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Online Sexual Mindfulness Intervention for
Black and Interracial Couples: A Pilot Study

Jenna M. Lawlor

A thesis submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Science

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ABSTRACT

Online Sexual Mindfulness Intervention for Black and Interracial Couples: A Pilot Study

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Master of Science

Sexual mindfulness has been shown to improve couple's relationship and sexual satisfaction. Mindfulness research has mostly been conducted with White participants, largely leaving out the perspectives of diverse participants. This study piloted an online culturally-adapted version of the Sexual Mindfulness Project with Black and interracial couples (N=26 heterosexual individuals in a committed relationship from three different continents; age range 23–44) to understand the program's acceptability and impacts. Qualitative interviews and quantitative surveys showed that couples enjoyed the program and experienced positive relational and sexual impacts post-intervention, including improved relationship satisfaction, sexual satisfaction, communication, and sexual mindfulness. Implications to improve the program curriculum and delivery are discussed.

Keywords: sexual mindfulness, Black couples, relationship education, pilot study

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Online Sexual Mindfulness Intervention for Black and Interracial Couples: A Pilot Study

Although mindfulness has been practiced for thousands of years, the academic study of mindfulness is relatively new. Scholars have begun exploring the benefits of mindfulness in sex and relationships within the last few years (Carson et al., 2004; Karremans et al., 2017; Khaddouma et al., 2015; Leavitt et al., 2019). Mindfulness research has largely been conducted with White participants (Proulx et al., 2018; Woods-Giscombé & Gaylord, 2014), with a few studies highlighting the experiences of Black participants (Gorden, 2021; Proulx et al., 2020; Watson-Singleton et al., 2016). The current lack of racial diversity in mindfulness research leaves out unique perspectives and experiences of racial minority populations. Therefore, mindfulness interventions will be strengthened and validated by including more diverse participants. To address this research gap, I seek to pilot the sexual mindfulness intervention with Black and interracial couples.

Review of Literature

Theoretical Framework

This pilot study is based on Karreman's (2017) mindfulness and romantic relationships theoretical model. Mindfulness is the practice of centering your attention on the present moment in a curious, non-judgmental way (Kabat-Zinn, 1990). Most research on mindfulness has focused on individual benefits (Brown et al., 2003; Creswell & Lindsay, 2014), but more recent research has begun to examine the potential of mindfulness to improve relationship satisfaction (Atkinson, 2013; Barnes et al., 2007; Kozlowski, 2013). Although this research has established a

link between mindfulness and relationship wellbeing, Karreman's model (2017) describes the processes that facilitate these relational benefits.

Relational mindfulness occurs when an individual pays attention to the emotions and thoughts that directly involve their relationship (Karremans et al., 2017). An example of relational mindfulness would be noticing feelings of gratitude when a spouse performs a kind gesture or recognizing an angry thought during a conversation and letting the thought pass without immediately acting on it. Scholars recognize four processes of mindfulness that Karremans and colleagues relate to specific relationship processes. The four mindfulness processes are: 1) awareness and monitoring of automatic and otherwise implicit responses; 2) emotion regulation; 3) executive control; and 4) self-other connectedness (Hölzel et al., 2011; Karremans et al., 2017). Karremans and colleagues (2017) explain that it is through these processes that the following relationship processes are affected: (a) motivations and behaviors that benefit the relationship; (b) handling relational stressors; (c) the thoughts that one holds about their partner and overall relationship. Karremans and colleagues (2017) theorize that mindfulness enhances relationships by preventing their deterioration. Although mindfulness may not have as much of an impact on already flourishing couples, it may act as a buffer between conflict and relationship distress when conflict inevitably arises, thus preserving relationship satisfaction for couples who are struggling but committed (Karremans et al., 2017).

Black Communities and Sexuality

A culturally adapted sexual mindfulness intervention for Black couples is needed to celebrate the culture and values of Black communities, while addressing the unique history and challenges that impact Black couple's sexual attitudes and experiences. Damaging sexual scripts and racial stereotypes can affect how Black men and women view their sexuality and develop

sexual relationships (Bowleg et al., 2015; Crooks et al., 2020). Black individuals can be empowered by challenging these stereotypes and intentionally determining their personal meanings for sex and relationships.

Black women have historically been subject to harmful sexual stereotypes which label them as either asexual and motherly (i.e., the “Mammy” stereotype) or sexually deviant and hypersexual (i.e., the “Jezebel” stereotype) (Nanda, 2019; West, 1995). The “Jezebel” stereotype depicts Black women as hypersexual temptresses (Jewell, 2012). This image of Black sexuality originated during the early slave trade in America when Black women were valued based on their reproductive potential to produce more slaves, leading to the victimization of rape and violence (Nagel, 2004; West, 1995). Jezebel is often associated with white features and light skin, contrasted with the “Mammy” stereotype of a Black woman who is darker, larger, and more of a nurturing figure (West, 1995). These depictions still have a negative effect on Black women’s self-image and sexuality (Brown et al., 2013; Hughes, 2019). One recent study suggested that Black women are viewed as being more sexually promiscuous and less likely to be intentional about preventing pregnancy than White women (Rosenthal & Lobel, 2016).

Although Black women have historically been opposed to the Jezebel portrayal (Hine, 1989), the stereotype is still perpetuated in media and self-identification. Modern hip-hop and rap music were first meant to empower women yet have evolved into sexualizing and objectifying Black women (Ross & Coleman, 2011). Stephens and Phillips’ (2003) hip-hop sexual script model suggests that the sexual scripts presented to Black women through hip-hop perpetuate stereotypes and deny representations that would lead to healthy sexual scripts.

A recent study suggests that younger African American women approve of the modern Jezebel image more than older women; however, both groups have relatively low endorsements

of the stereotype (Brown et al., 2013). Women with higher education and racial self-esteem report a lower endorsement of the portrayal of Jezebel (Brown et al., 2013). Some activists and artists have encouraged women of color to fight against these stereotypes through “aggressive shielding of the body; concealing sexuality; and foregrounding morality, intelligence, and civility,” (Thompson, 2009, p. 2). This idea led to Black women imposing an asexual identity onto themselves, stifling their freedom to explore sexually within relationships (Hughes, 2019; Nagel, 2004). Thus, Black women face the dilemma of fighting against stereotypes labeling them as hyper-sexual, while also struggling to identify with their sexuality and embrace sexual pleasure (Hughes, 2019; Nanda, 2019).

One promising qualitative study showed that Black women recognized their right to sexual pleasure and meaningful sexual relationships (Hughes, 2019). While some women reported that racial stereotypes did not have any effect on their sexual relationships, most women in the study reported that racial stereotypes shaped their sexual identity and behavior (Hughes, 2019). I contend that relationship and sex education, when approached through a strengths perspective, may empower Black women to interrupt these harmful stereotypes, embrace their unique identities, and develop healthy sexual self-concepts.

Black men also face negative racial stereotypes and sexual scripts. During slavery in the U.S., Black men were viewed as being inherently lustful towards White women, which eventually morphed into the stereotype of Black men perpetrating rape against White women as revenge for slavery (Bowleg et al., 2017; Davis, 1983; McGruder, 2010). This baseless stereotype led to accusations of rape and subsequent lynchings (Davis, 1983). Later, the 1932 Tuskegee Syphilis Study, funded by the U.S. Public Health Service, further compounded harmful stereotypes about Black sexuality. This 40-year study recruited 400 Black men with syphilis and

withheld treatment for the sexually transmitted disease, resulting in many of their deaths (Brandt, 1978). Subsequent prestigious scholars used this study to suggest that syphilis increased in Black communities due to “Black people’s hypersexuality, lasciviousness, and general moral depravity” (Bowleg et al., 2017, p. 579).

