

## Working with African American Individuals, Couples, and Families Expert Panel Webcast Video

February 20, 2014

### Operator

Good day and welcome to **Working with African American Individuals, Couples, and Families Expert Panel**. Today's conference is being recorded. At this time, I would like to turn the conference over to Jen McHenry. Please go ahead, ma'am.

### Jen McHenry

Thank you so much and hello everyone. I'd like to welcome you to the National Resource Center for Healthy Marriage and Families Expert Panel webcast entitled Working with African American Individuals, Couples, and Families. Again, my name is Jen McHenry, and I'm part of the Resource Center team. I'd like to thank everyone for joining us today, especially our panelists. Before we get started with the presentations, there's just a few housekeeping items I'd like to go over. The audio for today's webcast will be broadcast through your computer speakers. Please make sure that the volume on your computer speakers is turned up, so you can hear the presentation.

Today's Expert Panel will feature a combination of presentation slides and streaming video. If you're having technical difficulties viewing or hearing any part of the webcast, you can send us a Q&A message, and someone will respond with assistance. A video of our panelists will be in the largest box of your screen. The right-hand panel will feature additional supporting material. The top box will feature our presentation slides. There're a few special resources that we'll be discussing in today's Expert Panel that are available for you to download from the pod in the middle right of your screen. This is labeled Resource Center Material. Please click on the name of the file you wish to view and then the download button to open or save the resource to your computer.

Today's Expert Panel will be a facilitated discussion with time at the end of the initial conversation dedicated to addressing your specific questions. We'll be collecting questions over the computer and encourage you to submit them throughout the duration of the webcast. To do this, use the Question and Answer pod in the bottom right of your screen designated by the letters Q&A. Type your questions into the open field at the bottom and then click "Send Question" or press "Enter." You'll receive a reply thanking you for your question, and your question will be forwarded to the moderator and held to the end.

The material from this presentation will be posted on the Past Events Archive of our website, [HealthyMarriageandFamilies.org](http://HealthyMarriageandFamilies.org) under the Training, Technical Assistance, & Events tab. For anyone interested in tweeting during our Expert Panel, we invite you to use the hashtag #MarriageResCtr – Marriage Resource Center. You'll find it listed here at the bottom of the slide. Before we get underway, we have one short question on your screen we'd like you to respond to. Some of you may be participating in today's webcast in a group, which is fantastic. To help us get an idea of how many individuals we're reaching today, please answer the question on your screen. If you are in a group, including yourself, what is the total number of individuals watching today's webcast? So,

again, if you're just in a room by yourself, you're one. If you and another person are in there, please answer two. Just a quick minute to fill that out. Ready? And thank you so much. Hopefully, everyone was comfortable with answering that poll question. They may or may not make another appearance later in our webcast.

For some of those of you that may not be familiar with the Resource Center and what we offer, we're going to show you a quick, short overview of who we are.

Cueing up our video, and it should broadcast in just a minute.

*MUSIC PLAYING*

### **Male {video}**

Strong families are the foundation of strong communities, yet many families you serve struggle to achieve self-sufficiency, and, as service providers, you struggle to support them within traditional safety-net service delivery systems. The National Resource Center for Healthy Marriage and Families works with federal, state, tribal, and local government agencies to promote the value of healthy marriage and relationship education skills. We encourage their integration into safety-net service delivery systems as a holistic approach to strengthening the families you serve. We offer a Virtual Resource Center available 24 hours a day that is user friendly and easy to navigate. The website also includes success stories and a calendar of upcoming events. Our searchable library has over 300 resources, including research on promising practices that support the need for and benefits of healthy marriage education skills. The library also includes stakeholder specific products developed by experts in the field, like Tip Sheets, Fact Sheets, and Research-to-Practice Briefs. Visit our Virtual Training Center to learn more about free training and technical assistance, including webinars and in-person and online training opportunities. If you can't find what you are looking for, we have a call center that is staffed Monday through Friday, so you can speak to a live person. Healthy marriage and relationship education includes interpersonal skills like communication and conflict resolution, as well as critical skills like parenting and financial literacy. These skills serve as the cornerstone for strong families. For more information on healthy marriage education skills, visit:

[www.HealthyMarriageandFamilies.org](http://www.HealthyMarriageandFamilies.org); [info@HealthyMarriageandFamilies.org](mailto:info@HealthyMarriageandFamilies.org);  
1-866-916-4672.

### **Jen McHenry**

Great. Now I'd like to introduce and welcome the host for today's Expert Panel, Robyn Cenizal, the Project Director for the National Resource Center for Healthy Marriage and Families. Robyn Cenizal is a senior manager with ICF International and also serves as the Project Director for the Resource Center. In addition to her training and technical assistance work with ICF, she also brings with her over 26 years of government experience, specializing in strategic public-private partnerships to strengthen low-income, high-stress communities. She is a Certified Family Life Educator and has authored numerous publications on promising practices associated with serving low-income and culturally diverse populations. And I'll turn it over to Robyn, who will tell us a little more about today's webcast and introduce us to our panel. Robyn?

**Robyn Cenizal**

Thanks, Jen, and welcome to all of you. We appreciate you joining us today. I'm particularly excited to be joined by my esteemed colleagues, which I'm going to tell you a little more about. So without further ado, let me start with the introductions and brief bios.

First, we have Charisse Johnson. She serves as the Branch Chief of the Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood Discretionary Grant Program with the Office of Family Assistance at the Administration for Children and Families, which provides the funding and technical assistance to the 121 Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood grantees across the country. Ms. Johnson has over 25 years of experience in human services, including experience administering programs that promote child and family well-being, family self-sufficiency, and child welfare services across a multitude of programs related to children and families.

And then we have Dr. Tera Jordan. Tera is an Associate Professor in the Department of Human Development and Family Studies at Iowa State University. She teaches both undergraduate and graduate-level courses. The focus of her descriptive research is to understand the meaning that individuals attach to their intimate relationship experiences and to examine nuance behaviors and attitudes in romantic ties. Dr. Jordan earned her dual-doctorate in human development and family studies and demography from the Pennsylvania State University and worked eight years as a research scientist at the University of Georgia. She is also the author of several of the products that are highlighted here today. Tera.

We also have with us today, Kenneth Braswell. Kenny serves as the Director of the National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse, which aims to provide, facilitate, and disseminate current research, proven and innovative strategies that will encourage and strengthen fathers and families. Kenny also has over 22 years of community development experience, including serving as the Executive Director for Fathers Incorporated and the author of "When the Tear Won't Fall." Kenny.

