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Honors Thesis

AN EXAMINATION OF THE ASSOCIATIONS BETWEEN RELATIONSHIP
EDUCATION, TRUST, COMMUNICATION, RELATIONSHIP SATISFACTION,
AND SEXUAL SATISFACTION

by
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Submitted to Brigham Young University in partial fulfillment of graduation requirements
for University Honors

Department of Family Life
Brigham Young University
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ABSTRACT

AN EXAMINATION OF THE ASSOCIATIONS BETWEEN RELATIONSHIP
EDUCATION, TRUST, COMMUNICATION, RELATIONSHIP SATISFACTION,
AND SEXUAL SATISFACTION

Samantha Baker

Department of Family Life

Bachelor of Science in Neuroscience, Minor in Family Life

Relationship education courses are commonly used by couples seeking to increase their relationship and sexual satisfaction. In this study, I examined the mediating roles of trust and communication between marriage education classes and relationship and sexual satisfaction. This study used data from the Couple Relationships and Transition Experiences (CREATE) study, a longitudinal, nationally representative survey of newlywed couples. While the present study did not find a significant relationship between marriage preparation and relationship and sexual satisfaction, it does not rule out the possibility of a relationship existing due to some limitations of the present study. This study did find significant associations between trust and communication and relationship and sexual satisfaction. Additional research will be necessary to determine whether the hypotheses set forth in this study can be supported.

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An Examination of the Associations Between Relationship Education, Trust, Communication, Relationship Satisfaction, and Sexual Satisfaction

The majority of American young adults today see happy marriage as an ideal but are skeptical of its occurrence in reality (Helweg-Larsen et al., 2011). Divorce rates were on the rise for several decades but have recently begun to fall, largely due to the rise in cohabitation rates and decline in marriage rates (Gurrentz, 2018; Wang, 2020). Some couples are at higher risk of divorce due to factors including having parents who divorced, having parents who were physically aggressive towards their spouses, having low incomes, being nonreligious, and engaging in premarital cohabitation (Halford et al., 2006; Halford et al., 2001; Storksen et al., 2007; Williamson et al., 2018). Premarital education courses seek to provide couples with the information and skills they need to build happier, healthier marriages, such as increased communication skills, conflict resolution skills, and sexual education (Carroll & Doherty, 2003; Farnam et al., 2011; Fathi et al., 2021; Madison & Madison, 2013; Williams et al., 1999). Couples at higher risk of divorce especially need the information provided in these courses so they can end destructive patterns that may have been in their families for generations (Halford et al., 2006; Storksen et al., 2007; Sullivan & Bradbury, 1997).

Premarital education courses are generally effective at producing increases in marital quality, both immediate and short-term (Blanchard et al., 2009; Carlson et al., 2014; Carroll & Doherty, 2003; Farnam et al., 2011; Halford et al., 2001; Neumann et al., 2018; Sayers et al., 1998; Schumm et al., 1998; Stanley et al., 2006). Regarding long-term effects, the literature is more conflicted. Positive effects on relationship satisfaction resulting from relationship education programs tend to decline over time (Neumann et al.,

2018; Stanley et al., 2014; Sullivan & Bradbury, 1997; Williams et al., 1999), although that trend is not unanimously observed (Halford et al., 2001; Stanley et al., 2014).

However, some studies observed differences in the effects of relationship education based on the couples' risk of divorce (Halford et al., 2001; Stanley et al., 2014). In these studies, couples that are initially at high risk for divorce are likely to benefit more from relationship education than couples with low risk factors. In one study, high-risk couples that completed the Self-Regulatory Premarital Relationship Enhancement Program (Self-PREP) had higher relationship satisfaction than the high-risk control couples at a follow-up four years later, while this trend was not observed between the intervention and control groups of low-risk couples (Halford et al., 2001). Another study found that couples with higher risk of divorce were less likely to be divorced two years after completing a relationship education program than the control couples, although they had not maintained an increase in relationship satisfaction (Stanley et al., 2014).

The latter trend may be at least partially attributed to the propensity of marriage preparation courses to increase commitment between partners (Burgoyne et al., 2010; Stanley et al., 2006). This increased commitment can be measured even a year after completing a marriage preparation course (Burgoyne et al., 2010). Couples with low incomes who participate in premarital education tend to seek out couples' therapy at higher rates and at earlier stages of distress than low-income couples who did not participate in premarital education (Williamson et al., 2018). Willingness to seek professional help for marital issues could be a representation of this increased

commitment and would certainly help explain the lower divorce rates among these couples.