Sexual stereotypes about Black men that persist today include assumptions that Black men are overly sexual, aggressive, and have a larger-than-average penis size (Calabrese et al., 2018; Ghavami & Peplau, 2013; Nagel, 2004). These stereotypes may translate to feelings of insecurity, inadequacy, or performance-based pressure during sex. Some “positive” sexual stereotypes that are associated with Black men include being adventurous and passionate (Calabrese et al., 2018). All these sexual stereotypes can be harmful, even if they appear to be positive. Individuals should be able to decide for themselves who they are as a sexual being and what they value in their sexual relationship.

Relationship education (RE) may lessen the internalization of stereotypes and bring attention to healthier, individually determined sexual scripts. Countering racial stereotypes has been suggested as an impactful way to foster a positive self-concept (Thomas et al., 2013). Taken together, this evidence suggests that both Black women and men may benefit from culturally adapted RE by shedding internalized harmful stereotypes and embracing their personally defined sexual identity.

Interracial Relationships and Sexuality

As this study will include interracial couples, understanding the potential challenges and strengths of these couples is necessary to inform this intervention. Scholars suggest that U.S. laws that criminalized interracial relationships continue to have a lasting impact on societal norms surrounding interracial dating, marriage, and sexual relationships (Brown et al., 2019). As

well as historical influences, cultural influences also inform interracial relationships. When two individuals come together to form a relationship, they bring with them unique cultural values and norms that impact their relationship, which may be more prevalent in interracial relationships (Uhlich et al., 2022). However, research has come to varying conclusions about the relationship stability and satisfaction of interracial couples.

Some studies concluded that intercultural relationships may struggle more than cultural homogenous relationships (Kroeger & Williams, 2011; Hohmann-Marriott & Amato, 2008), including a higher likelihood of divorce than same-race couples, particularly Black-Hispanic couples (Brown et al., 2019). However, recent meta-analytic studies suggest that these couples do not experience less relationship satisfaction than cultural homogenous relationships (Brooks, 2021; Uhlich et al., 2022). Brooks (2021) suggests that these differences may be due to publication bias and U.S. geographical location, as some regions experienced more opposition to interracial relationships than others. Studies in the West concluded minimal differences between interracial relationship satisfaction with national samples, while studies conducted in the South present significant relationship satisfaction differences from national studies (Brooks, 2021).

The research examining interracial relationships focuses mainly on relationship satisfaction, leaving a dearth of research on sexual outcomes. Acknowledging the mixed results of interracial relationship research, mindfulness may help couples who are experiencing stress improve their relational and sexual outcomes, regardless of cultural differences.

Mindfulness and Black Communities

African American communities have been largely left out of mindfulness research, as mindfulness interventions have been mainly taught to higher SES White participants (Proulx et al., 2018; Woods-Giscombé & Gaylord, 2014). Scholars have recently urged mindfulness

interventions to target more diverse populations using culturally appropriate curriculum (DeLuca et al., 2018; Garfield & Watson-Singleton, 2021; Watson-Singleton et al., 2018). Responses from a focus group with older African American women suggest that a culturally appropriate intervention would include: (a) African American or minority facilitators who understand the past and present Black experience in America, (b) all African American or minority attendees to increase comfort and openness, (c) a Christian-based curriculum, and (d) having the program held in a familiar Black space such as a church or community center (Proulx et al., 2020). Other studies reflect these suggestions for creating a culturally appropriate mindfulness intervention (Proulx et al., 2018; Watson-Singleton et al., 2019; Woods-Giscombé & Gaylord, 2014). The focus group participants from Proulx and colleagues' (2020) study reported that they saw the value of mindfulness classes, if they are culturally adapted, to address the unique stressors that African American communities face.

The few mindfulness interventions that have been culturally adapted and taught to Black participants have shown promising results (Gorden, 2021; Watson-Singleton et al., 2016). After one mindfulness intervention, 12 African American women expressed positive benefits including present moment awareness, calmness, and relaxation. However, these participants also felt that mindfulness does not fit well into African American culture, as it evokes associations such as “hippie” or “atheist” (Watson-Singleton et al., 2016). Other qualitative studies have shown that Black participants found mindfulness to be complementary to their cultural and spiritual practices (Spears et al., 2017; Woods-Giscombé & Gaylord, 2014). Future interventions could address religious concerns during recruitment and incorporate discussion about harmonizing religious practice with mindfulness into the intervention. Although mindfulness has shown to be

beneficial in relationships, culturally adapted interventions are needed to determine how Black communities receive and benefit from mindfulness programs.

Sexual Mindfulness

In addition to relational benefits, recent research has shown that mindfulness may also benefit individuals' and couples' satisfaction with sex (Leavitt et al., 2019, 2021b; Smedley et al., 2021; Soqanloo et al., 2015). Sexual mindfulness can be described as intentional moment-to-moment awareness during a sexual experience (Leavitt et al., 2019). While dispositional mindfulness is considered a trait, mindfulness can also be taught, practiced, and developed. Intervention work to teach couples sexual mindfulness skills is a new area of research that has the potential to be expanded. The first structured sexual mindfulness intervention was conducted by Leavitt and colleagues in 2019 (Leavitt et al., 2021a). Participants learned relationship and mindfulness skills related to sex over a series of two classes. Post-intervention surveys revealed that participants reported higher levels of relational and sexual satisfaction, sexual mindfulness awareness and non-judgment, and sexual communication, in addition to lower anxiety related to sex (Leavitt et al., 2021a).

Relationship Satisfaction

Based on Karremans' and colleagues' model (2017), mindfulness allows individuals to regulate their emotions, manage conflict, and engage in pro-relationship behaviors. Mindfulness is linked with greater relationship satisfaction (Barnes et al., 2007; Davis & Hayes, 2011; Karremans et al., 2017; McGill et al., 2016) as is sexual mindfulness (Leavitt et al., 2019). In fact, sexual mindfulness contributed to relationship satisfaction above and beyond trait mindfulness alone (Leavitt et al., 2019). Similar relational outcomes may be present for Black and interracial couples who learn sexual mindfulness.

Sexual Satisfaction

Mindfulness is linked with relationship satisfaction (Khaddouma et al., 2015), sexual satisfaction and sexual wellbeing (Leavitt et al., 2019, 2021a; Smedley et al., 2021; Soqanloo et al., 2015), and sexual functioning (Ahani et al., 2021; Brotto et al., 2016; Kimmes et al., 2015; Leavitt et al., 2021b). Mindfulness likely interrupts distracting thoughts and anxieties during sex which may decrease sexual satisfaction (Newcombe & Weaver, 2016). Additionally, sexual mindfulness is linked to orgasm consistency (Adam et al., 2015; Leavitt et al., 2021b). Women reported improved orgasmic experiences, a better understanding of their sexual needs, and more self-compassion after learning mindfulness skills (Weitkamp et al., 2019).

Sexual Communication

Sexual mindfulness has been linked with improved sexual communication (Leavitt et al., 2021a). Most RE programs include some component that teaches communication skills, but few are directly related to sexual communication (Halford et al., 2003; Markman et al., 2010). After participating in the Sexual Mindfulness Project, individuals reported higher rates of satisfaction with sexual communication than before the intervention (Leavitt et al., 2021a).