Nisa Muhammad joins us as the founder of Wedded Bliss Foundation, a community-based organization helping teens, singles and couples, create and maintain healthy relationships and marriages, so more children grow up with benefits of two-parent families. Her work includes a creation of Black Marriage Day in 2002 and co-authoring Basic Training for Couples, a series -- a relationship education curriculum series.

And Dr. Rosario Slack — over 20 years of experience working with couples, parents, teens, and families, he also serves as the pastor at Temple of Faith Deliverance Church of God in Chattanooga, Tennessee. In addition to providing direct services, he developed Ten Great Dates for Black Couples Guide as well as co-authoring Basic Training with Nisa Muhammad, which was destined to empower couples to build better relationships. Dr. Slack is also the lead author on one of our most popular resources, the African American Toolkit, which will be highlighted here today.

Thank you, panelists, I appreciate you joining me today.

So I want to go ahead and get started with my first question to Charisse. Charisse, the Administration for Children and Families has awarded 75 million for healthy marriage programming and 75 million for responsible fatherhood program activities. Your agency

provides oversight to all of these grantees around the country that do this work, including the Resource Center. From your perspective, what value does the federal government see in investing in marriage and relationship education programming?

**Charisse Johnson**

Thank you, Robyn. Thank you, Robyn. First of all, I would like to say that this is a wonderful opportunity, and I think that we think about the government and why we fund this, we are really looking at opportunities and ways to support families. We're thinking about access to resources. Some of the education parts of this program — families may not typically have access to these resources due to classes or things like that in the community. You know, you have access to things that you may not typically have access to. But also thinking about how can we promote and strengthen families. What are things that need to happen in a community that is driven by the community uniquely that they know the issues that are going on in the community? They know how to develop programs that really reach vulnerable populations, or just resources to strengthen the community. So when we think about community development, that's one impact.

Also, we're thinking about how we can support things that really give us indicators of what really matters in practice. You know, how do we improve the practice? How do we find out ways -- and ways to reach, you know, unique populations or you know, unique situations that may exist? And the community knows that best. So how can support with the funding to do that? How can we really get some of our interest in regards to ACF around improving child well-being? How can get to improve that family's self-sufficiency? So we think about the reasons of why we use -- we put the 75 million in the healthy marriages -- in healthy marriages, it's because we really want to see how can we strengthen communities? How can we build communities? How can we reach families where they are to meet their unique needs? How can we allow communities to work together through partnerships to really think about how you integrate this work into the community at large? And really, you know, how to really see what really works, whether it be through research projects, or whether it's through just getting information through success stories from the community on what works and really to strengthen this field. We know that families need help. We know that families, you know, want to do better. We know that families want to be strong, and one way we can do that is through this funding. So I think it's a really good opportunity for the federal government to really think about ways to do that, and this program allows us to do that.

**Robyn Cenizal**

Thank you. Great. One of the programs that's funded through OFA through this funding is the National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse, and that's represented here today, as I mentioned, by Kenny. Before we talk to Kenny, I'd like to have Jen ask a question of our viewers.

**Jen McHenry**

Thanks, Robyn. What we're seeing is a poll question, um, to gauge what our audience may guess the answer to this question is: How many single fathers are there in the U.S.? And you'll see at the top there; we have a range for you to choose from: 250,000 to 500,000; 500,000 to a million; 1 million to 1.5 million; or 1.5 million to 2 million. Just a quick minute to take their best guess about how many single fathers are in the U.S. And

right now, it looks like our top response is between 1 million and 1.5; up to 37 percent of our audience seems to think that is the correct response.

**Robyn Cenizal**

Interesting, the actual answer is 1.96 million single fathers -- single, head of household fathers in the U.S., which is approximately 16 percent of all single parents. It's interesting, Kenny, because many times when we think about fatherhood services, we think about the non-custodial father and how to help them to be more involved in the lives of their children. But, as we just heard, there are a lot of fathers who are in the home with their children, and, in some cases, they're the only parent in the home with their children. Tell us a little bit about the resources that the Clearinghouse has that is supportive of those fathers, to help those dads be better dads.

**Kenneth Braswell**

You know, I think it's important to allow people to kind of understand the number with respect to single fathers. And that when we talk about single fathers, it's not an indicator of those who are engaged in fatherhood; it's an indicator of relationship. Just like it is with single moms, it's an indicator of where their parenting resources are coming from with respect to who's living in the home. And to know that number is what it is today, it just shows that there's an increasing issue that we have to deal with respect to relationships, which is why I'm so happy to be here today — to get folks to kind of understand that the work of the National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse is a complementary and necessary critical work to move alongside with the National Resource Center. And so the Clearinghouse itself, much like Charisse just kind of laid out for you a few minutes ago, really begins to allow us to create an umbrella platform for the work of responsible fatherhood across the country and ensuring that we do provide the kinds of resources that men need to be adequate and responsible, healthy, loving fathers in the lives of their children and to be able to receive the kinds of services that they need to do so. The AdCouncil did a survey about a year ago, and found that 97 percent of all dads in this country say that when their children were born, it was the best day of their lives. That says something. It says that fathers are just and have the biggest desires to be in the lives of their children. That where they stumble and where they have problems is in access to services, and sometimes some of the other stuff, as well. But it's really their ability to be able to kind of understand and I think that a lot of times we often believe that parents, both moms and dads, receive a manual when children are born. Neither of us receives a manual, and we do the best that we can, given the resources that we have and given what we were taught growing up to be great parents in our lives. And so the Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse does just that, but not only non-custodial dads, but dads across the continuum of fatherhood — from everyone to the extreme who has never had a relationship with the children in their lives all the way to the guy who is doing the best he can possibly do — working, feeding his children, shelter, healthcare, everything. And all of those parents from one extreme to the other, at some point in their lives, need a service, and I hope that's what we do with the National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse for them.

**Robyn Cenizal**

Fabulous thank you. Following up on that, what I hear you saying is that we need to think about these families as unique individuals, and everybody's situation might be

different, so we need to think differently about what services that they need, which I think fits very well with the work associated with Working with African American Individuals, Couples, and Families Toolkit that you worked on for us, Dr. Slack. In it, you address those issues affecting African American families, so why did you think that it was so important to recognize cultural nuances when serving families?

**Dr. Rosario Slack**

Well, first, let me say that I'm ecstatic to be alive to see this day come where we get the opportunity to talk specifically about the nuances of what it means to be Black in America and to be able to say that and to recognize that being Black is okay and that there are individual needs that Black people have — or as many people like to say African American. I still prefer Black, but you know, politically, it's African American. But, for me, it's Black because it incorporates the fact that Blackness is not something that is just American; it is something that spans the globe, and there's a oneness that is not often embraced as we deal with people in America. So the nuances that that have come up about as a result of being Black in America, is -- it's really hard to explain in a minute, but let me take a minute.

