding ceremony itself as an expression of Jewish identity. They admit they have to be sensitive to whom they are talking, for some couples could conceivably be turned off by an approach that sounds "too Jewish".

While a few of the therapists agree with the rabbis, the bulk feel that Jewish issues should not be included in the counseling sessions (unless the client requests it), because it is so value laden. They do admit, however, that Jewish issues should be discussed with Jewish couples, and for that reason, they prefer that premarital preparation occur in group settings, under a family life education format, which is explicitly designed to be directive and educative (implying that values discussion are appropriate for this setting, but not in therapy).

In addition to the rabbi or social workers providing premarital counseling, Jewish couples in Los Angeles can now participate in group premarital preparatory programs, designed for Jewish couples. Three such programs presently operate in the L.A. area. One is sponsored by Yshiva University of L.A., another by University of Judaism, and a third by Jewish Family Service of L.A. and Temple Emanuel of Beverly Hills. The stated goal of each program is to improve a couple's readiness for marriage. As discussed in an earlier chapter, the group process is believed to be more beneficial than individual or couple counseling. Those who run each program are excited about what they have to offer the Jewish community. They are also well aware that they are lacking empirical data to support their enthusiasm. However, if the support of the L.A. Jewish community is an indicator, the programs appear, at the very least, to be credible and worthwhile.

Naturally, the leaders of each program hope to expand their operation in order to accomodate the needs of the community. It is their belief that the interest is there; success depends upon trained facilitators to run each program and ample space to house the program. Judging by the supportive comments of this study's informants, the possiblity for growth certainly exists.

Discussion

The stated purpose of this thesis was to study the knowledge base of selected sample population on the subject of premarital counseling. Based on the review of the literature and data from the interviews, a number of points surfaced that need to be highlighted.

First, there is no dispute that marriage is a critical transitional episode in the life of an individual and the couple as a unit. Premarital

preperation with the aid of a third party is accepted as an innovative and viable way of helping a couple build the bridge between single life and married life. This is not a fact ignored by the Jewish community...at least officially. There is supporting evidence going back as far as fifty years. Nevertheless, assuming the sample population of this study is indicative of the larger body of Jewish communal professionals, it appears that very few have any knowledge of or training in the theory and practice of premarital counseling.

Again drawing on data from the population used for this study, one body of Jewish communal professionals, the rabbinate, regularly conducts premarital interviews. Due to their limited training in counseling skills, they are both unable to counsel couples in a systematic way, and ill-prepared to analyze clinically whatever information they collect from the intervewee. As one informant replied, "I tend to go by my gut reactions when judging the stability of a relationship." It is disturbing that such an influential person has to work from such an inadequate position. Reams of information are available on factors which influence the future stability of a marital relationship. A person with the proper information does not have to "go by my gut reactions", rather he/she can make a decision with the help of reliable data drawn from numerous studies. At the least, every rabbi in this country should be made aware of the availablity of this information, and preferably to be provided with it to lesson the demand on the rabbi to have to make a tiresome search of the literature. The rabbi also needs to know what to do with the information once it is gathered. First, the rabbi needs to be willing to make the appropriate referral if it is indicated, and second, he/she needs to know how to

effectively express his/her concern so it is properly received by the intended recipient of the information. Namely, the person(s) trusts the rabbi's judgement and seek out help. Third, the rabbi needs to know where to make the referral. Logical sources are JFS agencies, an existing premarital program in the community of the couple, or a therapist who specializes in marital issues. Returning to the general topic of counseling, no rabbi should be permitted to serve a congregation without having some skills in counseling to draw from. A great deal of a rabbi's work is in the area of human services, and it is more the rule than the exception that a rabbi has little if any training in human relations. Intensive training may not be called for (though some think it is), but limited-time programs, either integrated in the curriculum of the rabbinic seminaries, or later seem to be a reasonable proposition. The informants for this study agree. The resources to conduct such a program are available. There is no excuse for it not taking place.

Few therapists receive significant training in premarital counseling. Their training is of a generic kind. The informants for this study explained that since they rarely if ever provide this type of counseling service, there is obviously little need for it. Carrying out this logic one step further...why train for something that will rarely be used? However, if a social worker received training in this area, and thus increased his/her sensitivity to the finer nuances of relationship development, they may identify more people in need of premarital preparation. More specifically, if a social worker isn't sensitive to the need for premarital preparation, they won't find people who may benefit from it. Conversely...seek and ye shall find. Thus, social workers employed by JFS

agencies (and others in private settings who see Jewish clientele) should be exposed to the same information as suggested for rabbis. An instrument that both social workers and rabbis may find valuable is a standardized interview guide to be used in the course of the premarital interview, thus enabling the interviewer to improve his/her assessment capability.