Communication and Problem Solving

Research has shown that conflict can negatively impact a couple's sexual relationship (Luetke et al., 2020; Metz & Epstein, 2002). Mindfulness may act as a buffer between conflict and sexual satisfaction. Sexual mindfulness is associated with more communication about sex (Leavitt et al., 2021a). Additionally, women's sexual satisfaction is not as affected by their partner's ability to resolve conflict when women have higher levels of sexual mindfulness (Smedley et al., 2021). Individuals who have naturally have high mindfulness seem to better regulate heightened sexual arousal and calm anxieties associated with sex, thus contributing to

increased sexual satisfaction (Pepping et al., 2018). While general mindfulness may help couples bring mindful attention to the process of conflict (Ting-Toomey, 2011), sexual mindfulness may help couples be fully present during sex and not be distracted by their marital conflict. Teaching mindfulness skills may help couples be more open to sex as a means of connection and closeness, rather than focusing on performative goals such as simultaneous orgasm, leading to increased sexual satisfaction and desire (McCarthy & Wald, 2013).

Sexual Mindfulness and Black Couples

The current research on sexual mindfulness reflects the state of general mindfulness research, as it is largely based on the experiences of White individuals and couples (Khaddouma et al., 2015; Leavitt et al., 2021a), and Black couple research is still emerging. There are some promising sexual mindfulness studies that include Black participants, but the sample of Black participants is low, ranging from 4.7–8% of the total sample (Eyring et al., 2021; Khaddouma et al., 2015; Smedley et al., 2021), while the current proportion of the U.S. population who identify as Black is 14.2% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021). Although some sexual mindfulness research has included Black participants (Eyring et al., 2021; Khaddouma et al., 2015; Smedley et al., 2021), sexual mindfulness interventions that are culturally adapted for Black participants are yet to be taught.

Recent studies have investigated how sensate focus, a series of non-arousing, pleasurable touching exercises to prepare for sexual intimacy (De Villers, 2014; Gorden, 2021), might influence the meaning of sex for Black participants, which often involves internalized stereotypes (performance and anatomy-based) and goal-oriented sex (i.e. reaching orgasm) (Gorden, 2021). Interviews from De Villers' study (2014) revealed that participants considered mindfulness to contribute to their sense of "good and meaningful sex." Participants from

Gorden's study (2021) have also reported that mindfulness during sex helped them increase sexual communication, acceptance of themselves and their partner, and challenge racial stereotypes related to sex. Although the results are promising, this study concentrated on sensate focus and more research is needed to understand how sexual mindfulness can benefit sexual relationships for Black couples.

The Present Study

The purpose of this pilot study was to examine the feasibility of an online, culturally adapted Sexual Mindfulness Project (SMP) for Black and interracial couples. To date, there have been no sexual mindfulness interventions with Black participants, and no culturally adapted sexual mindfulness programs. Based on Karremans' and colleagues' mindfulness model (2017) and other research that suggests mindfulness practices are beneficial to Black and minority participants (Proulx et al., 2020) and sexual mindfulness research that indicates positive couple outcomes (Leavitt et al., 2021a, 2021b) I explored the following questions:

1. Would Black and interracial couples readily participate in an online culturally adapted sexual mindfulness program?
2. Would the program positively impact couples' sexual mindfulness post-intervention?
3. Would the program positively impact couples' sexual satisfaction, relationship satisfaction, communication, and conflict resolution skills post-intervention compared to their pre-intervention reflection?

Methods

This study utilized a partially mixed, sequential, equal-status, multiple-case study design (P3) based on the Leech and Onwuegbuzie (2009) typology of mixed-methods research. The study is partially mixed methods and sequential because the qualitative interviews and

quantitative surveys were completed separately, or sequentially, and then compared during analysis. However, the qualitative and quantitative aspects hold equal weight in the analysis, thus constituting an equal status mixed-methods approach.

The multiple case study design with thematic analysis (Yin, 1994; Carlson et al., 2012) was used to assess the impact of the SMP intervention within and between racially diverse couples. I followed Marks' (2015) thematic and numeric content analysis procedures. This study was an embedded multiple case study design (Yin, 1994), where each couple was a case and each case included two units of analysis, representing each person in the couple. Unfortunately, the final sample was too small to provide reliable data for parametric analysis. Thus, quantitative data were analyzed by comparing changes in pre- and post-intervention scores within and between couples. A positive change from pre- to post-assessment across cases may suggest that the intervention was helpful, at least in the short run (Kazdin, 2011; Morgan & Morgan, 2009).

Participants

I recruited 20 heterosexual Black and interracial couples (40 individuals) to participate in the SMP intervention. Individuals were invited to participate if (a) they were 18 years old or older; (b) both partners could attend all three classes together; (c) one or both individuals identified as African/Black American; (d) they were not pregnant; (e) both participants spoke English; and (f) neither participant had unresolved sexual trauma (Gorden, 2021). Of the 20 couples who signed consent forms to participate in the intervention, 17 couples attended the program. Ten couples completed both the survey and the interview. Twelve couples took the survey and thirteen couples participated in the qualitative interviews, resulting in a final sample size of 26 individuals (13 dyads). We had a diverse geographical sample, including couples from

three different regions of the U.S.: the West, South, and East Coast, and couples spread over three continents: the U.S., Africa, and Europe.

Recruitment and Procedures

This pilot study was approved by the Brigham Young University institutional review board. Recruitment involved distributing flyers at local community centers, universities, churches, and social media advertisements on platforms including Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and Reddit. Participants were compensated \$30 each for attending the classes and taking a post-intervention survey. Participants were also compensated \$5 each for completing the follow-up survey. The total compensation that couples received for attending three classes, taking the follow-up survey, and participating in an interview was \$70. Interested couples met with the primary investigator over Webex to ensure they fit the criteria for participating and prevent faux participation.

Participants signed a consent form before attending the classes. The program consisted of two weekend classes that were 2 hours and one weekend class that was 3 hours. Each lesson ended with a mindfulness practice and homework for the couple to try over the week before the next lesson. In the next class, facilitators followed up with couples on the homework and provided a brief review of the curriculum that was taught the week prior.

Description of Intervention

The Sexual Mindfulness Project (Leavitt et al., 2019) is a research-based couple relationship education program that utilizes mindfulness practices and sex education to benefit couple relationships. The SMP curriculum was revised for this project to be culturally appropriate, which included changing pictures to represent more diverse couples and adding more discussion about the relationship between mindfulness and religion, as scholars have

suggested acknowledging the cultural importance of religion when working with Black individuals (Watson-Singleton et al., 2016; Woods-Giscombé & Gaylord, 2014). The program utilized “interactive culturally based teaching[s]” (Mikle & Gilbert, 2019, p. 67), including storytelling and group discussions. Additionally, the program was co-taught by Black and White instructors. Having facilitators of the same racial background has been suggested to help interventions be relatable and culturally appropriate for racially diverse participants (Proulx et al., 2020).