When you don't understand something, you're afraid of it, and when you're afraid of something, you don't explore it. And if a person is not understood, then they are realigned or misaligned. And in America, Black families have been redefined, misdefined, and misaligned. And when we talk about including them in the big picture of the marriage movement, which many of us have been a part of for years, we had to recognize that there was some curricula that just did not jive with the experience of Black people in America. And just because you change that at the end and say, for Black couples, the content still was not sensitive in many ways to what the reality of the people of color had experienced. And so, you know, when we look at the Toolkit, we look at the realm of history and some of the influences that are not so obvious that people have had to accept as the way it is, but also, we're trying to help them to understand that though that is the way it is, there are some tools that you can learn to manage the way it is and make it into the way that you would like for it to be. And those nuances are not the same with every culture, and so cultural sensitivity is very important in embracing the fact that it is okay to be Black and to have had the experience that Black people have had and that my relationship is not going to be a cookie cutter approach, and the broad sweep of things is not the way that it can be dealt with. It has to be dealt with based on my perception, my reality, and my experience.

**Robyn Cenizal**

So just to follow up on that, in the Toolkit, you talk about a concept called code switching as it relates to communication. Tell us a little bit about what that is and why is it important for social service providers to understand that concept.

**Dr. Rosario Slack**

Having been a social service provider for years, I recognize code switching even in the culture -- within the culture. As I was dealing with a Black person, sometimes they would start saying things that they knew that I didn't know anything about. But what they were doing is they were referring back to their culture though, and they were highlighting the fact that I was not understanding them at that time, that I was not making the connection.

So what they did was they reverted to speaking in a language that they understood, but that they knew that I did not understand. So it was their defense mechanism to embrace their humanity and to accept that this is who I am, but then when -- if I were to then show them that I was concerned by like asking a follow up question, "What do you mean by that?" That embraces their humanity and brings them back in and helps them to know that I'm concerned about them; that I'm not so concerned about my job. And I think that a lot of times, service providers are so company-minded that they forget that they are dealing with real human lives and people that are dealing with tough issues. And so code switching is a defense mechanism a lot of times; it's a way of embracing my humanity, and sometimes it's a way of disengaging. And it's sometimes when -- this is my most recent understanding of it. Sometimes, it is to regain ground. If you are talking to me like I don't understand something, if I can code switch and change the vernacular, I can rise right back above you and let you know, without even telling you, that you are not as smart as I am. I mean not me, I'm just -- just people. So, yeah, I think that a lot of times, service providers need to be sensitive to the fact that none of us know all of it and that everybody has their own — and they have a right to embrace their own experience — and that we should not belittle that experience and that we should help them to embrace it and to help to teach us about it.

**Robyn Cenizal**

Thank you. Kenny, did you want to add something?

**Kenneth Braswell**

You know, I think also code switching is also seeking a place of comfort. We see it in languages. We see it as we deal with Latinos around the country. You know, when Rosario talked earlier about using the term Black and encompassing the world experience, it just not African Americans from Africa, but it's people from Haiti, it's people from Ghana, it's people from London, and every -- at every instance that you meet them, they look for a space of comfort. So even amongst friends of us who happen to be Black. Just as a for instance, if there are two people, one from Haiti and then the other from Haiti who didn't know each other, and then a connection they found out they're from automatically, they start speaking their own language because it's a place of comfort for them, and it brings them back to a place that they both now understand that they're a culture within a culture having to understand both of them and also knowing when it's appropriate to move in either way -- either one of the lanes.

**Robyn Cenizal**

Right. You guys make an excellent point that every individual just because they are Black doesn't share the same experience, so we do need to be mindful of the uniqueness even among the race, as well. So it's an excellent point. So moving into another area of conversation, I have another poll question for you. This poll question we are not going to give you an answer to; we are going to let you see a wonderful, brief video that will answer the question after the poll question is complete. Jen?

**Jen McHenry**

So our poll question should be popping up any minute for us, and it's, "What percentage of African American women have married?" Again, this is a range, so your best guess: it's 10 to 15 percent, 30 to 40 percent, 50 to 60 percent, or 80 to 90 percent?

**Robyn Cenizal**

How're we doing?

**1st Male {video}**

Misconceptions about Black marriages can create barriers in providing safety-net services. Get the facts so you can better serve your clients.

**1st Female {video}**

We've been married for 40 years.

**2nd Male {video}**

Raised three kids together.

**1st Female {video}**

It wasn't always easy.

**2nd Male {video}**

But we always knew we had each other.

**1st Male {video}**

Nearly one-fifth of low-income Black couples are married. These marriages are commonly overlooked in social service circles and infrequently represented in media.

**2nd Female {video}**

We've been best friends since we were kids, and I am thrilled to be her maid of honor.

**3rd Female {video}**

Yes, I'm so excited; I get married in two weeks.

**1st Male {video}**

Marriage still holds considerable, symbolic significance among Black adults and in low-income communities.

**4th Female {video}**

I'm a single mom; it's tough though. It would be easier if I had a husband to help.

**1st Male {video}**

One adult can care for a child. Two adults partnered in a healthy marriage are better able than one adult to provide time and needed resources designed to enhance children's development. Married parents are more likely to be better educated, earn more, live in more stable housing, and have a more supportive partner than single parents. Supporting Black couples and encouraging healthy relationships starts with recognizing the myths for what they are — just myths. Strong families are the foundation of strong communities. Get the facts to help families move to self-sufficiency. For more information on healthy marriage education skills, visit [www.HealthyMarriageandFamilies.org](http://www.HealthyMarriageandFamilies.org), [info@HealthyMarriageandFamilies.org](mailto:info@HealthyMarriageandFamilies.org), 1-866-916-4672.

**Robyn Cenizal**

So the majority of our viewers selected 30 to 40 percent, and, as you saw in the video, the actual percentage is 57 percent of Black women have been married. So it's interesting that to some degree the myth continues.

So following that, Tera, a lot of your research has been focused on relationships in the African American community. What does the research tell us about the general view of marriage within the African American community, and how do these views affect relationship patterns?

**Dr. Tera Jordan**

Sure. Thank you so much for the invitation to be a part of this wonderful webinar. The research has been pretty clear in that in the community, the African American community, still holds a very strong symbolic significance for marriage, and that, at one point, or another, when people are ready, they do desire to marry. I think I want to emphasize, when they are ready. And the means by which people are ready are different than they used to be. It used to be a function of age; it used to be a function of perhaps finishing high school, and now, you know, the bar is really, you know, raised quite a bit where people want to marry after perhaps they've finished a college education or perhaps after they moved into a home or secured other financial assets, or perhaps purchased a car. And so those bars are different than they were in my grandparent's generation where you bought those things together — that's why we got married. Today, it's, no, we need to set those things up first in order to perhaps stabilize the marriage. And so, in that respect, the pathways to marriage have changed, but they are still very present in the African American community, but they are a little bit delayed and so that is what the impact has been on delaying marriage in hopes that, perhaps, to be a little more stable when people do marry.

