Developing a Marriage Mentoring Program for Relationship Education

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ABSTRACT

Eric N. Gadol: Developing a Marriage Mentoring Program for Relationship Education

(Under the direction of Donald H. Baucom, Ph.D.)

In response to high divorce rates and the negative effects of divorce, there has been a
call for greater use of relationship education programs, which have been shown to be
effective at reducing the risk for relationship dissatisfaction and dissolution. Until now,
relationship education programs have been limited by the models of dissemination that have
been employed; the current study explores a newer model of dissemination that could allow
these programs to be brought to a greater number of couples: marriage mentoring. Nearly no
research has examined this model, although manuals have been written describing marriage
mentoring. The current study examines a program that draws from these manuals to train
experienced couples with healthy relationships to serve as mentors for younger couples.
These mentoring couples participate alongside the younger couples in an empirically-based
relationship education program called Side by Side, and the current study investigates the
changes that both the mentoring couples and the younger couples experienced over the
course of their participation. The mentoring couples who participated in this program
experienced negative changes in relationship satisfaction, communication patterns, and other
important aspects of their relationship. The most negative changes in relationship
satisfaction were seen among the mentoring couples who reported the highest levels of
relationship satisfaction before participating, whereas those mentoring couples who reported

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lower levels of satisfaction before participating experienced positive changes over the course of the program. The younger couples generally experienced positive changes in relationship satisfaction, communication skills, and other important aspects of their relationship, although the women among the younger couples showed the clearest positive changes. These positive changes were strongest among the younger couples who reported positive experiences of their relationships with their mentoring couples. In comparisons with previous research on relationship education programs, the pattern of effect sizes for the men and women in the younger couples in this study are most comparable to a relationship education program delivered by university personnel and are not as positive as the same program delivered by leaders of religious organizations. These findings and implications for future implementations of the marriage mentoring model are discussed.

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Introduction

An increasing number of couples who are planning on marriage are participating in premarital counseling programs. Many religious organizations require that couples intending to marry within their community first undergo premarital counseling, and some states have also made such requirements or offer a reduced fee for a marriage license to those couples who take part in premarital counseling (Ooms, 1998). Funding has also been requested at the federal level in the United States to support the research, development, and implementation of premarital interventions. Such efforts to increase the frequency and quality of these premarital interventions seem to be in response to the continuing epidemic of divorce in this country; estimates predict nearly half of all recent marriages will end in divorce (Kreider & Fields, 2001).

This prevalence of divorce is not without negative effects. Marital discord and divorce have been shown to be linked to a wide variety of adverse outcomes. In a review of the literature examining the effects of marital status and quality on health, Burman and Margolin (1992) compiled the results of over 25 studies including thousands of participants that show deleterious effects of divorce and marital discord on health outcomes ranging from mortality to severity of pain and immune functioning. Marital problems are also predictive of negative psychological effects, including depressive symptoms among nonclinical samples (Beach & Nelson, 1990) and relapse among individuals recovering from major depression (Weissman, 1987) and bipolar disorder (Miklowitz et al., 1987). Individuals who have experienced divorce also often display symptoms of PTSD comparable with those who have

experienced actual threat to life or limb (Mol et al., 2005). Indeed, divorce has been identified as one of the most stressful life events that individuals are likely to experience (Kitson & Morgan, 1990). In addition to these physical and mental health effects, Sayers, Kohn, and Heavey (1998) outline the negative economic impact of divorce on the families involved as well as the deleterious effects on the health of the children of divorce. Clearly, marital discord and divorce have a broad range of harmful results for those involved.

Given such pernicious effects of marital discord and divorce, developing strategies to reduce or prevent the occurrence of these problems is a worthwhile goal, and various religious organizations, religious groups, and researchers have called for the creation and evaluation of programs designed to reduce marital discord and divorce and, more positively, to enhance the quality of marriages (Stanley, 2001). Although many of these programs have been created outside the context of empirical research (Sayers et al., 1998), a number of programs have been developed and evaluated in the field of psychology in an effort to apply rigorous scientific principles to understand and prevent marital distress (Stanley, 2001).

Much of this research has taken place within the cognitive-behavioral orientation; as a result, many empirically-supported prevention programs are consistent with this orientation. The central principle on which most cognitive-behavioral prevention programs are based is that relationship distress does not arise from incompatibility between the two people in the relationship; instead, distress arises when a couple does not know how to address differences and disagreements constructively. The philosopher and theologian Stanley Hauerwas suggests as much in his discussion of marriage:

> … We always marry the wrong person. We never know whom we marry; we just think we do. Or even if we first marry the right person, just give it a while and he or she will change. For marriage, being what it is, means we are not the same person

after we have entered it. The primary problem morally is learning how to love and care for this stranger to whom you find yourself married. (Hauerwas, 1981, p. 172)

Phrased more psychologically, Stanley, Markman, and Whitton (2002) report that *how* couples argue is more related to the likelihood that they will divorce than *what* the couples argue about.

