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Individual Personality and Emotional Readiness Characteristics Associated with Marriage

Preparation Outcomes of Perceived Helpfulness and Change

Megan Ann Rogers

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

Individual Personality and Emotional Readiness Characteristics Associated with Marriage Preparation Outcomes of Perceived Helpfulness and Change

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Little is known about the role that personality and emotional readiness factors may play in participation and outcomes of premarital education programs in varying formats. Data collected via the RELATionship Evaluation Questionnaire (RELATE: Busby et al., 2001) was used to analyze how personality and emotional readiness factors affect perceived change and helpfulness in self-directed and workshop formats of premarital education for 384 individuals who participated in such interventions. Depression was significantly and negatively related to participant perception of positive change and helpfulness in a workshop setting. Kindness was positively and significantly related to perceived positive change in both workshop and self-directed formats, and income was negatively and significantly related to perceived positive change in workshop settings. Anxiety was significantly and positively related to perceived helpfulness in workshop settings. Implications of these findings are discussed. More research is needed to compare these results to other formats of premarital interventions, such as classes and counseling formats, and to more diverse population samples.

Key Words: premarital education, marriage preparation outcomes, MRE, RELATE, personality, emotional readiness, helpfulness, change.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction.....	1
Literature Review.....	3
Conceptual Framework	3
Current Study	9
Method	10
Participants.....	10
Procedure and Measures.....	11
Analysis.....	15
Results.....	16
Discussion.....	18
Limitations and Implications.....	22
Conclusion	25
References.....	27
Appendix.....	32

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1.....	32
Table 2.....	33
Table 3.....	34

Introduction

A substantial body of research has found that marriage and relationship education (MRE) is effective in helping prepare couples for marriage as well as increase relationship satisfaction and communication skills among married couple participants (Hawkins et al., 2008; Fawcett, Hawkins, Blanchard, & Carroll, 2010). MRE has been defined "broadly as including both skills-based programs for the prevention and remediation of marital distress and marital support groups normally labeled as marriage enrichment" (Larson, 2004, p. 421). While such marriage and relationship interventions have traditionally been facilitated in a classroom, workshop, or clergy setting, research has been investigating other formats that could help target specific populations. Recent research has shown that self-directed methods are also effective (Duncan, Steed, & Needham, 2009). It is also relevant to note that MRE not only deals with groups and self-directed approaches, but also includes assessment approaches as well. One such assessment is the RELATionship Evaluation Questionnaire (RELATE: Busby, Holman, & Taniguchi, 2001) which works as a relationship assessment tool to help participants learn about their relationships, including both assets and liabilities.

In addition to this literature, research is emerging about the characteristics of participants who attend certain marriage interventions, and what kinds of intervention experiences are best suited for different participants. For example, Duncan, Childs, and Larson (2010) found that a variety of interventions receiving attention in the published literature (i.e., for-credit college classes, community workshops, premarital counseling, and self-directed approaches) are seen by marriage preparation participants as helpful and change producing. Duncan, Larson, and McAllister (2014) identified several individual personality characteristics and emotional readiness factors associated with the selection of specific types of marriage preparation

interventions. Personality traits assessed included anxiety, depression, extroversion, flexibility, kindness, maturity, organization, and self-esteem. Other than self-esteem, these traits coincide with the “Big Five” factors of personality (McCrae & John, 1992). This study also showed between-intervention differences associated with age, gender, and education. Left untested, however, were how these characteristics and other predictors are associated with intervention outcomes.

Preliminary research has been conducted to assess what role personality and emotional readiness factors may play in the outcomes of self-directed MRE (Rogers & Duncan, 2014). This study indicated that extroversion in males and females was significantly related to participants’ perceived individual, couple, and context change and perceived helpfulness. These and other studies have set the stage for further inquiry into what intervention types may be most helpful and change producing for specific people with certain individual characteristics. Knowledge of this may aid relationship educators in creating interventions that are a better fit for certain types of individuals in terms of what the participant perceives as useful, as well as actual outcomes.

In this study, I seek to address how personality and emotional readiness characteristics, in addition to specific demographic factors, are associated with perceived positive change and perceived helpfulness within and across two marriage preparation education formats. For the purpose of this study, we differentiate helpfulness from change, with perceived helpfulness being how helpful overall they found an intervention to be, and change being the specific increases in knowledge and application they perceived from participating in the intervention. We have chosen to use this method of self-report because we believe how the participant perceives results of an intervention is important (Pratt, McGuigan, & Katzev, 2000).

Due to a large portion of participants in the RELATE sample being college students, participants who had only experienced involvement in a classroom setting were eliminated from the current study. Those having solely been involved in premarital counseling were also eliminated. This was due to the possibility that those involved in counseling may have more severe emotional problems. Self-directed and workshop settings were specifically picked to be examined with the hopes that it may be more comparable and representative of a general community sample.

Literature Review

Conceptual Framework

Two models served as a conceptual basis for this study. The first is based on a summary of over 50 years of research on premarital predictors of marital quality authored by Busby, Holman, and Taniguchi (2001). These scholars have suggested that this research can best be understood from an ecosystemic-developmental perspective. This perspective organizes existing research into a model comprised of four contexts, seen as being the most important contexts for premarital and marital relationships: individual, couple, family, and sociocultural (Duncan et al., 2010).