**Robyn Cenizal**

You did fabulous work on the fact sheet that supports the companion video that we just saw, and another product that you did for us on the separation, unique patterns of separation among Black couples, what was the most interesting piece that you came across when you were working on that product?

**Dr. Tera Jordan**

Sure. That was a definitely interesting product to work on. So just to be clear to the audience, I still publish under my maiden name, Tera Hurt, even though I am Tera Jordan now. The most interesting thing to me about the particular fact sheet focused on Black separation, were just the complexities that come about when a couple decides to separate, and how the length of separation can really place individuals at risk, children at risk, and perhaps the overall family at risk. And so, you know, sometimes marital separation is needed. You need some time to work things out, to perhaps recalibrate things, um, but that really, that period and that length of that separation, really is kind of murky, and people have to really work hard in deciding how you are going to manage that if you are now in different households, certainly around children and visitation and custody. And it certainly has an impact on individual well-being in terms of dealing with the psychological effects of now I'm separated, the financial concerns around now, you know, two households, or certainly less income coming in if one person has left the household and so just the way in which the literature really highlighted the fact that is now a new period of risk. Quite honestly, as a scholar, was very interesting for me to think about, very provocative to think about.

**Robyn Cenizal**

Great, great. Thank you. So, Nisa, you and Rosario developed the Basic Training for Couple's series together. Can you give us an example of how this curriculum actually reflects cultural competency, which we've heard is so important, and as it relates to African American couples, and why, again, that's so important?

**Nisa Muhammad**

Well, let me start by thanking you again for having me as part of this panel. And I think part of what it is that Rosario and I found is that when we were doing work, and we were doing direct services with families and couples, we were looking at curriculum that we felt didn't the needs of the couples and families that we were doing work with. In fact, they were asking us for more information and really asking us, "Where is the curriculum for Black people? Where is the curriculum that addresses our needs and concerns?" And we were looking at each other and saying, "Yeah, where is it, you know, where is the curriculum?" Until finally, we were together when somebody said, "Well why don't you all do it?" And so we were like, "Yeah, why don't we do this?"

And, you know, we did our research, and we looked at, across the country, what were the needs of African American couples and families in terms of a curriculum to help them learn how to form and sustain healthy marriages and healthy relationships. And one of the things that we found, which is our first -- the first week of our curriculum is called Why Marriage, because too often for a lot of people in the Black community -- if you ask them, you know, "What's -- Why marriage?" They say, "We want to know that too. What's the big deal about marriage? You know, why is marriage so important?" And we wanted to have that as our foundation to help people understand why marriage is important, what the benefits of marriage are for men, for women, for children. How does marriage benefit your community? How does marriage benefit your faith institution? And we could not find any other curriculum that started out with that kind of foundation. And so that's how ours starts out by helping people understand why marriage is even important. Because if you don't understand why marriage is important, you may learn how to communicate better, you may be able to manage a conflict, you may be able to commit to something, but then, after a while, I'm done with it, and I'm moving on to the next person because you don't really have an understanding of why marriage is important. Especially for men, who want to know what's the big deal? I'm doing really good by myself out here. You know, why should I get married? And so we help men understand the benefits of being married, all the benefits and what it does for men. What does it do for women, children? How do your children benefit by having married parents? The community where you live -- I tell people, "Okay, you may not want to get married, but you need to live where the married people live because they get better services from the county or the government or the city. They get better services. You can stay single but live where married people live."

**Robyn Cenizal**

Good point.

**Nisa Muhammad**

And so I help people understand that as well. And so that's one of the nuances I think

that's that's really critical, at least in our work, is that we start off talking about why marriage?

**Robyn Cenizal**

Right. Rosario, do you want to add anything?

**Dr. Rosario Slack**

It's so hard to add anything to what Nisa says. It was just important, like I said earlier, that as we perused -- and we were at Smart Marriages, and there were like a 1000 curricula. And um at that point, I believe that Lorraine Blackman was the only person that even said the word Black. And, you know, and so, so other people were trying to say -- they would say, "Well, you can tweak it; you can just take any curriculum and tweak it." But the problem of tweaking is often the tweaker. And if you don't know what it is that you're trying to accomplish, if you don't know where it is that people that you're dealing with come from, it's hard to tweak it so that it can be a successful curriculum, and so we determined that we wanted to reflect the voices of the people that we had run into across the country. They told us what were the issues. This is why we call our conflict issue conflict management, not conflict resolution, because there's still a lot of people in the Black community who are dealing with conflicts from 40 to 50 years ago,

**Robyn Cenizal**

Right.

**Dr. Rosario Slack**

60 and 70 years ago. And so what we try to teach people the skills that will help them to manage conflict even when it doesn't get resolved. And so that was another one of the nuances that I thought was an important point.

**Robyn Cenizal**

Excellent point. So you heard it here, folks. Rosario says, "Tweakers beware."

**Dr. Rosario Slack**

Not tweakers.

*PANEL LAUGHING*

**Robyn Cenizal**

Tweakers beware! So you make an interesting point about all of this and the importance of being culturally competent and who is doing the tweaking on this material. Those are excellent points, and I think that kind of leads us to our, our next piece. I kind of want to talk to Kenny just a little bit. The Resource Center, we promote the integration of relationship education skills into service delivery systems as part of a strategy to serve families more holistically, and the Fatherhood Clearinghouse is doing a really interesting project, an interesting strategy, for integrating positive messaging into communities, and they are doing so through barbershops. So, Kenny, tell us a little bit about the Fatherhood Buzz, and why barbershops?

**Kenneth Braswell**

You know, that's a great segue because just on the tail end of what both Nisa and Rosario was just talking about. You know, there's an addition to cultural competency and that's cultural reality. And so as we talk about the one in five, there is still the four in five,

and we have to talk about the four in five too because a lot of what we have to deal with is driven by the four and not the one. Even though media tends to focus on the four, the behavior is still driven by the four, and we have to look at that. And so much of what we know about the four, fortunately for us, is found in barbershops and beauty salons. That's why we're there. Historically, you know, in the Black community for as long as, you know, there's been clippers and guys have wanted to get their hair, you know, tight before they went to the club, you know, on Friday night. And, you know, yeah --

*PANEL LAUGHING*

And so -- talking about code switching.