Differences in effects of relationship education can also be seen for couples in high distress. A review of 19 studies found consistent evidence that couples who have higher relationship distress when starting a relationship education program see greater increases in relationship satisfaction than couples with low relationship distress (Palmer & Hawkins, 2019). Carlson and colleagues (2017) found gender differences in the role of relationship distress as a moderator, observing that relationship distress did function as a moderator for women who began a relationship education program with high relational distress. For men and for women who were not initially experiencing high relational distress, distress did not function as a moderator, but the relationship education program still increased their relationship satisfaction. The researchers found a potential ceiling effect for men in particular, as the men in their sample entered the program with relatively high relationship satisfaction.

Marriage preparation classes benefit couples in several ways. These classes occasionally include a sexual education component, which has been found to improve sexual quality, at least in couples that started with little or no knowledge of sexual anatomy, functioning, and techniques (Farnam et al., 2011). Overall, having a healthy view of sexuality is key to creating sexual and relational well-being, so marriage preparation programs that foster healthy views of sexuality may lead to greater marital satisfaction (Hernandez et al., 2011).

Another way marriage preparation programs benefit couples is through a focus on improving couple communication and conflict resolution skills (Williams et al., 1999).

The Premarital Relationship Enhancement Program (PREP) is one example of a marriage preparation program that has been shown to improve communication skills in couples (Carroll & Doherty, 2003; Fathi et al., 2021; Madison & Madison, 2013) and even across cultures (Fathi et al., 2021). This focus on communication is highly effective in improving marital quality, as communication is a predictor of marital satisfaction (Litzinger & Gordon, 2005). Communication is also an important part of a sexual relationship; Kleinplatz and colleagues (2009) found that a key component of optimal sex is having “extraordinary communication.” In fact, the positive influence of communication on sexual relationships requires effort from both partners, because partners’ communication patterns influence each other’s sexual satisfaction (Larson et al., 1998).

In addition to communication, marriage education programs may engender greater elements of trust within the marriage. Although not frequently studied, trust is a salient factor in maintaining marital satisfaction in long-lasting marriages (Roizblatt et al., 1999). Trust can be separated in three components: faith (belief that partner will act in caring ways in the future), dependability (partner has a history of acting in caring ways), and predictability (Rempel et al., 1985). Trust between partners may naturally increase during a marriage preparation or enhancement course as they learn more about how to act in caring ways, develop greater dependability as they begin to implement what they have learned, and grow in faith that their partner will act in those ways.

Present Study

In the present study, I examine the relationship between marriage education classes and relationship and sexual satisfaction, with trust and communication acting as

potential mediators. Trust and communication may influence how well relationship education is implemented in a marriage, thus influencing its effects on sexual and relationship satisfaction. Therefore, I hypothesize

H1: Participation in relationship education will be positively associated with relationship satisfaction and sexual satisfaction.

H2: Trust and communication will mediate the association between relationship education and relationship satisfaction and sexual satisfaction.