The *individual context* is comprised of “inherent individual characteristics (e.g. age and gender), personality traits and emotional health (e.g., kindness and neuroticism), and beliefs and attitudes (e.g., beliefs about marriage and family life and gender roles)” (p. 624). The *couple context* entails the process or patterns of interaction such as how the couple handles conflict, communicates, or regulates affect. These can be either positive or negative (Duncan et al., 2010). The perceived family functioning, in addition to the quality and style of the parent-child relationship and the parent’s couple relationship, is what the *family background context* is

comprised of (Duncan et al., 2010). This is separate from the *sociocultural context* which is made up of variables including socioeconomic status, social network support for the relationship, and race and ethnicity (Duncan et al., 2010).

I also drew upon the Five Factor model of personality (McCrae & John, 1992; Draper & Holman, 2005) to arrive at which major personality and emotional readiness factors might have a bearing on relationship intervention outcomes. The Five-Factor Model of personality is considered to be one of the most prevalent and accepted conceptualizations of personality structure (O'Connor & Paunonen, 2007). Researchers have claimed that this conceptualization is an accurate and consistent model in which to define and measure personality, creating comprehensive framework in which to organize research and guide assessment (McCrae & John, 1992). The model is organized in a hierarchal system of personality traits which are expressed in five different domains. These are Openness to Experience, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Neuroticism. It has been theorized that these specific characteristics, or some version of them, are necessary to adequately describe personality differences between individuals and are therefore the best model of personality ((McCrae & John, 1992). Research has found this model to be comprehensive, reliable, and robust in addition to being strongly associated with rises and declines in marital satisfaction (Busby et al., 2001; Larson, Blick, Jackson, & Holman, 2010), and the model is increasingly used in clinical practice and in the study of couple interactions (Draper & Holman, 2006). Though this model may not be a comprehensive explanation of personality, we see it as a starting point to better assess personality and emotional health characteristics and their relevance to relationship interventions and their outcomes (Duncan et al., 2014).

Characteristics of Individuals and MRE Outcomes

Past research has examined the individual characteristics of marriage preparation participants generally (Duncan et al., 2007) as well as the characteristics of individuals that are associated with involvement in different forms of marriage preparation interventions (Duncan et al., 2014). In one study, Duncan et al. (2007) examined if individual, family, couple, and sociocultural context variables would help to identify those who choose to become involved in marriage preparation interventions versus those who do not. They found that individual characteristics distinguishing between those who attended and those who did not, were being kind and considerate, valuing marriage, and emotional maturity (versus being more volatile or angry). It was also noted that some couple characteristics had a minimal relation (Duncan et al., 2007). Both family context factors and sociocultural factors, however, were not found to predict attendance (Duncan et al., 2007).

When examining what personality characteristics determine involvement in specific formats of premarital education, Duncan et al. (2014) found that those who attended classes (47.5%) were more likely to see themselves as “less depressed, more extroverted, kinder, and more mature, and with higher self-esteem than nonattendees” (p. 688). Those who participated in counseling (26.4%) tended to have the lowest scores in flexibility and maturity, while having the highest scores in anxiety (Duncan et al., 2014). Workshop settings (13.2%) had participants who scored neither lowest or highest in most categories, however, they did score lowest on organization. Finally, self-directed participants, those who report utilizing books, Internet sources, home study programs, DVD/CDs, and other similar activities, (12.9%) were identified as having the highest maturity and self-esteem, in addition to lower anxiety and less extroversion (Duncan et al., 2014). Taking these findings into account with others, it may be deduced that

those who participate in self-directed approaches are less extroverted than those choosing other formats, but of those, participants that are the *most* introverted are likely to benefit the least (Rogers & Duncan, 2014). Though recent studies suggest what participant characteristics are associated with involvement in certain formats of premarital education, there is minimal research identifying what characteristics are associated with outcomes such as how the participant may change in terms of knowledge and skill level.

A few meta-analytic studies, however, have shown effects of other characteristics when looking at relationship intervention outcomes (Hawkins, Blanchard, Baldwin, & Fawcett, 2008; Hawkins & Fackrell, 2010). In one meta-analytic study exploring the effectiveness of relationship education programs, Hawkins et al. (2008) examined the efficacy of relationship interventions as well as the potential moderating effects of certain variables. Included in these variables were individual characteristics such as race/ethnicity, economic diversity, and gender.

Influential Variables and Marriage and Relationship Education Outcomes

Gender. In addition to personality characteristics, an individual context perspective suggests that other factors of participants may play a role in MRE outcomes. Those characteristics receiving treatment in the MRE literature include gender, income, education, and age. Gender may play a significant role as to the effectiveness of different marriage and relationship interventions, especially when interacting with specific personality characteristics. Duncan et al. (2014) reported that involvement in marriage and relationship interventions was significantly associated with gender and that men were more likely than women to participate in both self-directed and workshop formats. The study also found “main effects by gender for four of the eight dimensions [measured]” (p.687) when examining individual personality and emotional readiness factors. Females specifically were found to be more likely to participate in

self-directed approaches when more mature (Duncan et al., 2014). Anxiety among females was also one of the only characteristics found to, by itself, predict involvement in a workshop format of premarital education. It may be possible that females with higher self-esteem participate more in self-directed formats due to experiencing greater feelings of competence.

Another study of relationship intervention programs found that women reported much higher increase in relationship satisfaction than men after participating in a self-directed Couple CARE course (Halford, Moore, Wilson, Farrugia, & Dyer, 2004). In a similar face-to-face version of the program, however, better maintenance of relationship satisfaction was found for *both* men and women four years after the completion of the relationship education (Halford et al., 2004). This suggest that there may be outcome differences due to format.