*PANEL LAUGHING*

And so, you know, there's, you know, barbershops for --particularly and historically has always been a place of safety and comfort to talk about their issues, to share their concerns, to release their frustrations no matter how wrong they are. And part of the Fatherhood Buzz effort for us was to begin to move into this comfortable space with them, not to intrude that space. And so what we wanted to do was, as a Clearinghouse — because we have the closest proximity to great information, good information, accurate information, what we wanted to do was just to go into barbershops and change the source of information. We didn't want to change the context of the conversation because you are not going -- we laugh about this all the time. They talk about child support in the barbershops. The question is what are they saying about it in there? And so what we wanted to do, we wanted to be able to go into barbershops through Fatherhood Buzz to be able to give these barbers great information, so that they can give their clients great information, so that they can have great outcomes and improve their relationships. So we go into the barbershops, and we change — what we affectionately say — we change the buzz every quarter. And so we've done education, we've done co-parenting, we've done some other -- we've done health. And, fortunately, this month, we're actually doing healthy relationships, and that is doing tip cards. We have 22 cities now to which we have barbers actively engaged in Fatherhood Buzz, where we send materials with, with tips on it. Just in terms of helping barbers stimulate and change the course of their conversations, so they don't have to be all articulate about the -- they don't have to be a doctorate in the conversation, but at least we want them to start from a safe frame, from a nice foundation. And so even if they have some issues, you know, that they're going to talk about the issues, let's at least start where there's some good information and then move forward. And so we're very happy about the Fatherhood Buzz effort, and if anyone around the country wants to get involved in it, just simply go to [Fatherhood.gov](http://Fatherhood.gov). Go to the Fatherhood Buzz page, and you can apply and sign up to be either a community partner in a community and/or a barbershop in the community. And that's any barbershop in any community.

**Robyn Cenizal**

Perfect. Rosario, you wanted to add?

**Dr. Rosario Slack**

As the other person up here who would go to the barber, I'd like to weigh in. I think it is genius — that was a good move because -- my barber actually goes to my church, and

with me being his pastor, you would think I'd be the one giving all the advice and having all of the input and the influence. But when I'm sitting in the chair, he can just ask me one question, and he can hear it on Sunday morning being preached. Because there's something, there's just something therapeutic about you surrendering your head to somebody else.

*PANEL LAUGHING*

It's like -- I have -- this guy could cut my neck off. He could, he could really mess me up, you know, for for whatever event I'm trying to look good for. So there's a lot of power there, and I think it's just important to help barbers to know what kind of influence they have and help them with their own relationships, so that they can then be testimonial about what they went through, and how they've come through it when they hear people complaining because inevitably the complaints are going to come. And I just think that was a great move that I just wanted to highlight.

**Robyn Cenizal**

Thank you. Charisse?

**Charisse Johnson**

Can I go back to the tweaker? Is that okay? The reason why that is so important to me is because sometimes we don't recognize how some of the images in our mind as practitioners impact how we deliver services to our consumer. And, sometimes, I think some people may call it like structural racism where norms and, and beliefs are part of our organization, and that it impacts how we make decisions. So even with when you talked about how you develop curricula to really address the real issues and the conversations, that we've learned from our grantees about what really goes on in communities to dispel myths and to let people know that you need, you know, you know to touch that person where they are and not make all these assumptions, and how even if you're Black, you may have some stereotypical beliefs about Blacks and what they look like. So it was real refreshing to even just listen to you all talk because it makes you reflect on how do I really make my decisions. Do I make them based on, you know, what the organization says alone? Do I make them based on hearing from that person and really understanding who they are? Do I make it based on what the last data report said that came out? You know, so how do I make decisions? So that, really, the conversation about what happens with that person across the desk from you becomes even more important because if you make your decision just on what you think or what you heard and not really deal with that individual, you are really kind of reinforcing some of the things you are trying to dispel. So thank you.

**Robyn Cenizal**

Nisa?

**Nisa Muhammad**

I think that's part of the value what the Resource Center has to offer — research about Black people by Black people, so that you can feel comfortable when you are reading the research that Tera knows what she's talking about. I mean, you don't have to wonder if she's in some ivory tower somewhere writing this research about African American or Black couples, and she's never been one or seen one or talked to any, and, in fact, she

knows what she's talking about. And I think that's part of the value of, as I said, the Resource Center and all of this research in the Toolkit. For those you are interested in doing work with Black couples in the African American community, the resources are here to help you be very successful in that realm.

### **Robyn Cenizal**

Perfect. While you have the mic, Nisa, why don't you tell us a little bit about Black Marriage Day, since that's coming up.

### **Nisa Muhammad**

Yeah, while I have the mic, Black Marriage Day. So there is, um, there's this thing called Black Marriage Day, and you know, I got tired of hearing all the negative things about Black people and their marriages — low marriage rates, they don't want to get married, high divorce rates, high out-of-wedlock childbirth rates — just this whole litany of negativity. And I was speaking at Smart Marriages Conference and said, "You know, there needs to be a Black Marriage Day. There needs to be an opportunity where we can stop the negativity and start on something very positive and celebrate marriages in the Black community because, believe it or not, there are a lot of them out there that are incredible; they're very positive; they have endured hell and high water, and they're still maintaining, but they get no attention. You don't see them in the media, but so we need to celebrate them. So conference over, workshop done, get back home — I get a call about a month later from Essence Magazine, and the reporter said, "I was in your workshop at Smart Marriages, when is Black Marriage Day? I said, "When is what?" And she said, "When is Black Marriage Day?" I said, "Hmm, let me call you right back." Went on the calendar, "oh my God, when is Black Marriage Day, you know, picked the fourth Sunday in March, got a website going, called her back and said, "Black Marriage Day is going to be in March, and here is the information." And Essence Magazine did the first little article about Black Marriage Day, November 2002. Well it's just been going strong ever since then because people really want to celebrate what is happening in the Black community and wanted some motivation, wanted some organization, wanted an impetus in which to be able to do it.

So this past year, we were in over 300 communities, and I say that communities as opposed to cities because some large cities have one, two, three, and four different celebrations, and so there all around the country people are very eager to do it. They have incredible celebrations. One church, I think it was Cincinnati one year, had the men of that church created a CD called Why I Love My Wife where each of the men in that church spoke to their wives saying why I love my wife. Not a dry eye in the church, of course, when that was over. People have dinner dances; they have workshops; they have Tom Thumb weddings where they have children dress up as the bride and groom. Because, in a lot of Black communities, these children grow up, no, they don't know anybody that's married. They've never been to a wedding, and so, for them, it's like, "Oh my God, we're getting all dress up." And so they're putting the roots of marriage in children at a very young age. People do, like I said, people do very, very incredible things. In Dallas, an organization called Anthem does something where they induct couples every year to the Black Marriage Day Hall of Fame. These couples are nominated by their friends and family, Anthem gets a professional photographer to take their picture, and they create an exhibit in an African American museum of these

couples. They take this exhibit on tour; it goes to city hall every year. All of these couples -- it gets put up in Love Field Airport where tens of thousands of people come through the airport every year. They see these pictures of these beautiful couples, and they're keys to success. It's a cultural movement to help normalize marriage in the Black community, to let people know it happens, there's some fabulous couples who are married, and they're doing wonderful. And so we're very encouraged about Black Marriage Day. It's March 23rd this year. For more information, go to [BlackMarriageDay.com](http://BlackMarriageDay.com) and get involved.