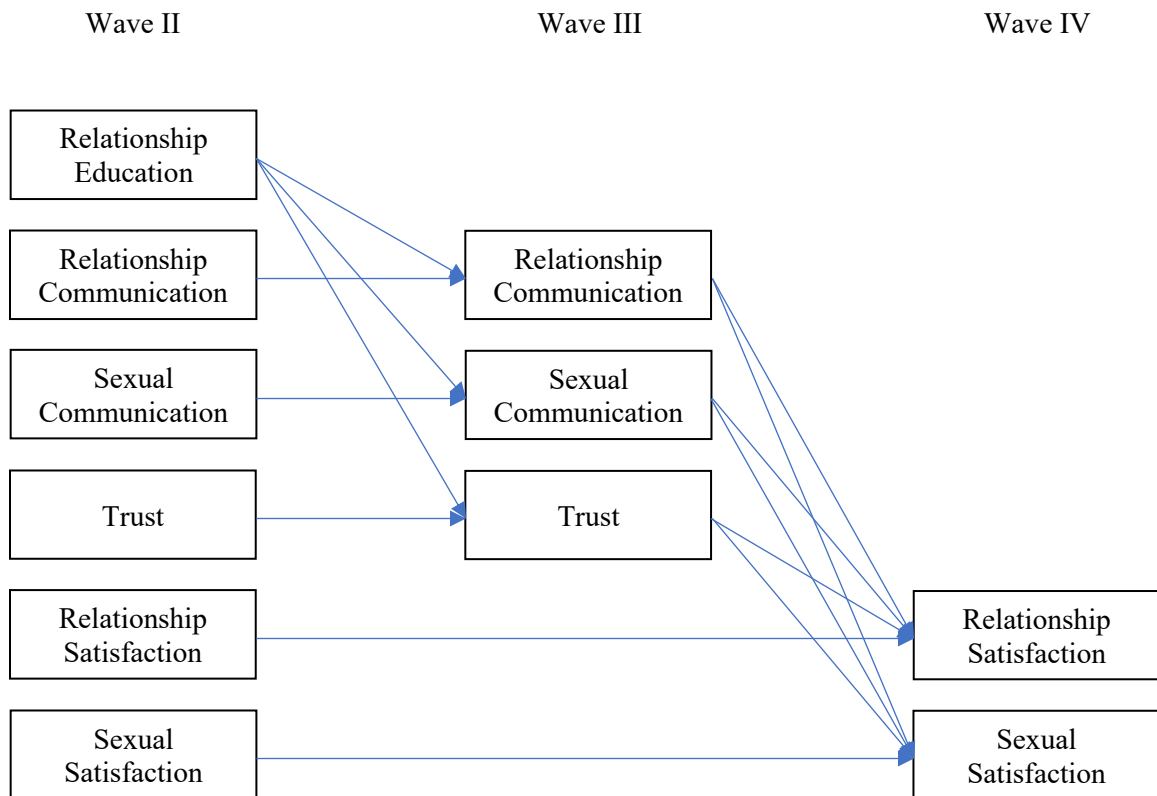


Figure 1. *Conceptual Model*

Methods

Participants

The participants for this study were taken from the Couple Relationships and Transition Experiences (CREATE) study. The study was approved by all appropriate Institutional Review Boards and relevant state agencies where required by law and research ethics. CREATE is a nationally representative study of newlywed couples, consisting of both heterosexual (total $N = 2,110$) and same-sex (total $N = 67$) dyadic marital relationships (total $N = 2,177$) at Wave I (see Yorgason, James, & Holmes, 2018). Originally, there were 2,181 couples, but four couples later asked to be removed from the study, bringing the sample size to 2,177. In Wave II, data was obtained from 1,819 households for a retention rate of 83.6%. Of the 1,819 households, data from both members of the dyad were received in 1,695 (93%) cases, and data from one member of the dyad were received in the remaining 124 (7%) cases. In Wave III, data was obtained from 1,753 households for a retention rate of 80.5%. Of the 1,753 households, data from both members of the dyad were received in 1,513 (86%) cases, and data from one member of the dyad were received in the remaining 240 (14%) cases. In Wave IV, data was obtained from 1,707 households for an overall retention rate of 78.4%. Of the 1,707 households, data from both members of the dyad were received in 1,476 (86.5%) cases, and data from one member of the dyad were received in the remaining 271 (15.9%) cases.

Data collection for Wave II started in April 2017, Wave III in May 2018, and Wave IV in June 2019. Participants were invited to complete each survey online approximately 1 year after they completed the prior wave. The Dillman survey method

was used in Wave II, Wave III, and Wave IV, with multiple contacts (text-message, E-mail, U.S. mail, phone calls) made across time (Dillman, Smyth, & Christian, 2008). Upon completing the contacting protocol for each group, the CREATE research team sent a text and emailed another invitation offering an extra \$10 to couples who completed the survey in the following week. Participants were asked to read and then acknowledge consent to participate in the study and emailed a \$50.00 Amazon gift card (\$100 per couple) upon completion of the survey.

We had two sample groups in the present study. The first group contained participants who had received relationship education between Wave I and Wave II of the CREATE study. The second group contained participants who had not received relationship education by Wave IV of the CREATE study. The group who had received relationship education had 382 Partner 1 participants and 320 Partner 2 participants. The group that had not received relationship education had 1001 Partner 1 participants and 1020 Partner 2 participants. This gave us a total of 1383 Partner 1 participants and 1340 Partner 2 participants included in the preliminary sample. The rest of the original CREATE participants were dropped from the study because they did not fit in either of these groups. Generally, Partner 1 refers to the female partner and Partner 2 refers to the male partner, but in same-sex relationships Partner 1 and Partner 2 may be male or female.

We had relatively high rates of missing data. The marriage preparation variable had 38.53% and 40.44% missing for Partner 1 and Partner 2, respectively. The mediators had between 22-29% missing for Partner 1 and between 24-32% missing for Partner 2. The outcome variables had between 22-30% missing for Partner 1 and between 24-34%

missing for Partner 2. Our regression model used listwise deletion to address this, which removed any participants with missing data from the final analysis. For this reason, the final analysis had 816 Partner 1 participants and 788 Partner 2 participants in the relationship satisfaction models and 811 Partner 1 participants and 783 Partner 2 participants in the sexual satisfaction models.