Similarly, past research has noted a greater interest in marriage preparation programs in general has been reported by women than men (Duncan, Box, & Silliman, 1996; Duncan & Wood, 2003) Duncan et al. (1996) theorize that this may be due to a higher sensitivity to affect dimensions in relationships which may cause women to be more concerned about the welfare of their intimate relationships and consequently more interested in participating in methods that would strengthen or enhance them.

One study investigating the benefits of a web-adaptation of the Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program (PREP) found that, on average, women gained greater knowledge of content than their husbands (Loew et al., 2012). In a meta-analysis of MRE interventions, however, there was no significant evidence found for a differential effect by gender (Hawkins et al., 2008). Of the 117 studies used in this meta-analysis, most were conducted with married couples. To help address this limitation, Duncan et al. (2010) conducted a study looking only at premarital individuals and found that women “consistently reported

greater positive change than men regardless of whether the program addressed individual, couple, or context topics” (p. 632). The current study continues previous research by identifying if gender is predictive of perceived positive change and helpfulness.

Income and education. Some research suggests that socioeconomic status may be a predictor of relationship dissatisfaction (Carlson et al., 2012). According to Carlson et al. (2012) “factors correlated with the status of low income such as less education, higher rates of unemployment, and increased psychological distress may perpetuate a cycle of unemployment, decreased income, and continued relationship distress” (p. 83). One recent meta-analytic study examined the effectiveness of relationship education interventions among lower income participants, moderating for sample characteristics such as income and education (Hawkins & Erickson, 2015). Hawkins and Erickson (2015) suggested that interventions for lower income participants may not be as effective due to the daily struggles they encounter and “chronic relationship challenges” (p. 64) and stress. These outcome studies assessing the influence of education and income, however, used primarily married samples. Less known is how these factors may influence marriage preparation educational outcomes.

Duncan et al. (2014) reported that young adults who do not attend college and have less access to resources may experience higher levels of anxiety and depression, which may cause them to doubt their marriage suitability and result in them increasingly seeking out marriage and relationship interventions. Similarly, those who are less educated and have fewer resources may find marriage and relationship interventions more helpful than others. This population may also find gaining access to specific formats more realistic than others, in addition to experiencing greater success in specific formats. For example, interventions that require less reading material may be found as more helpful for those with less formal education and lower reading

comprehension levels. It may also be that low-income individuals would find a free website more helpful than attempting to pay for and attend a workshop. When examining personal characteristics associated with those involved in different types of premarital interventions, Duncan et al. found that education was not significant when included as a covariate. Whether or not it is predictive of perceived outcomes, however, has not been tested. As a result, both income and education level will be examined as predictors in the current study.

Age. When identifying possible characteristics associated with involvement in different forms of marriage preparation interventions, Duncan et al. (2014) found that age, when inserted as a covariate, was not significant in predicting what form of premarital intervention participants would select. Drawing upon this study, we continue research in an effort to identify if these findings hold consistent when examining what predicts perceived positive change and perceived helpfulness outcomes

Current Study

Existing research has informed us about outcomes resulting from marriage and relationship interventions and the characteristics of those who participate, but little about how participant characteristics are associated with outcomes, such as perceived helpfulness or produced change. In the current study, we seek to further this research by answering the following research questions:

1. What individual personality and emotional readiness characteristics are associated with perceived positive change and perceived helpfulness resulting from premarital education, offered in a self-directed and workshop format?

2. Are gender, age, income, and education associated with perceived positive change and perceived helpfulness resulting from premarital education, offered in a self-directed and workshop setting?

Method

Participants

The sample was selected from a larger study of relationship formation, mate selection, and prediction of marital/relationship quality (Holman et al., 2001) which consisted of 5,516 individuals from all regions of the United States. The majority of this sample (3,861) reported no past or present participation in marriage preparation, leaving 1,655 participants. From the remaining sample, we selected only those individuals who reported participating in a self-directed approach (190) or community/religious workshop (194), leaving a total of 384 participants examined in this study.

Self-directed. The average age of those who reported participating in a self-directed format was 29 (SD= 9.2) and ranged from 18 to 62, with 67.4%, of the participants being between 18 and 30. Of those who reported participating in a self-directed approach, 42.6% were male and 57.4% were female. Participants in self-directed formats did not have much ethnic diversity with 86.8% Caucasian. Other ethnic groups represented in the sample are as follows: African or Black (4.2 %), Asian (4.2%), Native American (0.5%), Latino, or Mexican American, Puerto Rican, Cuban, etc. (1.1%), Mixed or Biracial (1.6%), and Other (1.1%). The sample for this study were highly educated, with 33.7% of the sample being currently enrolled in college, 18.4% having completed a Bachelor's degree, and 21.6% having completed a graduate or professional degree. Only 4.7% reported their highest completed education as a high school diploma or less. The majority of the sample also appeared to be less wealthy with 46.1% of

participants reporting their current income of \$20,000 or less. Those who reported their current income as being between \$20,000 and \$59,999 was 14.7% of the sample. Only 22.1% indicated a current income of \$60,000 or above.