This focus on communication has received much support from research in couple therapy. First, distressed couples generally display higher levels of problematic communication behaviors; for example, distress and instability in close relationships can be predicted by the levels of criticism, contempt, defensiveness, and withdrawal in those relationships (Gottman, 1994a, 1994b). Also, negative communication is a significant predictor of depression in the members of distressed couples (Sher & Baucom, 1993). The importance of communication is often apparent to distressed couples themselves; problematic communication is the most common presenting complaint among those seeking marital therapy (Geiss & O'Leary, 1981; Hahlweg, Revenstorf, & Schindler, 1984).

Not only do distressed couples display higher levels of problematic behaviors, but more satisfied couples also engage in more positive communication. Christensen and his colleagues developed the Communication Patterns Questionnaire to assess the type of communication in which couples tend to engage when discussing problems (Christensen & Heavey, 1990; Christensen, Noller, & Fitzpatrick, 1988; Christensen & Shenk, 1991; Christensen & Sullaway, 1984). They have shown that more satisfied couples engage in respectful discussion of problematic areas. Such respect may be seen in how each partner's needs are incorporated into the final solution to a problem adopted by the couple; when the adopted solution integrates input from both partners, the couples tended to be most satisfied (Gray-Little, Baucom, & Hamby, 1996).

Thus we see that couples who engage in more negative, conflictual discussions of their differences tend to be more distressed, whereas those couples who handle their differences with respect and cooperation tend to be more satisfied. Epstein and Baucom (2002) summarize the empirical literature on negative communication in order to explain why replacing these negative communication behaviors with positive ones is so important. They argue that frequent, negative behaviors create a negative atmosphere that is both distressing and depressing to the couple and that some particularly malevolent behaviors can strike at a person's very sense of self-worth, leading to even greater distress. These behaviors can violate basic assumptions about the relationship (e.g., that each partner has the other's best interest at heart), calling into question the sense of safety and caring that is the foundation of many relationships.

Expanding on these principles of communication, cognitive-behavioral couple therapy (CBCT) has focused on teaching couples how to communicate in ways that reduce the more toxic elements of disagreements and that increases the more beneficial methods of relating to each other. Epstein and Baucom (2002) outline the methods used in CBCT to teach such communication, generally dividing conversations into two types: (a) sharing thoughts and feelings and (b) decision making. In a sharing thoughts and feelings discussion, a couple's goals are to convey information, share an opinion, express an emotion (or emotions), feel understood by an important person in one's life, and understand that important person (Guerney, 1977). This type of conversation, which Epstein and Baucom label as couple discussion, may range from chatting about a recent movie the couple saw together to an expression of grief by one partner over the loss of a parent. It may also include sharing the pain and hurt one partner felt at something the other partner did or did not do.

In the second type of discussion, a couple focuses on addressing decisions to be made or problems that have arisen. The scope of issues that a decision-making conversation addresses includes everything from what to have for dinner on a given night to whether to have children. These conversations may focus on topics that the couple views as a "problem" (e.g., different opinions about how to raise their children) or decisions that they are excited to make together (e.g., where to honeymoon). For both of these types of conversations, the CBCT perspective asserts that there are skillful approaches that will allow both partners to express their opinions and feel heard, to understand the other's perspective, and to reach a decision without unnecessary conflict or escalation (if there is a decision to be made).

Baucom and his colleagues examined the literature investigating a variety of approaches to treating marital distress and determined that behavioral marital therapy is an efficacious and specific treatment for marital distress (Baucom, Shoham, Mueser, Daiuto, & Stickle, 1998). Cognitive-behavioral marital therapy, an extension and adaptation of behavioral marital therapy, was found to be possibly efficacious. In their review, Baucom et al. also indicate that the existing research suggests that a strict behavioral approach is insufficient in helping couples maintain the gains experienced in therapy. They further articulate that the research suggests that longer-term gains may be better maintained by helping the couples gain insight or understanding regarding themes that underlie their destructive interactions. According to Baucom et al., this approach suggested by the research is being utilized by orientations such as CBCT and integrative couple therapy. Some research has supported this assertion. In Dunn and Schwebel's (1995) meta-analysis of behavioral marital therapy, cognitive-behavioral marital therapy, and insight-oriented marital

therapy, cognitive-behavioral marital therapy was the only treatment that resulted in post-therapy changes in relationship cognitions. Integrative behavioral couples therapy, a treatment combining traditional behavioral marital therapy with emotional acceptance, has been found to be at least as efficacious as behavioral marital therapy in one study, (Christensen et al., 2004), and a two-year follow-up study indicated that both form of therapies showed similar levels of clinically significant improvement in relationship satisfaction, with evidence for greater stability among the participants who received the integrative behavioral therapy intervention (Christensen, Atkins, Yi, Baucom, & George, 2006).