Summary statistics indicated the following descriptive information about the sample at Wave I (see Table 1). The average age for Partner 1 at Wave I was 28.11 years old and the average age for Partner 2 at Wave I was 30.04 years old. The average age at marriage for Partner 1 was 26.70 and the average age at marriage for Partner 2 was 28.59. For 90% of participants, the current relationship was their first marriage, and for the remaining 10%, it was their second or higher marriage for one spouse. In terms of education, 36% of Partner 1 and 29% of Partner 2 participants had a bachelor's degree or higher. Approximately 26% of couples reported an annual income less than \$29,999, 36% reported an annual income between \$30,000-\$59,999, 25% reported an annual income between \$60,000-\$99,999, and 12% reported an annual income greater than \$100,000.

Table 1. *Descriptive Statistics for Study Variables (N (%) or Mean (SD))*

	Took Relationship Education		No Relationship Education	
	Partner 1	Partner 2	Partner 1	Partner 2
Sexual Satisfaction (W2)	3.40 (.94)	3.45 (.95)	3.61 (.92)	3.65 (.84)
Sexual Satisfaction (W4)	3.65 (.88)	3.44 (.96)	3.59 (.88)	3.56 (.85)
Relationship Satisfaction (W2)	3.64 (1.32)	3.62 (1.24)	3.96 (1.23)	4.03 (1.10)
Relationship Satisfaction (W4)	3.79 (1.37)	3.73 (1.32)	3.86 (1.30)	3.99 (1.16)
Relationship Communication (W2)	3.85 (.75)	3.71 (.80)	4.04 (.74)	3.89 (.78)
Relationship Communication (W3)	3.82 (.80)	3.73 (.79)	3.95 (.74)	3.79 (.79)
Sexual Communication (W2)	3.73 (1.00)	3.72 (.99)	3.83 (.95)	3.84 (.89)
Sexual Communication (W3)	3.90 (.93)	3.73 (.84)	3.81 (.95)	3.74 (.95)
Trust (W2)	1.52 (1.35)	1.49 (1.42)	1.62 (1.38)	1.85 (1.20)
Trust (W3)	1.39 (1.47)	1.34 (1.51)	1.57 (1.42)	1.79 (1.23)
Age	28.12 (5.27)	30.43 (6.99)	28.11 (5.40)	29.92 (5.77)
Married Age	26.63 (5.36)	28.86 (5.82)	26.72 (5.31)	28.86 (5.82)
Education				
Less than high school	10 (2.62%)	14 (4.38%)	27 (2.70%)	44 (4.31%)
High School	72 (18.85%)	103 (32.19%)	181 (18.08%)	262 (25.69%)
Some College	138 (36.13%)	105 (32.81%)	299 (29.87%)	283 (27.75%)
Associates	51 (13.35%)	23 (7.19%)	111 (11.09%)	110 (10.78%)
Bachelors	71 (18.59%)	53 (16.56%)	247 (24.68%)	213 (20.88%)
Masters	26 (6.81%)	14 (4.38%)	104 (10.39%)	68 (6.67%)
Advanced Degree (JD, PhD, etc)	13 (3.40%)	8 (2.50%)	32 (3.20%)	39 (3.82%)
Income				
\$0-9,999	10 (2.72%)		23 (2.40%)	
\$10,000-19,999	36 (9.78%)		84 (8.78%)	
\$20,000-29,999	49 (13.32%)		101 (10.55%)	
\$30,000-39,999	48 (13.04%)		137 (14.32%)	
\$40,000-49,999	30 (8.15%)		128 (13.38%)	
\$50,000-59,999	14 (3.80%)		64 (6.69%)	
\$60,000-69,999	37 (10.05%)		64 (6.69%)	
\$70,000-79,999	18 (4.89%)		78 (8.15%)	
\$80,000-89,999	10 (2.72)		31 (3.24%)	
\$90,000-99,999	10 (2.72)		40 (4.18%)	
\$100,000-109,999	11 (2.99%)		22 (2.30%)	
\$110,000-119,999	1 (.27%)		9 (.94%)	
\$120,000-129,999	13 (3.53%)		21 (2.19%)	
\$130,000-139,999	9 (2.45%)		35 (3.66%)	
\$140,000-149,999	5 (1.3%)		16 (1.67%)	
Previously Married				
Yes	41 (11.14%)	31 (9.90%)	86 (8.99%)	87 (8.92%)
No	327 (88.86%)	251 (80.19%)	871 (91.01%)	877 (89.95%)

Measures

The key measures used in this study include marriage preparation, trust, relationship communication, sexual communication, relationship satisfaction, and sexual satisfaction. Baselines for each of these measures are from Wave II of the CREATE study (see Figure 1). The mediators (trust, relationship communication, sexual communication) are also from Wave III, and the outcome measures (relationship satisfaction, sexual satisfaction) are also from Wave IV. All demographic measures are from Wave I.