Workshop. The average age of participants reporting use of a religious or community sponsored premarital workshops was 28 (SD= 16.5) and ranged from 18 to 51 with 77.3% of the participants being between 18 and 30. The sample of those reporting participation in a premarital workshop was split evenly with 50% of those being male and 50% female. Consistent with self-directed participants, the workshop participant sample did not include much ethnic diversity with 85.6% being Caucasian. The remaining ethnic groups represented are as follows: African or Black (2.6%), Asian (3.6%), Latino, Mexican American, Puerto Rican, Cuban, etc. (3.1%), Mixed/Biracial (1.5%), and Other (3.6%). Like self-directed participants, workshop participants were also highly educated with 37.6% reporting that they were currently enrolled in college. A large portion of the sample had also completed formal degrees with 18.0% having completed a Bachelor's degree and 21.1% reporting having completed a graduate or professional degree. Only 4.6% of the sample reported their highest completed education as a high school diploma or less. Reported income levels for this sample were low with 45.3% reporting a current income of \$20,000 or less and 16.5% had a current income between \$20,000 and \$59,999. Only 23.2% reported a current income of \$60,000 and above.

Procedure and Measures

The data used for these analyses were collected via the RELATIONSHIP Evaluation Questionnaire (Busby, et al. 2001). The purpose of this 300+ item survey is twofold, serving both as an outreach relationship assessment tool to help participants learn about their relationships, both assets and liabilities, and as a tool to gather relationship data. Questions focus

on the four contextual areas discussed above which are predictive of marital quality (Holman et al., 2001), with the focus for this study on the individual contexts predictors. Existing research has documented RELATE's concurrent and test-retest reliability and construct validity. For detailed information on the instrument's psychometric properties, consult the article by Busby et al. (2001).

Premarital interventions. Items assessed whether respondents had been involved in a class, community/church sponsored workshop, counseling, or self-directed learning experience, designed to help them prepare for marriage. Self-directed learning experiences comprise books, Internet sources, home study programs, DVD/CDs, and other similar activities. The response categories for each activity were “No,” “Yes, I was involved in such a class, workshop, counseling, or self-directed activity,” “Yes, I am currently involved in such a class, workshop, counseling, or self-directed activity,” or “Yes, I both have been and am currently involved in such a class, workshop, counseling, or self-directed activity.” Respondents who indicated past or current (or both) involvement in a self-directed or workshop intervention were selected for analysis.

Personality traits and emotional readiness characteristics. Personality traits assessed included anxiety, depression, extroversion, flexibility, kindness, maturity, organization, and self-esteem. Other than self-esteem, these traits coincide with the “big five” factors of personality (McCrae & John, 1992). RELATE acts as a first-level brief assessment of emotional and mental health for marital readiness purposes, not as a comprehensive screening tool (Larson & Halford, 2011). Research has shown that RELATE's personality trait scales can be reliably used to assess these “big five” characteristics (agreeableness, conscientiousness, extraversion, neuroticism, and openness) (Draper & Holman, 2005).

All of the constructs in the current study were measured using items which asked the participant how much a word or phrase described them, such as “sad and blue.” After each word or phrase, participants responded on a five-point Likert scale, with a score of one indicating that a word never described the participant, and a score of five indicated that the word described the participant very often. Scale scores were created to obtain an average of these measures and used as predictors in the analyses. Anxiety and depression are often found to be comorbid, however, this is not always the case. Although depression and anxiety frequently co-occur, they are still categorized and identified by mental health professionals as different nosological entities (Braam & Copeland, 2014). As a result, we make the distinction between the two in this study.

Anxiety was measured with four items, “worrier,” “fearful,” “tense,” and “nervous” ($\alpha = .77$). Depression was measured with three items, “sad and blue,” “feel hopeless,” and “depressed” ($\alpha = .82$). Extroversion was measured with four items, including “talkative,” and “outgoing” as well as two recoded items, “quiet” and “shy” ($\alpha = .82$). Flexibility was measured with four items, including “open minded,” “flexible,” “easy going,” and “adaptable” ($\alpha = .73$). Kindness was measured with the four items, including “considerate,” “loving,” “kind,” and “friendly” ($\alpha = .75$). Maturity (i.e. good anger management and impulse control skills) was measured with two reverse coded items, such that a higher score reflected more maturity or impulse control, “fight with others/lose temper,” and “easily irritated or mad” ($\alpha = .76$). Organization was measured with two items, “organized” and a reverse coded item which assessed if they were “messy” ($\alpha = .75$). Finally, the self-esteem scale consisted of four items, “I take a positive attitude toward myself,” and “I feel I am a person of worth,” and two recoded items, “I think I am not good at all,” and “I am inclined to think I am a failure” ($\alpha = .83$).

Helpfulness and change. For both education formats, respondents were asked how helpful they considered the intervention to be. Each individual was asked how helpful the format was in preparing them for marriage, on a 5-point scale (1 = *very unhelpful*, 2 = *unhelpful*, 3 = *neither helpful or unhelpful*, 4 = *helpful*, 5 = *very helpful*). This item was treated as a continuous measure.

To assess change, participants were asked to compare and report differences in how they were after the marriage preparation intervention in contrast to before they participated. Eleven items with demonstrated importance in predicting marital satisfaction in individual, couple, and context areas (Duncan et al., 2010; Busby et al., 2001) were used. In the *individual factors area*, items included, “Having a working knowledge of how emotional health can affect a marriage”, “Having realistic expectations for marriage,” “Feeling confident that I can have a successful marriage,” and “Feeling better about myself.” In the *couple factors area*, items included “Communicating thoughts and feelings to my partner in a clear manner,” “Listening to my partner in an understanding way,” “Handling disagreements and conflict in helpful ways,” and “Using far more positives than negatives when talking with my partner.” *Context factors* were assessed using the following items, “Having a working knowledge of how family of origin experiences can affect a marriage,” “Having a working knowledge of how culture (race, religion, economic background) can affect a marriage,” “Knowing how to deal with family and friends (in-laws, spending time with friends).”