A second area that deserves attention is the level of communication existing among the variety of Jewish communal organizations, institutions, programs...etc. For example, the leaders of the three premarital preparatory programs interviewed for this study seemed surprisingly unaware about each others programs. There wasn't a sense of total ignorance, but neither was it apparent that all three programs work closely together, planning ways to improve, comparing notes, and so on. It seems vital that communication occur regularly. These people are developing new and creative services for the Los Angeles Jewish community; poor communication hurts those who should be hurt the least...the community at large. Another example is the quality of communication that exists between rabbis and JFS agencies. Some of the social work informants seem to feel that many rabbis in the community simply do not understand what a Jewish Family Service agency is, or further, do not respect the quality of service JFS can provide. While the relationship between rabbis and JFS was not a focus of this study, a few comments by some of the rabbis indicates they prefer referring people to private therapists rather than JFS. It would be improper to speculate as to whether or not this is an accurate perception, and if so, what are its implications. It is an area that requires further exploration. It would be of value to JFS and to the receivers of its service to know how other professionals asses the quality of service

provided by JFS. Once again, a poor relationship between two prominent bodies of the Jewish community can hurt those who receive the services of these organizations.

A third point, and perhaps the most important, is the evidence of tremendous creative resources in the Jewish community. It is easy to harp about the abundance of problems among the many who make up the Jewish communal profession; ignorant with what has and is yet to be accomplished; forgetting that there is always going to be a continuing effort to develop means of addressing the needs of the Jewish community.

This paper focused on one issue in the Jewish community...premarital counseling and preparation. It is a relatively obscure topic, one that hasn't really caught the attention of many. That doesn't mean it won't one day. Strides are being made, and in L.A. and a few other Jewish communities in the U.S. and Canada, there are Jewish communal professionals who believe in premarital preparation, and are commited to making it work. These people need to communicate their experiences, because without this it will be difficult to improve and expand upon what already exists. It is difficult to make change in silence. Larger numbers aren't needed to bring about this change. Our history shows that masses are not required to bring about change, just a strong nucleus that is clear on what it wants to achieve. The pioneers of premarital counseling in the Jewish community must work together, they must communicate, and they must be clear about their sense of purpose.

Appendix A

Sample Letter

Dear

As a double master's student in social work and Jewish communal services at Hebrew Union College and George Warren Brown School of Social Work I am required to complete a master's thesis. I am doing a study on premarital counseling for Jewish couples. The research is being conducted under the supervision of my advisors, Dr. Bruce Phillips and Dr. Michael Signer.

In the course of the study I will be interviewing a variety of people in their professional settings. I am interested in talking to rabbis, marriage counselors and social workers. I would like to discuss with you your role as a counselor of premarital couples, your past experiences and present impressions in this role, and your sense of what the Jewish community ought to be doing in preparing couples for this stage of life. Everything will be confidential and anonymous.

I will be contacting you by phone in the near future with the hope that we can then arrange a convenient time to get together. I look forward to meeting you.

Sincerely,

Daniel H. Bass

Appendix B

Interview Guide

I. Background/Knowledge Base of Interviewee

1. How would you describe premarital counseling?
2. How can the time in the premarital interview be utilized best?
3. How did you become interested in premarital counseling?
4. Do you have contact with others who work as premarital counselors? What do you discuss?
5. Can you give me some examples of the different methods of premarital counseling?
6. What has been your best source for learning about premarital counseling?
7. If you are interested in receiving training in this subject, where would you go?
8. How do you perceive your role as a counselor? How does this compare with others in your profession?
9. Tell me how your counseling style evolved.

II. The Interview: Process and Content

1. How frequently do you meet with a couple before the wedding?
2. Tell me how the interview is structured.
3. Can you give me an example of some of the questions you might ask?
4. When would you see a couple separately?

5. Would you say there are identifiable characteristics about couples that request premarital counseling?
6. How do you deal with a couple that appears to be having difficulties in the relationship?
7. When you suggest further counseling, how do most people respond? If they resist, what do you do?
8. Tell me about your most recent premarital counseling session?
9. Do any interviews stand out more than others? Tell me about them.
10. What is an example of a bad/good interview?
11. If I were to observe you with a couple, what counseling characteristics will stand out?
12. Tell me what topics couples are most interested in discussing.
13. When a couple leaves your office, what is the one piece of information you want them to leave with?

III. Jewish Component Questions

1. Do Jewish issues ever come up?
2. How do you define a Jewish issue?
3. What has actually happened, and how did you handle it?
4. Of what importance does this matter play in your counseling style?

IV. Evaluation/Analysis of Premarital Counseling

1. How do you asses the value of your talks with couples?
2. Could there be better methods of providing this service?

3. Are people today adequately prepared for marriage? What is different? What can be done to rectify any deficiencies you perceive?
4. What do you know about group premarital counseling?
5. Is there a need for the Jewish community to institutionalize group premarital counseling? Advantages? Disadvantages? How could it be implemented best in the Jewish community?

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