Marriage Preparation

The marriage preparation variable was used to define our groups. Participants were asked “Have you been involved in a college class, community/church sponsored workshop, in counseling, or self-directed learning experiences, designed to help you prepare for or improve your marriage?”

Participants were included in the group who had not received relationship education if they had never participated in any form of marriage preparation or improvement, indicated by a response of “no” (1) at Waves I and II. Participants were included in the group who had received relationship education if they had answered “no” (1) at Wave I but “yes” (>1) at Wave II. Participants with other variations of responses were dropped from this study. This was done to control for the timing of the marriage improvement classes, so all participants would receive it around the same time. Also, this prevented having a large amount of time pass between them taking the class and the measurement of the relationship outcomes at Wave IV, as marriage improvement classes

may have diminishing effects with time (Neumann et al., 2018; Stanley et al., 2014; Sullivan & Bradbury, 1997; Williams et al., 1999).

Trust

The trust construct was created using five items from the Rempel et al. (1985) scale. Statements included: “I can rely on my partner to keep the promises he/she makes to me,” “I am certain that my partner would not cheat on me, even if the opportunity arose and there was no chance that he/she would get caught,” “When I share my problems with my partner, I know he/she will respond in a loving way even before I say anything,” “Whenever we have to make an important decision in a situation we have never encountered before, I know my partner will be concerned about my welfare,” and “I can rely on my partner to react in a positive way when I expose my weaknesses to him/her.” The participants were asked to respond on a 7-point Likert scale with -3 (strongly disagree), 0 (Neutral), and 3 (strongly agree). For Partner 1, the Cronbach’s alpha was $\alpha = .89$ at Wave II and $\alpha = .90$ at Wave III. For Partner 2, the Cronbach’s alpha was $\alpha = .89$ at Wave II and $\alpha = .90$ at Wave III.

Relationship & Sexual Communication

Relationship communication and sexual communication were analyzed as separate variables. To create the relationship communication construct, participants were asked “How are YOU in your relationship?” in reference to the following four statements: “I am able to listen to my partner in an understanding way,” “In most matters, I understand what my partner is trying to say,” “When I talk to my partner I can say what I want in a clear manner,” and “I sit down with my partner and just talk things over.”

Responses were recorded on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from “never” (1) to “very often” (5). The items came from an article on sexual restraint (Busby et al., 2010) and from the RELATE Premarital Questionnaire Part 3 (Busby et al., 2001). For Partner 1, the Cronbach’s alpha was $\alpha = .84$ at Wave II and $\alpha = .84$ at Wave III. For Partner 2, the Cronbach’s alpha was $\alpha = .85$ at Wave II and $\alpha = .85$ at Wave III.

The sexual communication construct was created from two items: “I talk openly with my partner about our sexual relationship” and “We are able to agree about what is acceptable in our sexual relationship.” Responses were recorded on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from “never” (1) to “very often” (5). For Partner 1, the Cronbach’s alpha was $\alpha = .71$ at Wave II and $\alpha = .72$ at Wave III. For Partner 2, the Cronbach’s alpha was $\alpha = .72$ at Wave II and $\alpha = .67$ at Wave III.

Relationship Satisfaction

The relationship satisfaction construct was measured using four items from the Funk and Rogge (2007) relationship scale, including, “In general, how satisfied are you with your relationship?” “How rewarding is your relationship with your partner?” “I have a warm and comfortable relationship with my partner,” and “Please select the answer that describes the degree of happiness, all things considered, of your relationship.” For the first two items, responses ranged from “not at all” (0) to “completely” (5). The third item, responses ranged from “not at all true” (0) to “completely true” (5). For the fourth item, responses ranged from “extremely unhappy” (0) to “perfect” (6). For Partner 1, the Cronbach’s alpha was $\alpha = .95$ at Wave II and $\alpha = .95$ at Wave IV. For Partner 2, the Cronbach’s alpha was $\alpha = .94$ at Wave II and $\alpha = .95$ at Wave IV.