Participants rated this change on a 5-point scale (1 = *much worse*, 2 = *worse*, 3 = *about the same*, 4 = *better*, 5 = *much better*). These items were considered and treated as continuous measures. The three subscales demonstrated good reliability, ranging from .80 to .92 (Duncan et al., 2010). For the current study the 11 items were combined to form an overall perceived change

score ($\alpha=.932$) for those who participated in self-directed formats as well as an overall change score ($\alpha=.938$) for those participating in workshops. Some studies suggest that retrospective pretest questioning approaches such as this produce a more accurate assessment of self-reported knowledge and behavior than traditional pretest-posttest approaches (Pratt et al., 2000).

Other predictors. Age, gender, income, and education were also added as predictors in the study. Age was measured by having participants report their date of birth. Education was assessed using the item, “How much education have you completed?” For this item, nine possible responses were provided ranging from “Less than high school” to “Graduate or professional degree completed.” Income was assessed using the item, “Your current personal yearly gross income (before taxes & deductions)” and included 10 possible income ranges, beginning with “None” and ending with “\$160,000 or above.”

Analysis

To assess whether individual personality and emotional readiness characteristics are associated with perceived change and helpfulness resulting from premarital education within self-directed and workshop formats, standard multiple regression analyses were conducted, using SPSS 23. This feature in SPSS 23, called *Enter (Regression)* is “a procedure for variable selection in which all variables in a block are entered in a single step” (SPSS 23). Standard multiple regression is the procedure of choice when the purpose is to simply assess the relationships among variables and to predict how multiple independent variables predict one dependent variable (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001).

First, a standard multiple regression procedure was conducted between perceived change as the dependent variable and each of the eight individual personality and emotional readiness factors as independent variables. Second, a standard multiple regression procedure was

conducted between perceived helpfulness as the dependent variable and each of the eight individual personality and emotional readiness factors as independent variables. In each of these procedures, the mean scores of the eight individual characteristics measures described earlier was used as predictors. Gender, age, income, and education were also entered as additional predictors. All of these analyses were performed separately for self-directed participants and community workshop participants.

As per the standard multiple regression procedures, descriptive statistics, a correlation table, the values of R, R-squared, and adjusted R-squared are reported below, as well as a summary of the analysis of variance for regression. T-statistics detailing the strength of each of the independent variables are also reported. An alpha level of .05 was selected for significance of association.

Results

Table 1 displays the correlations between all the variables. As shown, kindness and anxiety were positively correlated with perceived positive outcomes, meaning that as kindness and anxiety levels increased, so did perceived positive outcomes. Depression and income were negatively correlated with perceived positive outcomes, meaning that as depression and income increased, perceived positive outcomes decreased.

Self-directed Change

The first multiple regression procedure was run to assess whether individual personality and emotional readiness characteristics are associated with perceived positive change resulting from premarital education, when offered in self-directed formats. Table 2 displays the unstandardized regression coefficients, the standardized regression coefficients, and F statistics. As shown in Table 2, it was found that there was a good model fit, [F (12,174) = 1.929, p=.034)],

with an R^2 of .117. The R^2 indicates what proportion of the variance in an outcome variable that is explained by a regression model. Thus, 11.7% of the variance in perceived positive change is explained by this model. Of the eight individual personality and emotional readiness factors, only Kindness ($\beta = .181, p < .05$) was found to be significantly predictive of perceived positive change (See Table 2). Age, gender, income and education were not significant predictors. It is important to note that when in a zero order correlation environment, shown in Table 1, the variables depression, flexibility, and maturity did also reach significance, but when placed in a multivariate predictor setting, none of these additional variables significantly predicted perceived change.

Workshop Change

The second multiple regression procedure was run to assess whether individual personality and emotional readiness characteristics are associated with perceived change resulting from premarital education, when offered in workshop formats. As shown in Table 2, there was found to be a good model fit, ($F(12,153) = 1.948, p = .033$), with an R^2 of .133, explaining 13.3% of the variance in perceived change. Kindness significantly predicted perceived positive change ($\beta = .226, p < .05$) and Depression negatively predicted perceived positive change ($\beta = -.190, p < .05$). Income was negatively predictive of perceived positive change ($\beta = -.061, p < .05$). When in a zero order correlation environment, displayed in Table 1, the variables self-esteem and age also reached significance. When taken together, simultaneous accounting for the influence of the independent variables, however, none arise to significance.

Self-directed Helpfulness

The third multiple regression procedure was run to predict whether individual personality and emotional readiness characteristics are associated with perceived helpfulness in resulting

from premarital education, when offered in self-directed formats. As shown in Table 2, it was not found to have a good model fit, ($F(12,173) = .903, p=.55$), with an R^2 of .059. None of the eight individual personality or emotional readiness factors were significant in predicting perceived helpfulness. Age, gender, income, and education were not found to be significant. It is important to note that when in a zero order correlation environment (see Table 1), the variables kindness, anxiety, and maturity reached significance, but dropped out of significance in the regression equation.