The culturally adapted SMP curriculum was taught to participants by two trained instructors virtually using Webex. Online delivery methods are becoming more common for couples RE (Doss et al., 2020; Georgia & Doss, 2013), especially during the COVID-19 pandemic (Turner et al., 2022). Online RE allows for more diverse groups and underserved couples to participate (Doss et al., 2016; Georgia Salivar et al., 2018). Given that African American men are often hesitant to participate in relationship enrichment programs (Hurt et al., 2012; Smith et al., 2002; Williams & Justice, 2010), the ease and anonymity of an online program may increase men’s willingness to participate with their partner. Online RE has presented disadvantages, such as a lack of connection between participants, lack of participation, schedule constraints, and technology issues (Song et al., 2019; Turner et al., 2022; Wut & Xu, 2021). Despite these limitations, virtual RE suggests long-term positive effects for African American couples (Barton et al., 2017; Doss et al., 2019), making an online delivery of the SMP a viable option to benefit Black and interracial couples.

A logic model was used to represent the curriculum and class design aspects that should impact romantic and sexual outcomes for couples (see Figure 1). Couples attend three classes that range between 2–3 hours (see Table 1 for lesson descriptions). The program uses group

discussions, private couple discussions, and hands-on activities to reinforce RE and mindfulness concepts. Couples are given mindfulness sexual mindfulness activities to try at home. The relationship skills, mindfulness skills, and sexual mindfulness skills learned through the classes and homework should then impact couple's proximal outcomes including increased communication, problem solving, sexual awareness, and sexual non-judgment, as well as distal outcomes including relationship satisfaction, sexual satisfaction, communication, and conflict resolution.

After completing all three classes, couples completed a retrospective pre-post survey to measure the program's impact on their relationship. Previous research suggests that using a retrospective pre-post survey is helpful when reference bias is present, which may be the case with mindfulness (Pratt et al., 2000). Individuals who are unfamiliar with mindfulness may not be able to accurately report their level of mindfulness before the intervention but may understand it better after the intervention. Thus, asking participants to reflect on their level of mindfulness before and after the intervention may provide more accurate data. Couples were also invited to participate in a post-intervention interview about their class experience.

Measures

Sexual Mindfulness Measure

The Sexual Mindfulness Measure (SMM; Leavitt et al., 2019) includes seven items divided into two subscales: awareness and non-judgment of the sexual experience. This study used a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (never or rarely true) to 5 (very often or always true), with higher scores indicating higher levels of sexual mindfulness. The scale reliability for this study was good: awareness pre-intervention $\alpha = .91$; awareness post-intervention $\alpha = .76$; non-judgment pre-intervention $\alpha = .85$; non-judgment post-intervention $\alpha = .84$. The post-intervention awareness

scale may have had lower reliability ($\alpha = .76$) due to large sexual mindfulness improvements and the small sample size. Reliability is similar to a previous SMP study, with the exception of awareness post-intervention: awareness pre-intervention $\alpha = .89$; awareness post-intervention $\alpha = .76$; non-judgment pre-intervention $\alpha = .83$; post-intervention $\alpha = .84$ (Leavitt et al., 2021a).

Sexual Satisfaction

The New Sexual Satisfaction Scale (NSSS, Stulhofer et al., 2010) measures an individual's satisfaction with sexual experiences. The scale was validated cross-culturally. Participants responded to 12 items using a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (not at all satisfied) to 5 (extremely satisfied). An example item is, "The balance between what I give and receive in sex." Reliability from a previous SMP intervention was good: pre-intervention $\alpha = .88$; post-intervention $\alpha = .94$ (Leavitt et al., 2021a). The scale reliability in this study was acceptable: pre-intervention $\alpha = .90$; post-intervention $\alpha = .88$.

Relationship Satisfaction

A shortened version of the Couple Satisfaction Index (CSI, Funk & Rogge, 2007) was used to measure individuals' relationship satisfaction. The measure used a 6-point scale from 1 (Not True at All) to 6 (Completely True) An example question was: "Please indicate the degree of happiness, all things considered, in your relationship." Higher scores indicated higher levels of relationship satisfaction. The scale reliability in this study was acceptable in previous studies: pre-intervention $\alpha = .90$; post-intervention $\alpha = .80$ (Leavitt et al., 2021a), and in this study: pre-intervention $\alpha = .89$; post-intervention $\alpha = .77$.

Sexual Communication

This measure estimates satisfaction with sexual communication using 12 items (Wheless et al., 1984). Responses are collected using a 5-point scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5

(strongly agree) with higher scores associated with higher sexual communication. An example item is: “I tell my partner whether or not I am sexually satisfied.” The scale was reliable in a previous SMP intervention: pre-intervention $\alpha = .82$; post-intervention $\alpha = .93$ (Leavitt et al., 2021a). The scale reliability in this study was very strong: pre-intervention $\alpha = .96$; post-intervention $\alpha = .92$.

Communication and Problem Solving

Six items are used to measure communication and problem-solving in romantic relationships (Hawkins et al., 2017). Responses were recorded on a 5-point scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). An example item was: “You try to respect the ways your partner communicates that are different than your own.” Higher scores indicated higher levels of general communication and problem-solving skills. The scale reliability in a previous SMP intervention was acceptable: pre-intervention $\alpha = .86$; post-intervention $\alpha = .87$. The scale reliability in this study was good: pre-intervention $\alpha = .94$; post-intervention $\alpha = .83$.

Participants’ Homework Completion

Participants’ homework completion is measured using 1 item: “I completed my mindfulness practice about 0–100% of the time.” Participants respond to the statement using a scale with increments of 25 from 0–100%.

Analytic Procedures

I compared within and between couple quantitative scores to analyze the program impacts of a culturally adapted sexual mindfulness intervention. Couples’ pre- and post-intervention scores were compared to evaluate change in participants’ relational and sexual outcomes. I also used descriptive statistics and qualitative themes to understand participants’

experience with the program. Descriptive data collected included participants' age, race, education, income, and relationship length. Descriptive data is presented in Table 2.

This study utilized qualitative interviews to gain more in-depth data on the effect of the program on participants' relationships. The Primary Investigator (PI) interviewed couples who attended the program. This ensured that couples could be honest about their experience during class and with the facilitators. The qualitative data were analyzed using the Grounded Theory method (Charmaz, 2014). Grounded Theory methods allowed us to inquire about the process of change that participants may have experienced as a result of the intervention. The PI then transcribed the interviews. Together the PI and one of the facilitators read the transcriptions with the goal of drawing out main themes. Once main themes were identified, the interviews were coded to sort the themes into categories. Coding allowed us to identify the common meanings and experiences that couples described about the classes. Themes were then quantified using Marks' (2015) Numeric Content Analysis methods. During the one-hour interview, couples were asked the following questions:

1. What did you like or appreciate the most about this class?
2. What did you dislike the most about this class?
3. Do you feel like the class impacted your relationship?
 - a. Can you tell me a story or experience you have had that captures or reflects how the class has influenced you?
4. Would you recommend this class to others?
5. Do you have any suggestions of how this class could be better?

Results

Coding analysis of the qualitative data revealed three major themes: 1) class experience, 2) suggestions for improving the class, and 3) relationship impacts. Theme 1, class experience, revealed three subthemes: 1a) positive experience, 1b) new mindset and knowledge, and 1c) facilitator and participant interactions. Theme 2, program suggestions, included two subthemes: 2a) frequency and depth of the classes and 2b) increased participation and connection. Theme 3, relationship impacts, included the following three subthemes: 3a) increased communication, 3b) increased relational and sexual satisfaction, and 3c) increased relational and sexual mindfulness. Each couple's qualitative results will be reported for each theme and subtheme, followed by the quantitative results for the relationship impacts. Lastly, couples' homework completion will be reported. Table 3 lists the NCA for themes and subthemes, as well as the average number of codes per couple.

