A Critique on Marriage Education Websites

Jessica A. Neel

Louisiana State University

Author Note

Jessica A. Neel, Studying Child and Family Studies, Louisiana State University. Correspondence in reflection to this paper should be directed to Jessica A. Neel.

Email: jneel1@tigers.lsu.edu.

Abstract

The writer will conduct a review analysis on three Internet websites pertaining to the Family Life Education topic of marriage education. In detailed description, the writer will critique the three websites according to five main areas of evaluation. These five main areas of evaluation criteria include the accuracy of the web documents, the authority of the web documents, the objectivity of the web documents, the currency of the web documents, and the coverage of the web documents. Based on these five main areas of evaluation criteria, the writer will assess and decide which website, of the three, regarding marriage education, is a ‘good’ website, a ‘better’ website, and the ‘best’ website. The particular method conducted by the evaluator and the results of the critic’s assessment will also be examined and explained in this website review.

A Critique on Marriage Education Websites

The Internet provides a vast amount of information on a multitude of topics. Across many areas of Family Life Education topics, one can learn about an array of subjects, ranging from teen substance abuse to caring for the elderly. Another vital theme in Family Life Education that is thoroughly discussed and portrayed on the Internet is marriage education. In recent decades, marriage education programs have gained immense popularity and publicity. In the United States, there has been a nation-wide movement for couples desiring to have healthy marriages (Hawkins, Carroll, Doherty, & Willoughby, 2004). In this review, three Internet websites, regarding the theme of marriage education, are analyzed and judged in terms of ‘good,’ ‘better,’ and ‘best.’ These three marriage education websites consist of MERCY- Marriage Education and Resource Center – Strengthening Families One Couple at a Time (MERCY) (http://www.marriageeducationandresourcecenterky.com), National Extension Relationship and Marriage Education Network (NERMEN) (http://www.nermen.org), and Administration of Children and Families - Healthy Marriage Initiative (HMI) (http://www.acf.hhs.gov/healthymarriage). These three websites are critiqued based on five main areas of evaluation criteria, including the accuracy of the web documents, the authority of the web documents, the objectivity of the web documents, the currency of the web documents, and the coverage of the web documents. Based upon these five areas of criteria, these three marriage education websites, MERCY, NERMEN, and HMI will be evaluated and ranked as either ‘good,’ ‘better,’ or ‘best.’

**Method**

**Participants**

The participants in this critique, essentially, consisted of the three websites, regarding marriage education, which were reviewed by the writer. The websites analyzed in this review include Marriage Education and Resource Center (MERCY), National Extension Relationship and Marriage Education Network (NERMEN), and Healthy Marriage Initiative (HMI). Each Internet website was easily accessible through a Google search and pertains to the Family Life Education theme of marriage education.

**Procedure**

The evaluator conducted this website critique by selecting three websites, regarding the topic of marriage education, after performing a Google search based on this theme. The critic assessed the three marriage education websites based on a series of five evaluation criteria. The assessor reviewed and searched the websites to answer numerous questions regarding the accuracy of the web documents, the authority of the web documents, the objectivity of the web documents, the currency of the web documents, and the coverage of the web documents. After reviewing the findings to these criteria questions and comparing and contrasting the results of the three websites’ reviews, the evaluator was equipped to decide which, of the three marriage education sites, deemed as a ‘good’ website, a ‘better’ website, and the ‘best’ website.

**Results**

**Accuracy of Web Documents**

**MERCY.**

The Marriage and Education Resource Center, (MERCY) founded by David and Penny Hudson, strives to help couples make their marriages rewarding and successful. The Hudsons collaborate with couples who plan to marry, couples experiencing marriage’s different stages, and couples who are married and have lost their way. David and Penny Hudson are well qualified authors for this marriage program. They are both marriage educators and certified in several nationally recognized marriage education programs. The Hudsons are also founders of a religious based program called Coupletime, and Penny has written countless articles, regarding family and marriage, that have been published in both national and regional publications. Both David and Penny include several means of communication on their website for their readers. Their email address, phone number, and mailing address are all provided for their audience to contact them.