A great deal of the research in this field has focused on the treatment of marital distress once it occurs. However, a number of premarital programs have also been developed with the goal of reducing the risk for marital distress (Carroll & Doherty, 2003; Sayers et al., 1998). These programs have been based on a variety of theoretical orientations (or sometimes on no specific theoretical orientation), but their common goal has been to prepare engaged or newlywed couples for marriage in such a way as to reduce the risk for discord or divorce.

Of the various premarital programs available, Sayers, Kohn, and Heavey (1998, p. 726) identify the Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program (PREP; Markman, Floyd, Stanley, & Storaasli, 1988; Markman, Jamieson, & Floyd, 1983) as the "most well-developed and extensively researched [premarital] program." PREP is founded on the principles described in CBCT applied to the prevention context; that is, it teaches specific communication skills to facilitate a couple's exploration and addressing of relationship issues. As with the general CBCT approach, the basis for PREP is that it is not a couple's

differences that leads to distress; rather, it is how the couple approaches those differences and the negative affect those differences may evoke that primarily determine how satisfied the couple is (Markman et al., 1988).

PREP teaches communication skills to help couples address those differences in a series of alternating lectures and practice sessions in which the couples are introduced to new skills and then have an opportunity to apply them to their own relationships (Markman, Stanley, & Blumberg, 1994). In addition to teaching communication skills, PREP includes modules focusing on various relationship issues, such as sex, commitment, and spirituality. These modules are presented over a six-week program or in a focused weekend version (Renick, Blumberg, & Markman, 1992).

PREP is one of the only programs to have been evaluated beyond three years (Carroll & Doherty, 2003), and it also has the distinction of being implemented and evaluated on at least three different continents: Australia, North America, and Europe (Halford, Sanders, & Behrens, 2001; Markman et al., 1988; Markman & Hahlweg, 1993). Longitudinal and international results are somewhat promising for the PREP program, although they also highlight areas for improvement. Markman and his colleagues tracked participants in the PREP program for five years following the intervention (Markman et al., 1988; Markman, Renick, Floyd, Stanley, & Clements, 1993). At three years, PREP participants showed higher levels of relationship satisfaction and lower levels of divorce than control couples. At four years, these findings remained, and the researchers also found less negative communication, more positive communication, and lower rates of aggression in their relationship among the PREP couples when compared to the control couples. At five years, however, these differences largely disappeared. PREP couples still utilized the

communication skills at a higher rate than the control couples, and the men who went through PREP were less likely to resort to violence than the men in the control group, but the other findings became nonsignificant. The lower levels of physical aggression were still reported at a 12-year follow-up, although this was the only significant finding at that time point (Stanley, Markman, St. Peters, & Leber, 1995).

International evaluations of PREP have also demonstrated its effectiveness in some cross-cultural settings, but not in all. PREP has been translated for use in Germany, where it is known as EPL, and implemented by Hahlweg and his colleagues (Hahlweg, Markman, Thurmaier, Engl, & Eckert, 1998). Their findings replicate the results reported in America; the EPL couples showed lower rates of divorce and negative interactions and higher rates of relationship satisfaction and positive interactions than control couples. A variation of PREP incorporating self-regulation training (Self-PREP) has also been implemented in Australia (Halford et al., 2001). This study also made the addition of differentiating between high-risk and low-risk couples (based on divorce or relationship aggression in the couples' parents). They unexpectedly found that the intervention was effective for the high risk couples, but that the low-risk couples who participated in the intervention actually showed significantly greater drops in relationship satisfaction over the first four years after the intervention when compared to control couples. PREP has also been evaluated with a Dutch sample of somewhat older couples (van Widenfelt, Hosman, Schaap, & van der Staak, 1996); this study found an increase in problematic interactions among high-risk couples receiving PREP and the opposite among low-risk couples at a 9-month follow-up, and no significant differences between the high-risk and low-risk couples at a 2-year follow-up. In summary, van Widenfelt et al. found no protective effects for the high-risk couples who participated in

PREP. One explanation the authors offered is that the couples who participated in the intervention in this study were older couples who had been together longer than the typical American couple who participates in such interventions. The authors indicate that couples in the Netherlands tend to first cohabitate, then have children, and then get married, and the authors suggest that this different pattern may be useful to consider when assessing the best time to offer such an intervention. At this point, the research is unclear on how beneficial programs like PREP are for high- and low-risk couples, and there is mixed evidence for its cross-cultural effectiveness.