Theme 1: Class Experience

1a. Positive Experience

Overall, participants reported having a positive experience during the classes. Couples expressed gratitude for the classes and appreciated the openness about sexual topics. One man said, "It helped me and my spouse in understanding each other and working together to make our sexualities even better than it was before, so for that reason and a bit more I really am happy to say a big thank you to you guys." The overall program, including specific mentions to content and mindfulness assignments, was described as "helpful" 27 times.

1b. New Mindset and Knowledge

The second most common theme, referenced 34 times, was gaining a new mindset and knowledge about sex, mindfulness, and their romantic relationships. Participants mentioned

enjoying the mindfulness activities during class and the mindfulness homework activities such as the mindful chocolate tasting, mindful gaze, and mindful touch. Some participants benefited from learning anatomy. One said, “Those things about the body, female part[s]... those were things we didn't have any idea about but attending the classes enlightened us.” Regarding the homework assignments, a theme we found was that “At first [the mindfulness homework] was awkward and weird... but with time we got to understand our bodies more and our bonding got better.”

Couples also reported that the classes changed their perspective about sex and their relationships. One woman said, “Growing up as a child I [thought] that sex mainly is for pleasure and making some babies and throughout the course of this study it has actually changed my perspective of what sex is actually about... mindfulness has basically cleared my thoughts and has made me to feel greater connection with my partner.” Another man said, “It was a very new experience because I couldn't imagine how much sex was fun if you just think of it... slow down.”

1c. Facilitator and Participant Interactions

The last subtheme under class experience was participants' interactions with the facilitators and other couples. Most of the couples reported that the facilitators helped them feel comfortable. Couples appreciated how openly the facilitators talked about sexual and relational topics. One participant said, “They tried to help us understand different aspects of our bodies, they made us feel welcome and comfortable.” One participant referred to the facilitators as “an open book.” The only negative feedback about the instructors was that “[the facilitators] didn't really throw questions at people, they didn't really ask direct questions... to [make] the class more lively.”

Multiple couples mentioned wanting more participation from other couples. One man said, “I would like more open communication with the participants, sharing. The first time almost all of the participants were sharing, then for the second and the third [classes] very few people were sharing and I think when everybody shares what they think... you get to learn more.” The online setting, as well as a general lack of participation, made some couples hesitant to share. One woman said, “It was really hard for me to be able to [be] on camera and speak up sometimes when I just maybe had fear or something like that to talk about intimacy in such a[n]...open way with other people... I don't feel like I contributed as much as maybe I wanted to, I don't know, because I just felt a little bit shy maybe.” Despite a lack of participation from some participants, there were six mentions of enjoying the group discussions that occurred. One partner expressed, “You get new fresh ideas from different people, there are a couple of people from different nationalities and cultural backgrounds and it’s good to just interact with different people.”

Theme 2: Suggestions for Improvement

2a. Frequency/Depth of the Classes

The most frequent suggestion to improve the class was a desire for more depth of content, such as additional mindfulness class activities and assignments. A few participants wanted more personalized direction to work through personal or marital issues. One man said, “I wish everyone or each person, myself included, could have got taken the time to talk through what barriers, we all kind of place mental barriers, cultural barriers etc., that we placed first so that then it's a little bit easier [to] then dive into how to be mindful once you've got to remove some of those barriers.” Four participants, two male and two female, wanted more classes to be added

to the program, while three male participants reported that the program was too long and wanted fewer classes.

2b. Increased Participation and Connection.

The second most common suggestion was to facilitate increased participation and connection between participants. The online format of the classes seemed to present challenges for couples to fully participate, including being involved in the group discussions and keeping their cameras turned on for the length of the class. Two of the couples mentioned that they were attending the class on their phone and thus were unable to hold the phone up for the length of the two-hour class. Similar technology difficulties may have contributed to the lack of participants appearing on camera for the full length of the classes. Couples offered specific suggestions to increase on-camera participation within the group, such as asking directed questions or having an additional day dedicated to facilitating connection between participants.

Although participants recognized areas the program could be improved, all 12 couples reported that they would recommend this class to others. One participant said, “I think it can open up new conversations and provide a lot of awareness and just improve your sexual intimacy.” Nine couples saw applications for their friends and family and were excited to share the class with others. These couples expressed that the class could help their friends and family have more knowledge to resolve conflict and improve sexual relationship.

Theme 3: Relationship Impacts

Participants shared how the program affected their romantic relationship during and after the classes. Overall, the program had a positive impact on the couples’ relationships. One woman applied the mindful touch technique during class to comfort her husband when he was having a difficult day, “I remember telling him about it and telling him how we were just going to lay here

and just, you know, not sexual touch but just mindful touch...just a touch on the arm and face and things like that... I remember feeling like I was actually giving him more of comfort than I would have in any other way... it showed me that we can do things like that for each other, it doesn't have to be sex, it can be just those kinds of things.” Three overarching positive relationship impacts were determined from thematic analysis: 1) communication, 2) relationship satisfaction and sexual satisfaction, and 3) relational and sexual mindfulness. When examining the quantitative scores, men showed a larger positive change than women on all three of these relationship outcomes. Two out of 12 couples had a female partner with a larger positive change than her male partner.

3a. Improved Communication with Partner

Couples shared that the class provided a dedicated space for them to talk about their relationship. One woman said, “It opened up so much that I feel like we needed to talk about... I feel like that communication and those guided questions and the time set aside during each class to talk... it helped us to be more vulnerable and discuss things that may have impeded our intimacy as a couple.” Couples also mentioned that the program improved their communication outside of the classes. One woman recounted, “I usually [run] out from conflicts, you know, like ‘hm let’s just forget about it’... I never liked to figure out what was the problem, I just ran [from] the problem. But now, I’m not perfect at it but I try to talk about things more and clarify what was the source and how we are going to tackle this problem.” Her husband responded that, “She doesn’t run from our issues no more, she has been so open, now we can talk.” Multiple couples said that learning the difference between conflict and contention during class benefited their communication outside of class.

Of the 12 couples that took the quantitative survey, 11 couples showed improvement in sexual and general communication following the intervention. Regarding sexual communication, eight participants reported a small positive change between .1 and .9 of a point on a 5-point scale. Six participants reported a positive change between 1 and 1.9 points, six reported a positive change between 2 and 2.9 points, and one reported a positive change of 3 points. One female partner was the only participant who reported no change in sexual communication before and after the intervention.

For general communication, nine individuals reported a small positive change between 1. and .9 on a 5-point scale. Two participants reported a positive change between 1 and 1.9 points, seven reported a positive change between 2 and 2.9 points, and four reported a positive change between 3 and 3.9 points. One couple did not provide pre-intervention data to compare with their post-intervention score; however, their post-intervention sexual and general communication score was high (5).

3b. Improved Relationship Satisfaction/Sexual Satisfaction

Couples said that the classes improved the quality of their relationship and/or had a positive impact on their relationship. One woman said, “We are still trying to work on things that we’ve learned but it has brought a positive impact on our relationship.” Another participant said, “It helped me gain more confidence in my relationship and it drew me a lot closer to my partner so I really really liked that aspect and it helped me to stop in the moment and note things that we usually like just ignore.” Many couples described feeling a stronger bond with their partner during and following the classes.