Workshop Helpfulness

Finally, the fourth multiple regression procedure was run to predict whether individual personality and emotional readiness characteristics are associated with perceived helpfulness, when offered in workshop formats. As shown in Table 2, there was found to be a good model fit, ($F(12,177) = 2.194, p=.014$), with an R^2 of .129, explaining 12.9% of the variance. Anxiety significantly predicted perceived helpfulness ($\beta = .222, p<.05$) and depression negatively predicted perceived helpfulness ($\beta = -.321, p\leq .001$). Age, gender, income, and education were not significantly predictive of perceived helpfulness in workshop formats. When in a zero order correlation environment, shown in Table 1, the maturity variable also reached significance, but dropped out of the regression equation.

Discussion

The general purpose of this study was to explore the association between individual personality and emotional readiness characteristics with premarital relationship education outcomes. The study provided preliminary answers to the questions “What individual personality and emotional readiness characteristics are associated with perceived helpfulness and change resulting from premarital education, offered in a self-directed and workshop format?” and “Are

age, gender, income, and education associated with perceived helpfulness and change resulting from premarital education, offered in a self-directed and workshop format?”

This study found that several variables such as kindness, anxiety, depression, flexibility, self-esteem, maturity, age, income, and education were significant factors at the zero order correlation level, however, the significance of many of these variables were no longer present when placed in a predictive regression model. Of the eight individual personality and emotional readiness factors, only kindness was predictive of perceived positive change in self-directed formats and none were predictive of perceived helpfulness in self-directed formats. Of the 4 demographic predictors, only income was predictive of perceived positive change, and only in a workshop format. Thus, according to these findings, it appears that personality and emotional readiness factors, as well as certain demographic factors, have only a limited value as a whole in predicting change and helpfulness outcomes in premarital education.

While these characteristics as a whole were limited in predictive power, regression analysis results showed that being depressed was negatively correlated with both outcome variables, meaning that when participants were more depressed, they were less likely of reporting positive perceived change and less likely of reporting that the workshop was helpful. This fits with the theory that those who are more depressed may be more likely be less motivated or make “efforts to withdraw from [a] stressful situation or avoid seeking solutions” (Mahmoud, Staten, Hall, & Lennie, 2012, p.150). As a result, they may be less able to successfully find benefit in the new information they are receiving or an ability to apply it. It may also be possible that those who are more depressed may benefit from or seek out a more intensive premarital intervention such as premarital counseling (Duncan et al., 2014). Overall, this finding implies that a person’s depressive state may hold some influence when it comes to premarital education

outcomes, making at least that part of the big-five model of personality an important model to continue incorporating into further study of relationship education.

Given this theory, however, we would expect outcomes of to be similar across format. The insignificant effect that depression appeared to have on predicting perceived change or helpfulness in self-directed formats causes further questions and inquiry. A great deal of research has suggested that depression is also strongly linked to social anxiety (Kaufman & Baucom, 2013). Social anxiety is characterized by “fear of embarrassment or humiliation in social situation that causes significant distress or social functioning” (Kaufman & Baucom, 2013, p.265). Although our model does include items accounting for the presence of some anxiety in general, the items do not assess anxiety specific to interaction or close proximity with others. If a participant possesses both depression and social anxiety, it may be possible that participating in an at-home, self-directed environment, may alleviate feelings of anxiety, allowing them to better incorporate and apply premarital education. Further study is needed, however, to assess the impact of social anxiety on the effectiveness of different marriage preparation formats.

When it comes to overall anxiousness, our study found that anxiety was positively correlated to how helpful a participant reported a workshop format to be. It was not, however, predictive of the participant reporting positive change, at least in the context of the other factors. It is possible that anxious individuals who participate in marriage preparation workshops may find that their feelings of worry, fear, tenseness, or nervousness—specifically regarding issues of relationships—are alleviated, which results in them feeling that the workshop was helpful. More research is needed, however, to investigate if this is the case.

One interesting finding in this study was that participant income level was negatively correlated with perceived positive change in a workshop format. It is not entirely unexpected that

those with lower income levels are more likely to report greater change than those with higher incomes. This finding is consistent with past research that suggest that lower-income participants may greatly benefit from MRE (Hawkins & Erickson, 2015). It may be that when participants begin with lower resources, the benefit overall is greater. This also supports taking on an ecosystemic-developmental perspective which considers the sociocultural contexts relating to socioeconomic status.

It is surprising, however, that income did not also predict perceived helpfulness. It seems expected that if one reported that they improved behavior or increase understanding of concepts as a result of a workshop, that they would also perceive it as being helpful. In addition to this, it is also surprising that education was not predictive of perceived positive change with self-directed formats in addition to income. Education and income are often both examined together, making up the majority of what is considered to be socioeconomic status and therefore, it would be assumed that their influence would tend to be highly connected or correlated with each other.

Finally, our results indicated that being “kind” is also predictive of perceived positive change in both self-directed and workshop settings. This coincides with previously cited research by Duncan et al. (2007) which suggests that a differentiating factor between who chooses to participate in relationship education or not is whether they are kind and considerate. This implies that some factors associated with selection also carries over into actual outcomes. In a study examining the relationship between big-five personality traits and academic motivation, researchers found that “agreeableness” (which coincides with our measure of kindness) was positively related to a desire for self-improvement, persisting, and affiliating or enjoying being with others in school (Komarraju & Karau, 2005). If these findings hold true in learning settings outside of academics, it is likely they those who are more considerate, kind, caring, and loving

are more personally motivated to increase levels of relational self-improvement. Like income, however, it is surprising that kindness is predictive of perceived positive change but not perceived helpfulness. It may be possible that the single item identifying helpfulness may be more of a measure of consumer satisfaction than a reflection on actual subject matter. If so, the current helpfulness item may not be as accurate. It may be better to include assessments of the participant's overall reaction or emotion response to the intervention. As a result, more research is needed to identify what differentiates between a participant finding formats helpful versus change producing.