*PANEL LAUGHING*

### **Robyn Cenizal**

So, so you just mentioned some successes, and I want to talk a little bit about that before we open it up to our audience for questions. I want to, I want to start with you, Charisse, that the Healthy Marriage Initiative supports demonstration groups across the country, and they're designed really to identify and cultivate some of these promising practices that you see out there. So, with that in mind, can you give me some examples of some -- what we're learning about interesting approaches in how to serve families?

### **Charisse Johnson**

Thank you. I think we just heard one because I think we are now recognizing that it's not just top down or sideways in; it's all along that spectrum of -- or even a continuum of everyone has a role that they must play in making families stronger, and everyone has a role that they can play to make Black families stronger. So even participating in, you know, Black Marriage Day or whatever it may be, it's one approach to get the community thinking, so that's something that we've learned. And that's a success that's not necessarily funded by OFA, but it's a success when we think about community development. Another success is their partnerships. People who may not traditionally partner around this issue are partnering with our grantees. You know, you can take a local social services agency, they may want their families that they serve to participate in a program like this, and because we do have these grantees throughout the country, they have an opportunity to refer or to link people with partnerships they may not traditionally be able to fund. So you have partners in the community that can do marriage education or whatever it may be.

We are also seeing integration into some of the systems. We were at a site visit recently, and it was a correctional facility, and they have integrated this conversation into the work they're doing. And it's not that funding is not needed, but when you integrate, you sustain the message. And we don't want it to just be you're getting grant money for three years and then it goes away. We really want to see good integration into systems so that the change can be forever, and we're paying attention to the things that really matter and, in this situation, regarding the Black family. We're also seeing folks leveraging money and resources to make sure that families have opportunities to participate in the, in the sessions or in the classes and things like that. So that makes it so exciting when you see that the community is taking this, and they're taking it to another level in which they're really paying close, intentional attention to this issue and saying, "We want to do right. We don't want to do harm." And I think we've been in situations where sometimes we feel like we didn't know what to do, like what you just described, but now we have the

chance to say, "Are we doing it right? You know, what is the research telling us? What are we learning?" So, you know, that really is a success that we see in government is that communities and our grantees and our partners have taken this on; they recognize how important this is, and they're really the ones that are making a difference in the lives of families and children, and this only can be a win-win.

**Robyn Cenizal**

All right. Thank you. So back to you guys, Rosario and Nisa. As we know, this work can sometimes be a little bit hard to measure, but as direct service providers, you've had the opportunity to look in the faces of the families whose lives have been changed by this work. Can you give me a couple of examples that come to mind?

**Nisa Muhammad**

I'll go first. You know, one of the stories that sticks in my mind of my classes is the couple — I don't if anyone saw Black in America 2 on CNN — Black in America 2. They did a segment on our work in terms of strengthening families in the Black community, and they -- I worked with a couple that was on the brink of divorce. They had been married for 22 years and were on the brink of divorce. They had an issue with dating in terms of parenting. So the mom came from a single-parent household; the father grew up in a two-parent household. Now, if you're in a single-parent household, you know mom's rule. Whatever Mom says, it is the absolute gospel. There's nobody else that knows anything than what mom knows, so that's how you grow up. But if you're in a two-parent family and there's a dad around, you know, the complete opposite, that what dad says is law. And so they had these different backgrounds, so when it came time for dating, the mother wanted — the daughter said — she's like 14 or 15; she's ready to date. The mom is like, "Oh, it's okay; it'll be all right." The dad was like, "Hell no. I've been a 15-year-old boy; I know what they're after. I know what they want to do." And the mom is like, "It'll be fine. I trust her." And he's like, "It's not her; it's him." And the mother let the daughter date. The dad could not believe it. It created such a gap, and a big well, whatever, mountain in their relationship because he felt like his authority had been usurped. He felt like he had -- did not have the right to exercise his authority over his children, and so every other issue that came up, he just let her deal with it. He didn't -- he was disengaging slowly in the relationship, and they came to our classes. And on -- in front of live cameras, you know, we were able to really help them to see that you can work together as a couple and resolve these issues. And that, that in a marriage, you have to let a man be a man. I mean it can't be where you going to be mother and father, everything, because when you're a single parent, and you grow up seeing mom doing everything, you're very used to her doing everything, it's difficult sometimes for women to understand that, in a marriage, you have to work together. You really don't have to do everything; there's somebody else there to do a lot of the things that need to be done. And so, thankfully, like I said, on live camera, you know, they were able to work out their problems, and, if you see the Black in America 2 segment, they were very distant in the beginning, but, by the end, we had a graduation — Rosario was our guest speaker — they were in tears because they spoke about how this class saves their marriage. And so that's a success story any of you can watch on — I think it's on YouTube.

**Robyn Cenizal**

Everything's on YouTube, isn't it? Rosario, you want to add something?

**Dr. Rosario Slack**

Just a couple of things. I want to highlight one fact that Nisa didn't -- probably doesn't even know about. On the day of the graduation, I had the opportunity to get there early, and this guy and his wife were the first people that were there. And I didn't know who he was. I had not talked to him, had not seen him, and I just spoke to him, and I said, "Are you here for the graduation?" He said, "Yeah." He says, "What about you?" I said, "Yeah." And so, then I said, well, you know, my normal questioning, "How, how long have you been married?" and all of these things, and he said, "22 years, 21 years." And I said, "Thank you. Thank you for providing that example for our community." And I just went on and on and on telling him how important it was for him to have, you know, paved the way for people like me who was coming behind him. All of that, and then when he got up to talk, Nisa did let me know that this was the couple that was being highlighted. My point is that a lot of times, we don't have to do what we think we know we're doing; we just got to do what's right. Just tell people thank you for your example.

And, and another thing I thought about is that now another success that we're having is that we have Black researchers who can come out of the closet now and say, "Let me speak for my people. Let me give it to you, not at, from a skewed perspective but from an informed perspective where there's still some things that you may think you're seeing that that's not really what you're seeing".