Couples also expressed that the classes improved their sexual experiences and intimacy. Mindfulness was a large contributor to improving their sexual relationship. Couples applied the

mindfulness activities from class to their sexual relationship. One man said, “The whole assignment about the chocolates...in your mouth, is not chewing it, letting it melt, it brought about [a] self-control experience, especially when you guys [are] going to have sex, when you guys want to make love, what I [learned] from that was you shouldn’t rush things, you should take it slow. It makes you and your partner bond...it has taken us to another level of sexuality so I appreciate that.” Another woman said, “I love the excerpt on mindfulness that [allowed] us to be conscious of our body, to understand how our body actually works.”

Quantitative results reflected the couple’s interviews. Self-reported relationship satisfaction and sexual satisfaction increased post intervention for 11 of the 12 couples. For relationship satisfaction, five participants reported a positive change between .1 and .9 on a 6-point scale, six reported an increase between 1 and 1.9 points, five reported an increase between 2 and 2.9 points, and four reported an increase between 3 and 3.9 points. The female participant reported no change in relationship satisfaction, but her partner reported a 2-point increase. Sexual satisfaction scores, scaled to five, improved between .1 and .9 points for six individuals. Eight participants reported a positive change between 1 and 1.9 points, five reported a positive change between 2 and 2.9 points, and three reported an increase between 3 and 3.9 points. Again, one couple did not provide pre-intervention data, yet their post-intervention relationship and sexual satisfaction scores were high (5 and 6). The male partner in another couple did not provide pre-intervention data, but his partner reported an increase in relationship and sexual satisfaction post-intervention.

3c. Increased Relational and Sexual Mindfulness

Couples shared that the class reminded them to slow down and be more intentional about their relationship. Some couples reported slowing down and being more present during sex. One

participant explained, “The study has made me pay attention to my emotions during sex. Before, I would get easily distracted and I might not get the perfect sexual experience I wanted, but after the study I can now enjoy sex in a different way.” Couples also applied mindfulness to their overall relationship, with some couples being more present while communicating or reflecting on their relationship.

Visually comparing sexual mindfulness awareness scores indicated that both individuals in 10 of the 12 couples had increased awareness post-intervention. One partner in each of the two remaining couples reported an increase in awareness and one female participant reported no change. Four participants reported a change between .1 and .9 of a point on a 5-point scale. Six participants reported a positive change between 1 and 1.9 points, five reported a positive change between 2 and 2.9 points, and another five participants reported a positive change between 3 and 3.9 points. Three participants were missing pre-intervention data.

For the sexual mindfulness non-judgment subscale, nine individuals reported increased sexual mindfulness non-judgment, while 11 individuals reported decreased non-judgment. Two participants reported no change between pre- and post-intervention. On a 5-point scale, three participants reported a positive change between 3 and 3.9 points, three reported a positive change between 2 and 2.9 points, two reported a positive change between 1 and 1.9 points, and one participant reported a positive change of .9. One participant reported a negative change of 3.3 points, three reported a negative change between 2 and 2.9 points, four reported a negative change between 1 and 1.9 points, and three reported a negative change between .1 and .9. Two participants provided no pre-intervention response. For two couples, both partners reported lowered sexual mindfulness non-judgment. However, these couples reported increased mindfulness, sexual satisfaction, and closeness with their partner in the qualitative interviews.

More women than men reported decreased sexual mindfulness non-judgment with eight women reporting lowered non-judgment compared to three men. No couples reported decreased sexual mindfulness in their qualitative interviews.

Homework

Participants were asked how often they completed the weekly homework assignments from 0% of the time to 100% of the time. Eight of the 12 couples reported completing the homework 75% of the time, with four couples reporting completing it 100% of the time.

Discussion

This pilot study sought to understand the effects of a culturally adapted, online version of the Sexual Mindfulness Project for Black and interracial couples. While sensate focus interventions have shown positive effects for Black couples (Gorden, 2021), this is the first culturally adapted sexual mindfulness intervention for Black and interracial couples. The findings of this study can be categorized into (a) the acceptability of the program and (b) the impacts of the program. Overall, the participants reported that the program was acceptable and impactful.

Program Acceptability

This pilot study measured the acceptability of the program by how much the participants liked the classes and how willing they would be to recommend the program to others. Research shows that mindfulness interventions are more acceptable to diverse populations when culturally adapted (DeLuca et al., 2018; Garfield & Watson-Singleton, 2021; Green et al., 2021; Watson-Singleton et al., 2018). The cultural adaptations made to the SMP were based on the suggestions of Black scholars who previously implemented mindfulness programs. The main adaptation suggestions were (a) include Black facilitator(s) (Proulx et al., 2020); (b) include discussion

about religion and mindfulness (Watson-Singleton et al., 2019; Woods-Giscombé & Gaylord, 2014); and (c) more representation of Black couples within the curriculum pictures and examples (Mikle & Gilbert, 2019). The program facilitators said that discussions took place about the influence between religion, sex, and mindfulness, but no participants referenced this in their interviews.

Qualitative results positively answered Question 1 that the program was likable and recommendable by participants from different regions in the U.S. and across three continents. Participants specifically reported enjoying the program content and assignments and in fact wanted more of them. The participants connected well with the facilitators. These results reflect program evaluation research, suggesting that facilitator quality and relatability are important to program outcomes (Bradford et al., 2012; Higginbotham & Myler, 2010; Ketring et al., 2017). Couples also reported enjoying learning from each other and getting new perspectives from people of different nationalities and cultures. Each couple seemed enthusiastic to share the program with their friends and family. More research is needed for conclusive results, but these preliminary findings suggest that a culturally adapted sexual mindfulness program would be accepted by and benefit racially and culturally diverse populations. The acceptability of this mindfulness program reflects other mindfulness programs that have been culturally adapted (Gorden, 2021; Green et al., 2021; Proulx et al., 2018; Woods-Giscombé & Gaylord, 2014), as well as culturally adapted RE for African American couples (Beach et al., 2011; Mikle & Gilbert, 2019).

Program Impacts

Post-intervention provided positive answers for Questions 2 and 3, with couples reporting increased sexual mindfulness, relational satisfaction, sexual satisfaction, sexual communication,

and general communication. These results add to the growing literature that sexual mindfulness benefits couples' sexual relationships (Leavitt et al., 2019, 2021b; Smedley et al., 2021; Soqanloo et al., 2015).

This pilot study had very similar positive results to previous SMP studies (Leavitt et al., 2021a, 2021c). Participants reported similar relational and sexual benefits from learning about sexual mindfulness and communication skills (Leavitt et al., 2021a). Additionally, previous SMP interventions showed that higher levels of mindfulness homework completion resulted in more change (Leavitt 2021a, 2021c). There was no meaningful difference between participant score change depending on how often they completed the program homework. Further research is required to understand the association between homework completion and subsequent change.

Relationship Impacts

In line with Karreman's (2017) relational mindfulness model, couples reported that practicing mindfulness in their relationship allowed them to sit with the discomfort of conflict and engage in communication more than before the intervention. Mindfulness has been previously found to improve communication between couples (Barnes et al., 2007; Khalifian & Barry, 2021). Similarly, the communication skills learned during the intervention helped couples be more open and vulnerable and work together on resolving conflict or relationship issues. This positive result aligns with previous research findings that improved communication can increase relationship and sexual satisfaction (Owen et al., 2012; Woodin, 2011). A recent qualitative study interviewed happily married Black couples and found that open communication was the most commonly shared advice for keeping their marriages strong (Skipper et al., 2021), similar to the level of importance couples in this study placed on communication.