In an attempt to review and summarize the literature on premarital programs, Carroll and Doherty (2003) provide a comprehensive meta-analysis of empirically-supported premarital programs. In their review of 13 experimental studies examining the effectiveness of premarital programs, all but one of those studies utilized a program that taught communication skills. Carroll and Doherty report that all but one of those programs were also found to be effective in improving both communication skills and relationship quality, based on both observational coding and self-report measures. The one program that was not found to be effective was the one program that did not teach communication skills.

Carroll and Doherty's (2003) review found not only statistically significant differences between the experimental and control groups, but they also found that these programs produced substantial effects, at least in the short term. Carroll and Doherty included 7 of the 13 experimental studies in their meta-analysis, resulting in 237 outcome measures. Overall, their meta-analysis resulted in a between-groups effect size of 0.80, comparing treatment groups to control groups. They also examined these effects more closely, producing a mean effect size of 0.99 immediately following the intervention and a

mean effect size of 0.64 at longer term follow-ups. Carroll and Doherty concluded that empirically based premarital programs do generally result in gains in communication skills, including negotiating conflict, and overall relationship quality and that these gains can generally be seen up to three years following the intervention. However, Carroll and Doherty pointed out that there are a limited number of studies that have followed participants beyond three years and that further research is required before we can be certain what the long-term effects of premarital programs are. Interestingly, they did note that a focus on communication, particularly conflict negotiation, seems to be a necessary component for an effective premarital program, but they also noted that the effective programs exhibit a wide diversity in other aspects. For example, group sessions, individual couple counseling, and weekend retreats appear to be equally effective, as do programs conducted by professionals and lay leaders.

Other research has not cast such a positive light on premarital programs. Sullivan and Bradbury (1997) conducted a survey of recently married couples asking whether they had participated in some sort of premarital program. Their analyses revealed no differences on marital satisfaction or marital aggression between those who had participated in a premarital program and those who had not. It should be noted that Sullivan and Bradbury's survey did not assess what type of premarital counseling the couples had experienced. As discussed above, a number of studies have demonstrated that couples who go through premarital training programs such as PREP do show significant and reliable improvements in relationship functioning over no-treatment and placebo control conditions (Giblin, Sprenkle, & Sheehan, 1985; Hahlweg & Markman, 1988). The different results of these studies highlight the need for evaluating what specific premarital interventions are effective. Merely

asking whether a couple has received premarital counseling is not a detailed enough assessment to explore the effectiveness of premarital programs. With the overwhelming evidence that programs such as PREP that teach communication skills significantly improve relationship functioning, Sullivan and Bradbury's results become a clear call to continue to develop and identify effective programs and to disseminate those programs in place of the ones that produce no significant improvements.

As part of the effort to continue the development of effective programs, some researchers have returned to considering the improvements made to CBCT for distressed couples. One criticism that behavioral approaches generally have received is that they are inadequate in addressing certain relationship problems. Couples whose primary complaints involve a low level of affection and a sense of disconnection have generally not benefited as much from behavioral interventions as other couples have (Bennun, 1985a, 1985b). Additionally, the quality of affection in a couple's marriage prior to treatment was the best predictor of how well the couple responded to behavioral interventions in one study (Hahlweg, Schindler, Revenstorf, & Brengelmann, 1984). Generally, couples who are experiencing lower levels of connectedness and affection appear to benefit less from behavioral interventions. Addressing these shortcomings of traditional behavioral interventions has become an area of emphasis for CBCT and for cognitive-behavioral premarital programs.