Sexual Satisfaction

The sexual satisfaction construct was created using the following four items: “How satisfied are you with how often you currently have sex with your partner?” “How satisfied are you with the amount of creativity and variety in your sexual relationship with your partner?” “How satisfied are you with the pattern of who initiates sex in your relationship?” and “How satisfied are you with the amount of love and affection there is in your sexual relationship with your partner?” Responses ranged from “very dissatisfied” (1) to “very satisfied” (5). For Partner 1, the Cronbach’s alpha was $\alpha = .84$ at Wave II and $\alpha = .84$ at Wave IV. For Partner 2, the Cronbach’s alpha was $\alpha = .86$ at Wave II and $\alpha = .87$ at Wave IV.

Control Variables

The controls in this study included participants’ age, their age at marriage, whether they were previously married, their highest completed education level, and their household’s gross annual income. Participants responded to the first two variables with a whole number. Participants answered two separate questions about whether they or their spouse had been married before their current marriage as either “yes” (1) or “no” (2). The education variable had responses ranging from “less than high school” (1) to “advanced degree (JD, PhD, PsyD, etc.)” (7). The income variable asked for their gross monthly household income, which was later recoded as an annual income within brackets of \$10,000 (i.e. \$30,000-\$39,000).

Data Analysis

We used Stata version 17 to analyze the data (StataCorp, 2021). After examining the predictors, mediators, and outcome variables using histograms, box plots, and skewness and kurtosis tests for normality, the data was determined to be normally distributed. We also used the “extremes” function to identify outliers, and there were none of concern.

We estimated correlations between the predictor and the mediating variables to assess for multicollinearity. We then estimated correlations between the predictor and outcome variables. In all cases, we found no evidence of multicollinearity.

We estimated four regression models, one for each partner’s sexual and relationship satisfaction. We built each model starting with the predictor and outcome variable and added each mediator and control variable progressively to identify the potential change each one produced.

We also conducted a post-hoc test where we estimated the four regression models again with the same-sex couples dropped from the sample. This was done to ensure that the small population of same-sex couples had not significantly altered the results.

Results

Estimated correlations are listed in Table 2. All correlations between the mediators and the outcome variables were statistically significant. Some of the correlations involving the predictor variable were statistically significant, while others were not.

In terms of effect sizes, Partner 1’s trust at Wave III had a moderate positive association with their own relationship satisfaction and a small positive association with

their own sexual satisfaction. Partner 2's trust at Wave III had a small positive association with their own relationship satisfaction. Partner 1's sexual communication at Wave III had small positive associations with their own sexual and relationship satisfaction. Partner 2's sexual communication at Wave III had small positive associations with their own sexual and relationship satisfaction, although the former bordered on moderate. Partner 1's relationship communication at Wave III had small positive associations with their own sexual and relationship satisfaction. Partner 2's relationship communication at Wave III also had small positive associations with their own sexual and relationship satisfaction. Out of the controls, age had a moderate positive association with Partner 1's sexual satisfaction and a small positive association with Partner 2's sexual satisfaction and relationship satisfaction. Married age had a moderate negative association with Partner 2's relationship satisfaction and a small negative association with Partner 2's sexual satisfaction. For both partners, their own relationship satisfaction at Wave II had a moderate positive association with their own relationship satisfaction at Wave IV, and both partners' own sexual satisfaction at Wave II had a large positive association with their own sexual satisfaction at Wave IV.

Although the overall regression models had R^2 values ranging from .40-.44 and were statistically significant, all four models having F-test values of .000, the marriage preparation variable had small regression coefficients and nonsignificant p-values in all four models (see Tables 3-6).

The post-hoc analyses with the same-sex couples dropped from the sample displayed similar regression coefficients, significance, and effect sizes to the results of the mixed sample described above.

Table 2. Correlations for Partner 1 and Partner 2

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Marriage Preparation	--	-.071*	-0.054	-.099***	-.080*	-.067*	-0.031	-0.034	-0.009	-.084**	-.117***
2. Sexual Satisfaction (W2)	-.062*	--	.566***	.545***	.373***	.362***	.292***	.663***	.458***	.416***	.288***
3. Sexual Satisfaction (W4)	0.037	.582***	--	.342***	.564***	.220***	.308***	.376***	.447***	.204***	.296***
4. Relationship Satisfaction (W2)	-.093**	.562***	.365***	--	.533***	.590***	.390***	.480***	.341***	.634***	.450***
5. Relationship Satisfaction (W4)	-0.021	.387***	.553***	.560***	--	.355***	.419***	.321***	.355***	.397***	.463***
6. Relationship Communication (W2)	-.076*	.385***	.254***	.606***	.402***	--	.528***	.411***	.296***	.467***	.371***
7. Relationship Communication (W3)	-0.059	.288***	.330***	.370***	.409***	.535***	--	.287***	.406***	.327***	.454***
8. Sexual Communication (W2)	-0.023	.645***	.421***	.493***	.318***	.437***	.326***	--	.541***	.414***	.258***
9. Sexual Communication (W3)	0.045	.422***	.445***	.310***	.341***	.308***	.403***	.562***	--	.254***	.390***
10. Trust (W2)	-0.027	.427***	.259***	.733***	.471***	.532***	.370***	.399***	.224***	--	.549***
11. Trust (W3)	-0.046	.284***	.315***	.527***	.550***	.404***	.495***	.254***	.379***	.630***	--

Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Table 3. *Regression Analysis for Partner 1's Relationship Satisfaction at Wave IV*

	B	β	p	95% CI
Relationship Satisfaction (W2)	.432	.377	.000	[.336, .528]
Trust (W2)	-.069	-.067	.115	[-.154, .0168]
Trust (W3)	.335	.343	.000	[.262, .409]
Sexual Communication (W2)	-.016	-.011	.750	[-.115, .0831]
Sexual Communication (W3)	.143	.105	.002	[.0514, .235]
Relationship Communication (W2)	.016	.009	.815	[-.119, .151]
Relationship Communication (W3)	.104	.059	.086	[-.0147, .223]
Age	.045	.178	.107	[-.00965, .0988]
Married Age	-.042	-.169	.124	[-.0965, .0116]
Education	-.022	-.025	.426	[-.0745, .0315]
Income	.003	.007	.809	[-.0192, .0246]
Previously Married	.070	.016	.590	[-.184, .323]
Marriage Preparation	-.027	-.006	.809	[-.247, .193]
R ²	.44***			

Table 4. *Regression Analysis for Partner 1's Sexual Satisfaction at Wave IV*

	B	β	p	95% CI
Sexual Satisfaction (W2)	.484	.481	.000	[.410, .5586]
Trust (W2)	-.049	-.071	.083	[-.105, .0065]
Trust (W3)	.099	.148	.000	[.0473, .151]
Sexual Communication (W2)	-.026	-.026	.523	[-.104, .0531]
Sexual Communication (W3)	.159	.170	.000	[.0936, .225]
Relationship Communication (W2)	-.058	-.047	.222	[-.150, .0349]
Relationship Communication (W3)	.119	.098	.006	[.0340, .204]
Age	.043	.253	.028	[.00462, .0820]
Married Age	-.042	-.244	.034	[-.0806, -.00325]
Education	-.005	-.008	.806	[-.0427, .0332]
Income	-.017	-.068	.034	[-.0325, -.00125]
Previously Married	.328	.011	.722	[-.148, .214]
Marriage Preparation	.067	.023	.405	[-.0907, .224]
R ²	.40***			

Table 5. *Regression Analysis for Partner 2's Relationship Satisfaction at Wave IV*

	B	β	p	95% CI
Relationship Satisfaction (W2)	.401	.354	.000	[.309, .494]
Trust (W2)	.024	.023	.552	[-.0541, .101]
Trust (W3)	.159	.164	.000	[.0889, .106]
Sexual Communication (W2)	.013	.010	.790	[-.0810, .106]
Sexual Communication (W3)	.128	.101	.005	[.0384, .217]
Relationship Communication (W2)	-.048	-.031	.426	[-.168, .0709]
Relationship Communication (W3)	.268	.177	.000	[.161, .374]
Age	.040	.195	.123	[-.0108, .0903]
Married Age	-.048	-.236	.060	[-.0990, .00204]
Education	.054	.072	.024	[-.007, .101]
Income	-.002	-.007	.826	[-.0224, .0179]
Previously Married	-.187	-.049	.099	[-.410, .0356]
Marriage Preparation	-.129	-.031	.266	[-.357, .0985]
R ²	.40***			

Table 6. *Regression Analysis for Partner 2's Sexual Satisfaction at Wave IV*

	B	β	p	95% CI
Sexual Satisfaction (W2)	.499	.479	.000	[.421, .576]
Trust (W2)	-.033	-.044	.224	[-.0874, .0205]
Trust (W3)	.034	.046	.199	[-.0177, .0848]
Sexual Communication (W2)	-.079	-.081	.044	[-.157, .00207]
Sexual Communication (W3)	.205	.217	.000	[.139, .271]
Relationship Communication (W2)	-.014	-.011	.753	[-.0980, .0710]
Relationship Communication (W3)	.161	.141	.000	[.0818, .240]
Age	.024	.156	.205	[-.013, .0616]
Married Age	-.024	-.155	.207	[-.0615, .0133]
Education	-.014	-.025	.428	[-.0492, .0209]
Income	-.016	-.065	.041	[-.0306, -.00064]
Previously Married	-.015	-.005	.860	[-.179, .150]
Marriage Preparation	-.133	-.043	.125	[-.302, .0367]
R ²	.41***			