Sexual Impacts

Qualitative results showed that learning mindfulness during class helped couples slow down and be more present in their sexual relationship. This corroborates research that letting go can improve women's sexual experiences (Mayland, 2005). Other research suggests, especially for women, that practicing sexual mindfulness can improve attention to physiological responses to sexual stimuli and arousal (Adam et al., 2015; Brotto & Basson, 2014; Brotto et al., 2016). While most mindfulness research focuses on women, some studies reflect our results that slowing down and being aware of sexual sensations can also improve men's sexual experiences (Leavitt et al., 2019, 2021a). Sexual mindfulness and other mindfulness practices can improve how Black couples experience sex (Eyring et al., 2021; Gorden, 2021; Leavitt et al., 2019).

Sexual Mindfulness

Overall, couples reported increased sexual mindfulness following the intervention. Results did suggest that a majority of participants experienced a decrease in sexual mindfulness non-judgment, while also reporting an increase in awareness. An increase in awareness may initially result in couples being more judgmental of sexual experiences. High levels of awareness coupled with low levels of acceptance is associated with lower relationship satisfaction (Krafft et al., 2017). Some research suggests that an excess of awareness or self-focused attention may be detrimental to one's mental and social health (Ingram, 1990; Mor & Winquist, 2002). Interestingly, all of the couples who reported decreased non-judgment still had increases in relationship and sexual satisfaction and communication. This may be evidence that the communication and conflict resolution skills learned during the program helped couples address issues or judgments that may have surfaced. Leavitt and colleagues (2021a) stated that the SMP curriculum specifically teaches communication and problem-solving skills, "to help individuals

address their heightened awareness while improving their skills of introspection” (p. 36)

Additionally, the mindfulness skills learned may have helped couples have positive relational and sexual experiences despite feelings of judgment.

One participant illustrated this by reflecting on his view of sexual mindfulness before and after the intervention: “my journey with mindfulness I guess started a few years ago and I'd say when I first started bringing up feedback around intimate moments I think in many ways it sounded more like or seemed more like judgment in some way...one great thing that the class did from that perspective was to highlight that it wasn't... intended or meant to be anything around judgment as much as it was the way I was trying to apply being more present.” Research with a larger sample size is needed to explore this phenomenon further.

Gender Differences

While the most recent SMP study suggested that women showed greater change (Leavitt et al., 2021c), this study showed greater positive change in post-intervention scores for men. This is meaningful, given that African American men are often hesitant to participate in RE (Hurt et al., 2012; Smith et al., 2002; Williams & Justice, 2010). In other RE programs, women seem to participate more and have higher program effects than men (Arnold & Beelman, 2019; Kim Halford et al., 2004), or men and women have similar rates of change (Owen et al., 2012). There are some RE programs where men improved more than women (Beach et al., 2011; Carlson et al., 2014). There were a few couples in this study where the female partner improved more than her male partner, but overall men had higher change. Future research is needed to understand gender differences with sexual mindfulness and relationship outcomes.

Strengths, Limitations, and Future Research

This study has several strengths worth noting. Qualitative analysis followed Marks (2015) Numeric Content Analysis to increase the rigor of the study. The study also included a very diverse sample with participants from three different continents with various ages, incomes, and relationship lengths, all of whom endorsed and benefitted from the program. This study also presented several limitations. The study had a flaw in the survey programming wherein the Sexual Mindfulness and General Communication measures were displayed on the survey on a scale of 1–7, but responses were restricted to a scale of 1–5. After examining the data, we concluded that participants standardized their own scores when answering these questions and no adjustments were made to those scores. Individuals whose partner did not complete the survey were not included in the final analysis.

To identify possible careless responses in the post-intervention survey, we included two attention check questions throughout the survey (Maniaci & Rogge, 2014; Schmitt & Stults, 1985). An example of an attention check is, “Please enter 4 into these boxes to verify that you are paying attention.” One individual answered both attention checks incorrectly but their partner answered both attention checks correctly. Five participants got one of the attention checks wrong but answered the other correctly. These participants were kept in the final analysis. The four couples who had missing data for the attention checks were also missing pre-intervention data and were not included in the final analysis. Despite these limitations, this study provides meaningful feedback to improve future SMP interventions for racially and ethnically diverse couples.

Future SMP interventions for Black and interracial couples may add more discussion about socio-cultural factors that influence sexuality and include more Africentric principles, such

as discussing collectivist values (Mikle & Gilbert, 2019). Future studies could also further explore cultural adaptations of the SMP with other populations. Based on our finding that men benefitted from the program more than women, further research is needed to understand program effects by gender. Our final sample only included one interracial couple, so the impact of the intervention for interracial couples requires further investigation. Future research could also examine the effectiveness of the SMP with a larger sample. A longitudinal study of the effects of the SMP program could give insight into distal program effects for Black and interracial couples.

For future SMP classes held online, facilitators may want to include a longer ice-breaker for couples to become more comfortable with each other. While some couples reported wanting to have more connection/conversation with the other couples, the main purpose of the program was to help individuals connect with their partner. This goal of facilitating conversation, learning, and connection within couples to improve their sexual and relationship experiences seemed to be achieved when considering the results of each couple. The online approach to the SMP intervention was ideal for engaging couple conversation while learning from other diverse couples. For those couples who want more depth of content and connection with participants, future SMP interventions may consider a Second-Level approach with more content and classes.

Implications

The online, culturally adapted Sexual Mindfulness Project was feasible and worthy of recommendation by the couples who participated. Comparing cases suggests the program positively impacted the couples who completed the post-intervention assessments (N=13) relationally and sexually following the intervention. More research is needed to understand if one SMP curriculum would be generalizable to people from various cultures and backgrounds, or if multiple culturally adapted programs would benefit different demographics.

While the online format presented some challenges, it allowed for a more diverse group of couples to participate. Individuals from various nationalities, backgrounds, and racial identities benefited from this intervention. Study results showed that most couples experienced an increase in sexual awareness and a decrease in non-judgment. The program may need to be updated with more emphasis on how to remain non-judging during sexual experiences, even with an increase in awareness. Future SMP interventions for Black and interracial couples might include more African-centered content and discussion of sociocultural impacts on sexuality. Overall, this exploratory study provided valuable program development feedback for SMP curriculum improvements to benefit racially and culturally diverse couples.

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Table 1. Sexual Mindfulness Project Lesson Descriptions

Day 1: Participants discuss the societal and personal meanings we ascribe to sex and learn about communication skills related to sex, the basic concepts of mindfulness, and components of a healthy relationship. Homework from Day 1 involves discussing sexual meanings, practicing affectionate touch, and a sensate focus activity.

Day 2: Participants learn topics such as gendered sexual differences in arousal and orgasm, an overview of male and female sexual anatomy, the basic concepts of sexual mindfulness, and societal standards that might inform our sexual attitudes and behaviors. Day 2 ends with a sexual mindfulness activity for couples to try at home.

Day 3: Participants review the basic concepts of mindfulness and sexual communication and learn about emotional intimacy, sexual boundaries, and personal responsibility for one's sexual experiences. Day 3 also includes dedicated time for question and answer and ends with a loving-kindness meditation and mindful embrace activity. Participants are encouraged to continue mindful practice in their relationship after the intervention.