Unlike past studies which have suggested significant differences between men and women regarding participation and outcomes of relationship education (Duncan et al., 2010), this study found that when inserted as a predictor, no significant correlation or prediction by gender was found. Evidently, perceiving self-directed or community workshop-based premarital education as helpful or change producing is independent of the gender of a participant. However, similar to studies which have examined what factors are associated with participation in premarital education (Duncan et al., 2014), this study also found that both education level and age were not significant predictors of helpfulness and change when included as a covariate.

Limitations and Implications

There are several limitations of this study that ought to be acknowledged. Of the eight personality and emotional readiness factors, only “kindness” was found to significantly predict perceived positive change. This may be a spurious finding and it may be possible that there was a lack of significant findings due to a lack of variation in the sample used. The sample taken from the RELATE dataset and used in this study is both small and fairly homogeneous.

In this study, a large majority of the sample was Caucasian and therefore lacked racial diversity. As a result, we do not know if the findings resulting from this study would hold consistent across samples that were more representative of the general population. Further examination of racial differences and how they may or may not affect the perceived change and helpfulness of premarital education programs would be valuable.

In addition to this, our sample was highly educated over all. In a similar study, Duncan et al. (2014) noted that those with less education may have different emotional readiness profiles and that they may affect results. Similarly, a large portion of our sample reported a lower income level, but this is likely due to them being younger or currently enrolled in college. Despite having a lower income, it is likely that a great deal of the sample may not actually possess an overall low socioeconomic status. Less educated participants and those with a lower socioeconomic status, or who are at greater risk, should be studied in the future.

It should also be acknowledged that if the sample had been randomly selected, it may have revealed different profile predictors and individual characteristics connected to perceived helpfulness and change. Similarly, Duncan et al. (2014) notes that it is likely that the sample is more relationally motivated in general, given that they are choosing to complete the RELATE assessment in the first place.

Another limitation of the study may exist in our analysis and approach to measuring change outcomes. An ecosystemic-developmental perspective served as a guiding theory in this study and when selecting the items that were chosen to measure positive change. The eleven items measuring individual, couple, and context change were averaged to create a single change variable. Measuring change outcomes for these three ecosystemic-developmental areas separately may yield different results when identifying what individual factors predict change

outcomes. For example, certain personality characteristics may be significant predictors when looking only within a certain outcome area, but not significant of an overall change affect across areas. This analysis approach be account for differences occurring between the findings of this study and those existing in preliminary results found by Rogers and Duncan (2014) which indicate that several personal characteristics were predictive of helpfulness and change in a self-directed method when looking separately at individual, couple, and context change outcomes. The analysis done by Rogers and Duncan (2014) also ran separate analysis for both men and women whereas this study chose to simply insert gender as a predictor.

For the purpose of this study, we choose to look only at individual predictors of perceived positive change and perceived helpfulness, and were not interested in examining any interactions that may exist between various variables. To better understand the role of these 12 predictors and how they fully influence outcomes, it would be helpful for future studies to further this research by examining how these 12 variables interact with one another.

It should also be noted that we cannot know with certainty that the changes indicated in this study are truly due to the program itself or to other unknown or hidden factors. It is possible that those who participated in these two relationship education formats were also simultaneously being affected by other outside sources which could have yielded this outcome. For example, those who participated in a relationship education intervention may have also begun personal counseling. etc.

Lastly, it is important to note that in addition to the significant predictors found in this study, there may also be several stronger predictors or factors which are not accounted for in this analysis. As a result, we cannot be certain if what may predict or affect perceived helpfulness and change in premarital education formats is fully being revealed. Further studies are needed to

both expand the scope of this research as well examine in greater detail how predictors may interact with one another.

Assuming, however, that the results of this study are accurate, there some implications that should be addressed. This study found that very few of the 12 predictors were significant in predicting perceived positive change or perceived helpfulness. This informs us as clinicians and relationship educators that the specific characteristics of participants may not be crucial when determining who to include in or target with our marriage and relationship education programs. Had different results been produced, it may have been deducted that there is a need to assess and screen for certain personality types before carrying out relationship education. The findings of this study, however, indicate that successful relationship education programs are likely to be effective across different populations, and that the personality of those who participate will only minimally affect outcomes. The exception to this, however, is that workshop formats may not be as effective for those who are more depressed. Marriage preparation educators may need to pay particular attention to those who suffer from depression, as workshop formats may not be the best choice for them. These participant may be better suited for more intense interventions such as counseling. Additionally, it may be important for relationship educators to spend greater effort to target low income populations, as they may benefit more from workshop formats. Those with low incomes, however, may be more unlikely to afford a workshop which may increase the need for educators to be creative when finding ways to help low-income individuals participate in such interventions.

Conclusion

This study sought to examine how personality and emotional readiness factors, in addition to demographic factors, may affect perceived change and helpfulness in self-directed

and workshop formats of premarital education. We found that overall, depression was significantly and negatively related to participant perception of positive change and helpfulness in a workshop setting and kindness was positively and significantly related to perceived positive change in in both workshop and self-directed formats. Of the demographic factors, only income was significant, which was negatively related to perceived positive change in workshop settings. Anxiety was significantly and positively related to perceived helpfulness in workshop settings. Though many limitations of this study exist, findings suggest that personality and emotional readiness characteristics, as well as certain demographic factors, may have only a minimal impact in predicting outcomes of premarital education in workshop and self-directed formats. As a result, it is possible that despite possessing certain traits, most participants may fare just as well as other participants not possessing those traits. Acknowledging this, however, it may be better, to encourage those who are depressed to participate in interventions other than workshops, such as counseling, which may better address more specific or chronic issues rather than just provide general relationship principles and information.