**NERMEN.**

The National Extension Relationship and Marriage Education Network, (NERMEN) founded by a collaboration of professors, from various universities’ cooperative extensions, all majoring in Human Development and Family Life Specialists, provides insight on healthy relationship and marriage education through extension efforts. The website is primarily designed for extension educators who are working with people in relationships. The partnership of these diverse professors proves to be well qualified authors for this relationship education website. All of these professors, who have earned their PhDs, comprise the working group of NERMEN and are experts in the field of family life and education. Each member of the working group provides a direct link to their website including their contact information. Their email address, phone number, and a brief background history are included in their personal links.

**HMI.**

The Healthy Marriage Initiative, (HMI) created by the Administration for Children and Families (ACF), part of the Department of Health and Human Services, promotes families’ well-being in federal programs. HMI’s primary purpose embraces helping couples have greater access to marriage education materials and helping couples have healthy marriages that is mutually enriching and constantly growing. ACF is well-qualified as the author of HMI’s website. It is a subunit of the government’s Department of Health and Human Services, signifying its status as a national organization, providing direction to national programs, regarding families’ safety and well-being. ACF’s programs directly impact the state, county, and city governments. ACF allows the general public to contact them and other helpful hotlines and organizations. HMI’s website contains the mailing address of the main headquarters, along with the address of each regional office.

**Authority of Web Documents**

**MERCY.**

The American Bible Society published the Internet website MERCY. MERCY’s website has a separate webmaster, forMinistry.com, for the maintenance of the site. The publisher, the American Bible Society, does not directly list its qualifications on MERCY’s website; however, a link is provided to direct readers to the publisher’s own website, which does include its qualifications. The domain name and publishing institution of MERCY’s site is .com, signifying this website has a commercial intent.

**NERMEN.**

The National Extension Relationship and Marriage Education Network published the Internet website NERMEN. NERMEN’s website has the same webmaster, for the maintenance of the site, as its publisher. The publisher, NERMEN, does not directly state its qualifications on NERMEN’s website; however, NERMEN expresses its mission statement and resources offered on the website. The domain name and publishing institution of NERMEN’s site is .org, symbolizing this website is a nonprofit organization.

**HMI.**

The Administration of Children and Families published the Internet website HMI. HMI’s website has the same webmaster, for the maintenance of the site, as its publisher. The publisher, ACF, provides a direct link to their personal website stating their organization’s qualifications and background. The domain name and publishing institution of HMI’s site it .gov, signifying this website is a government organization.

**Objectivity of Web Documents**

**MERCY.**

The objectives and goals MERCY’s website strives to accomplish include increasing the quality of marriage preparation, increasing the number of couples who participate in these programs, helping couples participate in divorce-prevention programs, and helping couples find marriage education resources. The information provided on MERCY’s website is portrayed in great detail. The authors list titles of topic-related books and websites, explain thoroughly their programs and workshops for people with different needs, and provide synopses of videotapes related to marriage education. MERCY is geared toward both the success and happiness of families and couples and the strengthening of our communities. David and Penny Hudson created this website for couples who are looking for education tools and resources, couples who are married and are trying to improve their relationship, and couples who are trying to prevent their marriage from ending in a divorce. The Hudsons want couples to take advantage of the useful marriage educational tools on their website. The authors do not express their opinions in the content of MERCY’s website. The website’s information is supported by statistics and provides background material about the programs offered. Even though, MERCY’s website is published by a religious affiliation, the content is not advertising a particular product, idea, or service. The publisher does not influence the website or give bias to its content.