Table 2. Participant Descriptives

Variable	Values	<i>N</i> = 26*	%
Age	23-25	6	23%
	26-28	8	31%
	29-31	9	35%
	35-44	3	12%
Race	Black	24	92%
	Pacific Islander	1	4%
	White	1	4%
Education	Some college	8	31%
	Bachelor's degree	14	54%
	Master's degree	4	15%
Relationship Length	3-4	14	54%
	5-6	8	31%
	7-8	2	8%
	18	2	8%
Income	\$40,000- \$60,000	6	23%

	\$60,000- \$90,000	4	15%
	\$90,000-\$120,000	6	23%
	\$120,000 and above	10	38%
Location	United States	18	70%
	Africa	6	23%
	Europe	2	8%

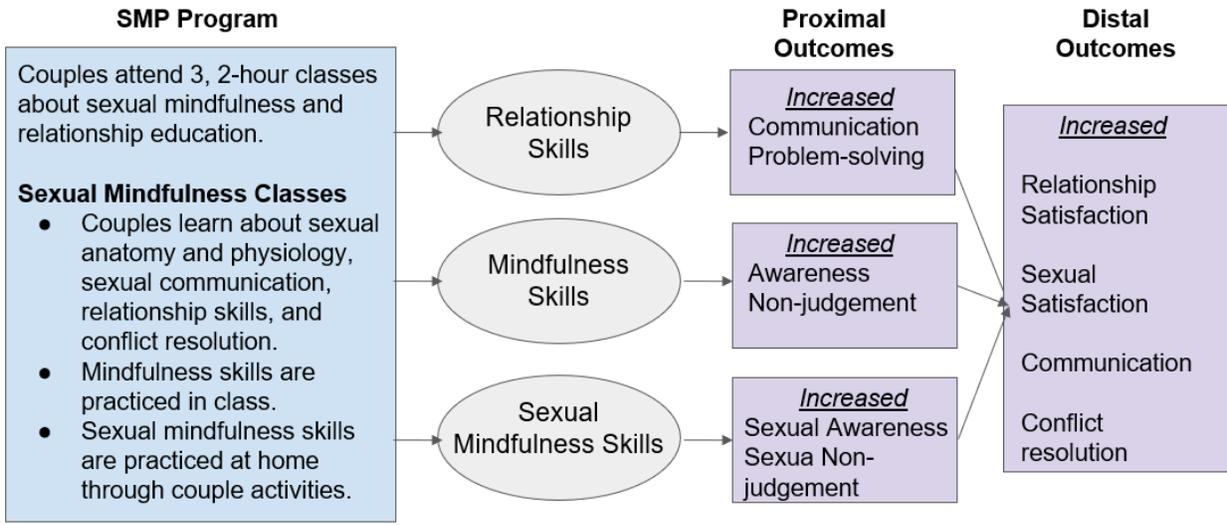
Note. * *N* = Participants who completed the survey only or the survey and interview.

Table 3. Numeric Content Analysis of Interview Themes and Subthemes

Theme	Subtheme	# Coding References	# Out of 12 Couples	Average # References per Couple
1. Class Experience		105	12	8.75
	A) Positive Experience	51	12	4.25
	B) New Mindset and Knowledge	34	7	4.86
	C) Facilitator and Participant Interactions	20	10	2
2. Relationship Impacts		124	12	10.33
	A) Improved Communication	42	6	7
	B) Improved Relationship and	45	11	4.09

	Sexual Satisfaction			
	C) Increased	37	11	3.36
	Relational and Sexual Mindfulness			
3. Suggestions		27	11	2.45
	A) More Content/Classes	16	8	2
	B) Fewer Classes	3	3	1
	C) Increased Participation and Connection	8	3	2.6
Total Codes		256		

Figure 1. Sexual Mindfulness Project Logic Model



Appendix

Table A

Couple (F/M)	Home work	Pre/Post Sexual Mindfulness Awareness	Pre/Post Sexual Mindfulness Non-Judgment	Pre/Post Relationship Satisfaction	Pre/Post Sexual Satisfaction	Pre/Post Sexual Communication	Pre/Post General Communication
1	75%	4.5 / 4.75 3 / 4	1.3 / 1 ^b 3 / 1.3 ^b	4.25 / 5 3.5 / 5	3.6 / 3.8 3.2 / 4.5	2.75 / 3.42 4 / 4.8	4 / 4.8 3.8 / 5
2	100%	3.75 / 4.75 3 / 4.75	2 / 1.7 ^b 3 / 1.3 ^b	3.25 / 4.75 2.75 / 5.5	3.9 / 4.7 3.1 / 4.6	3.92 / 4.6 3 / 4.5	3.8 / 4.7 2.7 / 4.7
3	100%	4.75 / 4.75 ^a 3 / 4.75	2.6 / 3 3.3 / 4.3	5.75 / 6 5.25 / 6	4.3 / 5 3.3 / 4.9	5 / 5 4.1 / 4.9	3.7 / 3.8 3.7 / 4.3
4	75%	3.25 / 5 1.5 / 4.5	3 / 1 ^b 1 / 3	4.75 / 6 3.25 / 5.5	3.1 / 4.8 2 / 4.8	3.75 / 4.92 2.42 / 5	4.8 / 5 1.7 / 5
5	75%	. / 5 . / 5	. / 1 1 / 1 ^a	. / 5 . / 6	. / 5 . / 5	. / 5 . / 5	. / 5 . / 5

6	75%	2.25 / 4.75 4 / 4.75	3 / 1.3 ^b 1.6 / 3.3	3 / 5 3.5 / 5.5	2.4 / 4.8 3.5 / 4.8	2.25 / 4.6 4.2 / 5	2 / 4.5 2.5 / 5
7	75%	4.75 / 5 3.5 / 4.75	2.3 / 4.3 1.6 / 3.6	5 / 5.75 3 / 4	4 / 4.7 2.7 / 3.7	4.7 / 5 1.7 / 3.3	4.8 / 5 1.5 / 3.7
8	100%	2.5 / 5 2.75 / 4.75	4 / 1.3 ^b 1.6 / 5	2.75 / 5.75 2.5 / 5.75	2.9 / 5 2.8 / 4.7	2.92 / 5 2.6 / 5	2.7 / 5 2.3 / 4.3
9	75%	4.5 / 5 1.75 / 5	2 / 1.3 ^b 2 / 5	4.75 / 5 3.5 / 5	3.6 / 4.4 2.7 / 4.5	3.6 / 4.6 2.25 / 5	4.8 / 5 2 / 5
10	100%	4.5 / 5 2.5 / 5	2.6 / 1.3 ^b 1 / 4.6	5 / 5 ^a 2.25 / 5	4.2 / 4.9 2.7 / 4.9	4.25 / 4.92 2.5 / 4.75	4.7 / 5 2.3 / 4.8
11	75%	1.25 / 4.75 1.5 / 4.5	3.3 / 3.3 ^a 4.6 / 1.3 ^b	3.75 / 5 1.25 / 4.25	1.3 / 4.5 1.2 / 4.6	1.6 / 4.92 4 / 5	1.2 / 4.8 1.7 / 4.8

12	75%	2.5 / 5	3 / 1 ^b	2.25 / 5.25	3.4 / 4.2	3.5 / 4.6	3 / 4.2
		./ 3	./ 2.3	./ 4.5	./ 2.8	2.92 / 3.7	3.2 / 3.7

Note. ^a No change ^b Negative change