Discussion

No significant association was found between participation in relationship education classes and relationship and sexual satisfaction. While this finding was not expected, it could be attributed to the weakness of the marriage preparation measure. Because it was a single binary response, this variable did not account for the length of the programs, the content of the programs, or whether the participants did the homework assigned. Each of these factors would play a role in the effectiveness of a particular program. However, it is possible that relationship education classes do not increase sexual satisfaction and relationship satisfaction for newlywed couples. If this is the case, then relationship education programs need to be adapted to address these couples' needs more effectively.

Despite no support for hypothesis one, trust and communication were significantly associated with relationship satisfaction and sexual satisfaction. We know that relationship education is intended to teach participants how to improve both trust and communication (Carroll & Doherty, 2003; Fathi et al., 2021; Madison & Madison, 2013; Williams et al., 1999).

While often not explicitly focused on in relationship education, trust can be built during relationship education courses as partners increase in dependability, faith, and predictability (Rempel et al., 1985). The present study has found that trust is positively associated with sexual satisfaction and relationship satisfaction, which implies that marriages that develop greater trust would see an increase in both sexual satisfaction and relationship satisfaction. Relationship education programs would likely be more effective

in producing increases in sexual satisfaction and relationship satisfaction if they add content that focuses on building trust between partners.

Communication is one of the primary focus areas in many relationship education programs (Allen et al., 2012; Bader et al., 1980; Blanchard et al., 2009; Carroll & Doherty, 2003; Farnam et al., 2011; Fathi et al., 2021; Madison & Madison, 2013; Williams et al., 1999). The present study has replicated the findings of other researchers with evidence that communication is positively associated with both relationship satisfaction (Litzinger & Gordon, 2005) and sexual satisfaction (Kleinplatz et al., 2009; Larson et al., 1998). Programs that focus on communication would thus see an increase in relationship and sexual satisfaction, which is indeed the case in the aforementioned studies.

Limitations and Future Research

Because of the weakness of the relationship education measure we used, it is not clear if these specific participants increased their communication skills and trust. Future research could use a more nuanced measure of relationship education to evaluate whether relationship education increases trust and communication. This measure could include variables such as length of program, percent of sessions attended by the participant, content of programs, type of administrator (religious leader, licensed therapist, professional researcher, etc.), and amount of outside homework assigned and completed by the participant.

This limitation could also be mitigated by conducting a study where all participants complete the same relationship education program. This may create enough

standardization to observe significant effects. Results from such a study would not be generalizable to all relationship education programs, but they would give insight into the effectiveness of a particular program. Additional research could determine which aspects of the program were the most beneficial, and other programs could be adapted to align with new findings.

An additional limitation of this study was the lack of differentiation between distressed and non-distressed couples. It is possible that couples that were not in high distress when participating in a relationship education program did not have significant increases in relationship satisfaction and sexual satisfaction due to ceiling effects. Because these couples were not separated from couples that were in high distress when participating in a relationship education program, the average relationship satisfaction of the group may have appeared to be more static than it actually was.

A third limitation of this study was the high amount of missing data. It is common in psychology research to have 15-20% missing data (Enders, 2003). However, our rates of missing data were much higher. The relationship education variable had the highest amount of data missing, which created the large drop in participant numbers from the original sample to the preliminary sample. Among the other variables, there were no variables that had significantly higher rates of missing data than the others. This negates the possibility of the average participant being overly uncomfortable answering particular questions about their relationships. A future study could be done using a statistical analysis program that deals with missing data in a way other than listwise deletion, such as full information maximum likelihood, to use more of the available survey data.

Strengths

Despite its limitations, the present study has many strengths. The data was collected in a nationally representative survey. This eliminates potential sample bias due to participants being too similar. It also allows us to generalize findings to groups beyond those who are most typically studied, namely Americans who are white and middle-class. Additionally, this study uses longitudinal data, following the same couples over four waves of surveys. This allowed us to use a mediation model that stretched over multiple years, using data from prior waves as baselines for later waves. Finally, this study had a large sample size. This permits greater confidence in our findings of associations between trust and communication and relationship satisfaction and sexual satisfaction.

Relationship education has the potential to enhance trust, communication, relationship satisfaction, and sexual satisfaction. Understanding the mechanisms by which these components interact could have a great positive impact on many marriages and families across the United States and elsewhere. This study was a step along this path, and continuing research can provide greater illumination on this topic.

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