**NERMEN.**

The objectives and goals NERMEN’s website hopes to accomplish include providing research-based resources for couples to utilize and supporting extension educators with resources, such as, training materials and names of other collaborative programs and colleagues working toward the same mission. The content of NERMEN’s website is portrayed in great detail. Comprehensive lists, links, and descriptions of NERMEN’s resources, programs, and training materials are all included on the website. Lists of further outside resources and information, such as, facts, educational programs, organizations, and evaluation tools, are all provided on the site. Readers can easily understand NERMEN’s mission and the resources available to the public, due to the extremely detailed content of the website. NERMEN is geared towards both couples looking for healthy relationships and those couples that are currently in relationships. The alliance of these professors created this website for youth and adults who are in relationships. NERMEN provides educators with research-based materials to relay to learners who desire healthy relationships. NERMEN also collaborates with other organizations at the national, state, and community levels that support this mission to aid in the education of healthy relationships. The authors of NERMEN strive for the content to be supported by current research, deeming the website as research-based. Therefore, the authors’ personal opinions do not influence the content of the website. Because NERMEN’s site is both published and authored by NERMEN, the information provided to the general public is not masked by advertising.

**HMI.**

The objectives and goals HMI’s website desires to accomplish include increasing the percentage of children growing up in two parent homes, increasing the number of couples who are in healthy marriages, increasing the public awareness of healthy marriages, and increasing the number of premarital couples who have the skills to sustain a healthy marriage. The website’s material is explained in tremendous detail. The site’s vast and in depth amount of information includes topics on the healthy marriage initiative, its background, and the founding association. The website’s detailed content also comprises of the program’s benefits, activities, supporting research, and upcoming news and events. ACF established HMI’s website because of Congress’ discoveries in 1996 based on marriages. Congress’ findings stated marriage is the foundation of a successful society and promotes the interest of children. In order for states to strengthen the union of marriage, The Deficit Reduction Act of 2005 was created to help fund programs geared toward the education of helping couples have healthy marriages. HMI’s site is primarily for couples who are currently married or plan to marry and who desire the tools and resources to have a healthy marriage. The website’s content is not influenced by the authors’ opinion, because the site’s material is solely research-based. In addition, the content is not masked by advertisements, because the publisher, author, and webmaster are all the same organization, ACF, which is a subunit of the government organization, Department of Health and Human Services.

**Currency of Web Documents**

**MERCY.**

MERCY, the actual program, was established in 2004, but the production of the website was not provided as public information. The latest update of the website was not indicated on the site’s page. Based off of the links that connected to the following site, the links were updated fairly recently. However, most of the links were dead and did not connect to the following site. Overall, even though, one could not determine the latest update of the website’s content, the information does not appear to be outdated. The statistics and general subject matter provided by the authors still hold true today.

**NERMEN.**

NERMEN, the actual program, was established in 2006, but the production of the website was not provided as public information. The website was last updated on July 7, 2011. The links incorporated in the website for further research were all working connections. In addition, the content of each link contained current research-based material and proved to be updated regularly. The only dead link found to not correctly connect to the following site was the ‘Contact Us’ link. Overall, the content of NERMEN’s site is based off of current research and regularly updated, verifying the information to not be outdated or insufficient.

**HMI.**

HMI, the actual program, was created in 2005, but the establishment of the website was not provided as public information. The website was last updated December 1, 2010. The website’s links were all currently updated, in either 2010 or 2011, and are even more recently updated than HMI’s site. There are no dead links attached to this website. Even though the content of HMI’s site has not been updated since 2010, the background history and the mission of HMI are still relevant information today.

**Coverage of Web Documents**

**MERCY.**

Overall, the links that did connect to the following site complimented the general theme of marriage education, but most of the links were not working. The balance of text and images across the website was not proportionate. The site included two images total, being greatly overshadowed by the vast amount of surrounding text. Even though most of the content includes program descriptions and resources related to the general theme, the outside supporting information was cited correctly by providing the website links. However, two sections did not include citations, the statistics regarding marriage education and the benefits of marriage education. MERCY did not require special software to be downloaded or a fee to be paid to acquire the information. The website did not have a suggested browser for better viewing or a text only option, but the layout of the site appeared to already be basic.