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Appendix

Table 1
Correlation between Perceived Helpfulness and Change and 12 Personality, Emotional Readiness, and Demographic Predictors.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	SD-C sig.	WS-C sig.	SD-H sig.	WS-H sig.
1. Kind	1.0											.276***	.209**	.123*	.069
2. Anxious	-.086											-.094	-.105	-.122*	.039
3. Depressed	-.179**	.501***										-.170**	-.194**	-.041	-.163*
4. Extroverted	.198**	.219***	-.018									.048	.082	-.063	-.057
5. Organized	.060	.092	.052	.145*								-.016	.050	-.079	-.064
6. Flexible	.506***	-.280***	-.219***	.025	-.034							.198**	.078	.024	-.012
7. Self-Esteem	.187**	.124*	.171	.192**	.009	.103						.061	.154*	-.010	.085
8. Mature	-.335***	.347***	.335***	.066	.222***	-.302***	-.039					-.211**	-.011	-.180**	-.115*
9. Gender	.031	.180**	.141*	.036	.058	-.100	-.070	.066				-.010	.073	-.019	.060
10. Age	.019	-.128*	-.036	.087	-.011	.150*	-.126*	-.139*	-.099			-.002	-.138*	.026	-.077
11. Income	-.006	-.213**	-.172**	-.137*	.082	-.001	-.107	-.109	-.133*	.532***		.016	-.169*	.027	-.100
12. Education	-.007	.026	-.075	-.026	.041	-.020	-.105	-.128*	.115	.258***	.373***	-.091	-.095	-.022	-.166*

Note * $p \leq .05$. ** $p \leq .01$. *** $p \leq .001$.

Abbreviations: SD-C sig. = Self-directed perceived change, WS-H sig. = Workshop perceived change, SD-H = Self-directed perceived helpfulness, WS-H = Workshop perceived helpfulness.

Table 2
Summary of Multiple Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Perceived Change and Helpfulness among Self-directed and Workshop Formats

	Self-directed Change			Workshop Change			Self-directed Helpful			Workshop Helpful		
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β
Kind	.222	.110	.181*	.226	.113	.186*	.254	.152	.156	.109	.176	.053
Anxious	.036	.083	.040	-.049	.093	-.053	-.118	.117	-.094	.360	.144	.222*
Depressed	-.095	.077	-.110	-.190	.084	-.223*	.069	.107	.058	-.480	.138	-.321***
Extroverted	.018	.133	.011	-.086	.153	-.046	-.123	.186	-.055	-.436	.250	-.135
Organized	.002	.112	.002	.055	.112	.038	-.083	.159	-.041	-.078	.183	-.032
Flexible	.060	.092	.058	-.092	.102	-.086	-.154	.129	-.109	-.190	.164	-.103
Self-Esteem	.037	.149	.019	.237	.154	.123	-.057	.205	-.022	.359	.238	.112
Mature	-.123	.084	-.125	.084	.092	.077	-.185	.119	-.139	-.184	.144	-.099
Gender	.033	.085	.029	.061	.092	.055	-.021	.120	-.014	.123	.143	.064
Age	-.002	.005	-.026	.000	.003	.012	.001	.008	.015	.001	.005	.025
Income	.018	.026	.063	-.061	.029	-.221*	-.002	.038	-.005	-.034	.046	-.070
Education	-.039	.024	-.132	.014	.028	.048	-.015	.033	-.036	-.074	.045	-.146
R ²		.115			.133			.059			.129	
F		1.929*			1.948*			.903			2.194*	

Note * $p \leq .05$. ** $p \leq .01$. *** $p \leq .001$.

Table 3
Descriptive Statistics for Each Regression

	<u>SD Change</u>			<u>WS Change</u>			<u>SD Helpfulness</u>			<u>WS Helpfulness</u>		
	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Kind	189	4.42	.460	169	4.4	.46	188	4.41	.47	193	4.39	.47
Anxious	189	2.73	.612	169	2.83	.61	188	2.75	.61	193	2.85	.60
Depressed	190	2.16	.646	169	2.21	.66	189	2.18	.65	194	2.24	.65
Extroverted	189	3.28	.341	169	3.32	.30	188	3.27	.34	193	3.31	.30
Organized	190	3.25	.374	169	3.24	.39	189	3.25	.37	194	3.24	.39
Flexible	190	4.12	.537	169	4.1	.52	189	4.11	.54	193	4.1	.52
Self-Esteem	190	2.93	.290	169	2.93	.29	189	2.93	.29	194	2.93	.30
Mature	190	2.32	.577	169	2.36	.51	189	2.35	.78	194	2.36	.52
Gender	190	.57	.496	169	.53	.50	189	.58	.495	194	.50	.50
Age	190	28.97	9.23	169	28.5	17.43	189	28.99	9.18	194	28.03	16.46
Income	189	2.46	2.03	167	2.58	2.02	188	2.45	1.99	192	2.52	2.01
Education	190	6.31	1.91	169	6.33	1.89	189	2.45	1.90	194	6.3	1.89

Abbreviations: SD =Self-directed, WS= Workshop.