And so, one more thing that I'm going to say, I think that the whole issue of quantifying is very difficult, so I quantify based on people's reports. And as people continue to say, "We're still doing those skills." Or if they're in the class, and they say, "Now, you know, he's not doing what" -- just those things show there's been an increase in awareness, and an attempt to succumb to the teaching. So, just as as I have watched person after person after person whose has said, "Thank you. We're doing better, but we are still struggling here." They're least at a point where they feel free to talk about it, and that they have a frame of reference of someone that can speak to it about.

**Robyn Cenizal**

Awesome, excellent point. Thank you. So I want to open it up to our audience for questions.

**Jen McHenry**

Thanks, Robyn. Um, so this is Jen again, I'm gonna voice, one of the first questions we got through touches on a couple of things I think we've talked about, but an individual said that a lot of the people they're working with feel that marriage is out of their reach, and could the panel speak a little bit to that as an issue, and ways to make a difference on that?

**Robyn Cenizal**

Who wants to start?

**Kenneth Braswell**

You know, I'm glad that was the first question because I've had like this nugget in the back of my head and couldn't find a place to drop it, and now you gave me a place to drop it.

**Robyn Cenizal**

Did you -- did you put in the question, Kenny?

**Kenneth Braswell**

Yeah, it's going to be in a question; it's definitely in a question. It is the question. And so, about a year and a half ago — we're funded -- Fathers Incorporated was funded by the Open Society Foundation to revisit the Moynihan Report, the 1965 report that talks the case for Negro action and Black families in this country. Nisa was one of people that I interviewed, and a couple of other people from around the country, but one of the people that I interviewed was Dr. Timothy Smeeding at the University of Madison, Wisconsin. And he said something to me that day that just struck me that day and continues to strike me and is right in align with that question as to why people believe or think that marriage is out of reach. And he says, "Why do we have such a high threshold for marriage yet such a low threshold for having children?" That somehow we buy into the fact that it is so much more easier to have children than it its to get married, and, oftentimes, we take this conversation of marriage, and we disconnect it from the conversation of children when marriage and relationship is directly connected and critical to the success of our children. So whenever people ask that question, "Why is marriage so difficult and is out of reach," we should start asking yourselves some other questions, which is really what are you trying to accomplish in life, and what path are you trying to take to try and accomplish that? And what has been your lessons? What have been your pathways to what you've seen that leads you to believe that the threshold of marriage is so high that it's unobtainable for you? And I believe that it all kind of goes back to what are the nature of your relationships? And I think that when you begin to ask those questions, I think that what we find in our communities oftentime that we end up finding ourselves as parents as a result of situationships, not relationships. Situationships is when we become parents as a result of a situation that we happen to be in. I met her one night. We hooked up. That's a good word — code switching. We hooked up, right? And nine months later, baby showed up, and, now, we don't know how to relate because we were never in a relationship; we were only in a situationship. And so it is very difficult for someone who was engaged deeply in situationships to understand what marriage really means when they don't also don't know what relationships mean. And I think that's a higher dialogue that we have to have to begin to ask that particular question for folks.

**Robyn Cenizal**

Thank you, Kenny. Excellent point. Do we have another question?

**Jen McHenry**

Sure, we do, actually. Someone asked about the importance of integrating marriage and fatherhood programs working together. Since we've touched on both parenting and marriage conversation.

**Robyn Cenizal**

Rosario, do you want to take that?

**Dr. Rosario Slack**

Yes, but first, I like the word situationships. I never heard it; we'll be code switching with that one. But, I think it's very important, as Kenny was articulating just now, to understand that there should be a marriage, all pun intended, between healthy marriage

and responsible fatherhood programming because as, as we raise the bar of expectation, we can change the “-ship” that we see. Whether it be a situationship or relationship, we can change the whole shipyard by putting the, the two of them together and utilizing the best from each world. Responsible fatherhood is hard when you don't have a relationship with the mom. Period. You can be as responsible as you want, but if you don't have access to the child — and in the majority of the cases, the mother is, is the primary...

**Robyn Cenizal**

Gatekeeper.

**Dr. Rosario Slack**

Yup. Yeah, that's a good word. Um, so -- so you can have all the relationship skills in the world, but if you don't have the opportunity to carry them out, you're still not gonna, gonna be successful.

One more thing I want to say quickly. I was doing a fatherhood class in Chattanooga at a hospital, and we took a break. And as I walked out of the hospital room, or the, the training room, this guy was walking past, and he was, "Man" he said. I said, "How're you doing?" He said, "Man, I'm excited, man. My old lady just had a baby." I said, "You have an old lady?" He said, "My girl, my girl, my girl had a baby." I said, "That's really, really good." I'm not going to give all of it to you; I'll just tell you the end of it. I said, "Are you married? How long have you been married?" He said, "Oh, we're not married." I said, "Well, guy, let me tell you something. You see the way you feel right now, if you don't marry that woman, in two years, you are not going to have this same feeling that you have right here." Now, to me that's a good way to integrate my knowledge of research and dealing with a human being. I didn't have to quote who studied it; I knew it. And so, from the responsible fatherhood perspective, I knew that he was probably not married in the beginning, but I also knew from the healthy marriage perspective, if he did not get married, what was going to happen.

**Robyn Cenizal**

Excellent. Charisse?

**Charisse Johnson**

And I just want to kind of say something in response to that. It sounds like, I think, that we are trying to change the narrative. You know, by putting good information out there to really talk about who we are, that it is obtainable. You know, that we can plan, that we can have strong relationships, not buying into the myths and the stereotypes and the images that we may see in the news, in the news; we may see images in books or whatever. But, really, an opportunity to change the narrative, and I think that's what I'm was impressed about by just listening to the panelist today is that we are changing the narrative, and how powerful can that be for a group of people. So thank you all.