**NERMEN.**

The links incorporated in NERMEN’s website all complimented the document’s theme and even provided further information and resources on this topic. The balance of text and images across the site deemed to be proportionate and aesthetically pleasing. Each page of the site consisted of at least one image or graphic. All of the resources and programs NERMEN includes in their website for the public’s further knowledge are correctly cited with the author and the year. The site contains an option for readers to download Adobe Acrobat Reader, in order to obtain further information, such as, the program materials. NERMEN incorporates neither a fee for one to pay to obtain the content nor a suggested browser for better viewing or a text only option on their website.

**HMI.**

The links provided in HMI’s website compliment the overall theme and further explain the Healthy Marriage Initiative or lead to the author’s, ACF, website. The balance of text and images incorporated in the website are not propionate. The site only includes three images throughout its entirety. The links referring the readers to further outside information are correctly cited, including the websites of these extra sites. The site contains an option for readers to download Adobe Acrobat Reader, in order to obtain further information, such as, printable and downloadable files. HMI does not offer a fee to pay to obtain further information or a suggested browser for bettering viewing or a text only option on the website.

**Discussion**

**The Good Marriage Education Website**

Based upon the areas of criteria, the three marriage education websites were judged as either ‘good,’ ‘better,’ or ‘best.’ The Marriage Education and Resource Center earned the ranking of a ‘good’ marriage education website. After analyzing the evaluation criteria, MERCY’s website possessed four of the five main areas of criteria. MERCY displayed accuracy of the web documents, authority of the web documents, objectivity of the web documents, and coverage of the web documents. The website does not exhibit currency of the web documents, because almost all of the links were dead. Not only did the links not connect, but the evaluator could not determine the latest update of the website. The content of MERCY’s website appears to still be true today, but one cannot be positive, because there is no proof the information has been recently updated.

**The Better Marriage Education Website**

According to the areas of evaluation, the National Extension Relationship and Marriage Education Network earned the ranking of a ‘better’ marriage education website. After reviewing the criteria, NERMEN’s website received four and a half of the five main areas of criteria. NERMEN portrayed accuracy of the web documents, authority of the web documents, objectivity of the web documents, coverage of the web documents, and to a lesser degree, currency of the web documents. The website earned only half of the criteria for currency of the web documents, because one of the website’s links was dead. The ‘Contact Us’ link did not connect, which resulted in only half of the credit for the currency criteria.

**The Best Marriage Education Website**

After conducting the analysis and review of the three websites, The Healthy Marriage Initiative earned the ranking of the ‘best’ marriage education website. Based upon the evaluation criteria, HMI’s website received all five of the five main areas of criteria. HMI revealed accuracy of the web documents, authority of the web documents, objectivity of the web documents, coverage of the web documents, and to its fullest degree, currency of the web documents. The website received the entire credit for the currency criteria, because the links all connected and were not dead. All three websites exhibited all of the areas of criteria for a website review; therefore, this one area of criteria was the determining factor of the ranking ‘good,’ ‘better,’ and ‘best.’

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, after reviewing three websites regarding marriage education and evaluating their content based on criteria, including accuracy, authority, objectivity, currency, and coverage of the web documents, a critique and ranking system was developed. Based on the number of criteria, out of the five areas, the websites possessed, determined their ranking as either ‘good,’ ‘better,’ or ‘best.’ MERCY received the ranking of a ‘good’ marriage education website, due to several dead links. NERMEN earned the ranking of a ‘better’ marriage education website, due to only one dead link. HMI received the ranking of the ‘best’ marriage education website, due to no dead links. All three marriage education websites are extremely resourceful to couples, youth, and families desiring to learn more about marriage education.

References

Administration of Children and Families - Healthy Marriage Initiative. Retrieved on Sunday, March 25, 2012 from: <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/healthymarriage>.

Hawkins, A. J., Carroll, J. S., Doherty, W. J., & Willoughby, B. (2004). A comprehensive

framework for marriage education. *Family Relations, 55*(5), 547-558.

MERCY- Marriage Education and Resource Center - Strengthening Families One Couple at a

Time. Retrieved on Sunday, March 25, 2012 from:

<http://www.marriageeducationandresourcecenterky.com>.

National Extension Relationship and Marriage Education Network. Retrieved on Sunday, March

25, 2012 from: http://www.nermen.org.