**Nisa Muhammad**

I'm going to add one quick thing. It's not until we give young people information about marriage and the benefits of it that they are even in a position to consider it. I do a class for pregnant and parenting teens, and did a class for them and talk about the same thing, why marriage and the benefits of marriage. Well, about a year later, I saw one of

the couples that I had worked with. I said, "Oh, Ms. Muhammad, it's so good to see you. I said, "How are you and -- and Robert -- how are you all doing?" And she said, "We got married." I'm like, "You did what?" She said, "We got married. You said it was good." And I was like, "Yeah, but I didn't know you were really listening like that." I mean, it's my same spiel I give to everybody, but they were really listening. At 18 years old, they had a baby. They were listening, and they got married. And she said, "We don't know anybody that's married, you know, but we heard you talk about it. We did our own little Google search on marriage, and we got married, and we're happy." And I, I was so glad that to hear that because for a lot of young people, there's no one that introduces the concept of marriage to them. There's no one at 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, and I can keep going, talking to them about marriage. You know, I ask people when I'm speaking around the country, "How many has seen the movie 27 Dresses?" Very funny movie. Young, white girl — she had been in 27 weddings, had all a closet full of bridesmaid dresses. So then I also ask, "How many of you know 27 young, Black women that are married?" Nobody raises their hands. Okay, let's lower the number. How many of you know 20 young, Black women that are married? Nobody raises their hand. Let's go to 15, 10, 5. It's a cultural divide. Our daughter went to Spelman College, one of the best colleges for young, Black women. They -- they graduate being able to change the world. She doesn't have five married friends at 26. I'm thankful she got married. You know, it's a mother's worry. Is my daughter going to get married, you know? But it's a cultural divide, and unless someone is talking to our young people about marriage, not just hooking up, not just having a baby, but the M word. What is going on with you and marriage? Have you considered marriage? Because if not then there are serial situationships, there are serial relationships. And then children come about as a result of that, and then we have these issues. So no one is talking to our young, middle schoolers about marriage. You know there is a middle school in D.C. that has a childcare center because they have pregnant teens in middle school, but nobody is given them information about marriage. And it's really a travesty that seriously needs to be addressed.

**Dr. Tera Jordan**

One of the -- in my experiences -- did a lot of -- most of my work with married couples was when I was in Georgia, and I think these programs are so critical, not just for the programming around relationship skills and marriage, you know, socialization that we've talked about, but really about building that community. And how many couples we worked with in Georgia said, "We either don't know anybody, or we don't trust them to support us as being a married couple." And for me, my vision of our community is that is really changed. The village has really changed where we don't have that core group of married couples that people feel like they can reach out to and connect to the way in which perhaps it used to be a generation ago. And so, in addition to the reasons why these programs were developed, I think a byproduct of that is just building a community where people know where other married couples are in the event you want to go out to dinner. Hey, you just want to get together and have, play cards, but just connect as married couples and build that community around every -- all married couples need that support. And so these programs are really critical for assisting with that.

**Kenneth Braswell**

The other thing too, as a man, "My wife" is a just great way to start a sentence. You

know, "My wife and I," you know, went to, you know, "My wife and I" – if, you know, for a guy, it's just a great way to start a sentence. So if you don't do it for no other reason...

**Dr. Rosario Slack**

What do you mean sentence?

**Kenneth Braswell**

Like a sentence, "My wife and I". "My wife" is just a great way to start a sentence. If you can start it as a man with those two sentences, you're doing something good.

**Robyn Cenizal**

We got time for one more question. For the panel.

**Jen McHenry**

And this question is related. It's how do you incorporate the healthy into healthy marriage and relationship education as we introduce this concept to people, so we don't fall into getting married just to get married.

**Nisa Muhammad**

I'm going to give this to Rosario too, so we can give this from two different perspectives. Number one, one of the things that we do when we talk about why marriage, we talk about what marriage is, and we talk about all the healthy aspects of marriage. So that we're not just talking about marriage just to get married, but we are talking about -- and we believe in marriage. That's number one, we believe in marriage. Now every marriage is not healthy 100 percent of the time. So, you know, for a couple that may be struggling, you know we are not going to dismiss their marriage just because they're struggling and may not be considered totally healthy. You know, every marriage needs work. Every marriage needs support. And so, at some point in time, you can take a picture of anybody's marriage, and say, "Oh my God, what's going on there?" But a marriage is not a snapshot, it's a long playing movie. And we want couples to stick around to get to the end. And so healthy marriage today, healthier tomorrow, healthiest the next day, but it may start out unhealthy, and so we take couples where they are and help them get where we want them to be.

**Dr. Rosario Slack**

In that work, what one of the things that we highlight is we ask people to talk about the marriages in their family. Talk about what have you seen, which is where we get our information on how to be married, and then how do you feel about what you've seen, and what do you want? And so healthiness is about habits. When you create the habits, when you become the person who is doing the right thing, you will possibly attract a person who wants to do the right thing, and so then you, you can build skills around that, and like it's not not to judge that, you know, it's not perfect, but it's how to sustain a relationship with another person in a healthy way.

**Dr. Tera Jordan**

When I think about healthy marriage, I think about not equating marriage with all marriages. And so, you know, much of the researchers talked about that the quality of the marriage is just as critical to think about as the structure of the marriage. And, in particular, if we focus on the impact of low-functioning marriages on children, so when children are brought up in homes where things are not going well for extended period of

times, that really does impact their development, and so it's not just about being married, but it is about working together as a partnership, investing in that the way in which you would invest in anything that is important to you and that you are committed to and understanding that just getting across the aisle or just getting to the courthouse is not enough, but it's about continuing to put in the work so that you can have the highest quality marriage that you can because otherwise that conflict is not only not good for kids, it's not good for individuals either. You see an increase in mental health concerns, certainly physical health concerns, and that's not what we are talking about here. We really are talking about healthy marriages.

**Robyn Cenizal**

Thank you. And thank you to all my panelists for this very thought-provoking conversation today. For those of you who are viewing this, I hope that today's presentation has been thought-provoking. I hope that you've heard some things today that will make you want to pull down those resources that are on the computer in front of you. Download those products that we've talked about today and read them, but most importantly, what I want you to do is to continue the discussion in your own communities. This should be the starting point, not the ending point. We'd like you to focus on are two areas. One, what is your organization doing to improve the way it serves families, particularly African American families in your community. What's your organization doing, and what could it do better? And the second challenge for you today is, what are you as an individual doing? What are you doing to make a difference? You heard Rosario tell a story about asking a young man about marriage in the hallway after a child was born. We are all in situations where we have an opportunity to influence people around us, whether that's modeling healthy marriages or sharing information with folks in our own families about healthy relationships and healthy relationship skills. So I challenge you to continue the discussions in your communities and to take personal responsibility for the people in your lives, around you and in your family and in your workplace and encourage them to access the resources necessary to strengthen relationships or to know what healthy relationships are if they don't know what they are. The Resource Center is here to support you. If you do take advantage of the opportunity to continue the discussions within your agencies, I hope you'll email us at the healthy, at [info@HealthyMarriageandFamilies.org](mailto:info@HealthyMarriageandFamilies.org) and let us know what you've done. We'll have all the contact information up at the end of today's presentation, and we will have a short survey that we hope that you'll hang around and complete for us, so that we can continue to do a better job for you.

Again, thank you. Thank you to my panelists and thank you to my team behind the scenes. Allen Bediako, Jen McHenry for doing such a fabulous job for us today, and with that, I'll say goodbye.

**Operator**

Thank you, and this does conclude today's Working with African American Individuals, Couples, and Families Expert Panel. We thank you again for your participation.

**END**