Epstein and Baucom (2002) agree that behavioral interventions as they have been implemented in the past are not sufficiently effective in addressing some presenting complaints. They argue, however, that behavioral interventions have often been applied too narrowly, i.e., there has been too much focus on addressing singular concerns without

attending to the themes emerging in these concerns. Their model of enhanced cognitive-behavioral couple therapy expands beyond these specific concerns to consider macrothemes that emerge at the levels of the individual, the couple, and their environment. Epstein and Baucom do not abandon the structured behavioral interventions, nor do they rely on them exclusively. Rather, their model of enhanced cognitive-behavioral couple therapy utilizes these behavioral interventions as tools to help couples achieve specific goals related to the broader themes. For example, a wife may experience her husband's desire to spend time with his friends independent of her as a sign of disinterest in their marriage. Practicing the communication skills of CBCT may help the wife to understand and respect the need for a sense of autonomy that motivates her husband's behavior (rather than disinterest), and it may be helpful for the husband to implement specific behavioral changes that his wife experiences as signs of his commitment to their relationship. Thus, individuals can learn broader themes from the implementation of these specific interventions; once the individuals have learned to be more responsive to each other's needs, they will no longer rely on the behavioral interventions, unless they return to a problematic style of relating. An essential aspect of Epstein and Baucom's enhanced cognitive-behavioral couples therapy then is attending to the macrothemes, desires, and motives that emerge for the couple in addition to using specific behavioral interventions to help the couple change their style of interaction.

Epstein and Baucom (2002) offer a framework within which to operate when considering these macrothemes. They conceptualize the couple at three levels: the individual, the couple, and their environment. How a couple functions is based on factors that fit into one of these categories. At the individual level, each member of the couple has unique motives and desires, a unique personality, and possibly psychopathology that contribute to

(or detract from) the couple's functioning. At the next level, Epstein and Baucom recognize

that a couple is not simply the sum of two individuals; instead, there are couple processes and

patterns that emerge through the interaction of the two individuals. A couple is a dynamic

entity that develops and adjusts, usually reaching some state of equilibrium as the individuals

attempt to have their needs met and learn how to relate with each other. Finally, a couple

does not exist in a void; a couple's functioning is influenced by their environment, whether

positively or negatively. Some aspects of the environment will bring stressors (e.g., a

demanding job or intrusive family of origin) or will benefit the couple (e.g., a supportive

group of friends or a faith community that encourages the couple in their marriage). At each

level, the couple continues to develop over time. Individuals enter new stages of life and

develop new motives and desires; couples develop new ways of interacting as they learn

more about each other, or they become accustomed to familiar ways of interacting and

dislike change; and a couple's environment changes as they have children, change jobs, or

navigate new ways of relating with their families of origin.

Baucom and his colleagues (Baucom, Kirby, Stanton, Fredman, & Sullivan, 2003)

have applied this understanding of macrothemes and this model of relationships to

developing a premarital program, bringing a broader approach to prevention programs for

couples that goes beyond communication training. Drawing on empirical findings of CBCT

and PREP (Baucom, Hahlweg, Atkins, Engl, & Thurmaier, 2006; Schilling, Baucom, Burnett,

Allen, & Ragland, 2003), they have created a program they call "Building Our Own Story

Together" (BOOST), emphasizing the couples' agency in determining how they develop in

their relationship. BOOST teaches participants the communication skills that are

foundational to CBCT and PREP and raises several relationship issues with which the

couples can practice these new communication skills. These relationship issues cover a number of important macrothemes, including individual differences (motives and communication styles), social support (supporting each other and giving to and receiving from the community), maintaining a sense of connectedness (through shared activities and conversations and through physical affection and sexuality), and practicing spirituality in the context of their relationship. The various topics of BOOST are presented within the three-level framework of individuals (motives, communication styles, supporting each other), couple (communication, connectedness, sexuality), and environment (receiving community support, giving back, and spirituality), and couples are encouraged to attend to and discuss how these macrothemes play out in their relationships.

While BOOST has been received positively by the two church communities in which it has been implemented, the model for disseminating the program has its limitations. Until recently, the primary method for disseminating BOOST, PREP, and other empirically supported programs has been to train university personnel (e.g., professors and graduate students) to deliver these programs. However, this approach presents certain problems. First, as some researchers have pointed out (Laurenceau, Stanley, Olmos-Gallo, Baucom, & Markman, 2004), this method of delivery does not reflect the typical setting or manner in which these programs are delivered. The majority of premarital prevention programs are delivered in religious organizations by a leader of that organization, not by an unfamiliar professional. Second, the design that utilizes university personnel is inherently limited in its scope of dissemination. Essentially, there are only so many university personnel that can be trained to deliver such programs, and those who are trained have a limited amount of time.

Thus, the dissemination of these empirically-supported programs is limited by the current method of distribution.

In an attempt to address the inadequacies of this current method, recent research has begun to explore alternate methods for disseminating PREP. Researchers have evaluated PREP that has been implemented by lay church leaders (Laurenceau et al., 2004), clergy and lay church leaders (Markman et al., 2004; Stanley et al., 2001), and Army chaplains (Stanley et al., 2005). These studies have confirmed the viability of training clergy for the dissemination of these programs (Stanley et al., 2005), and they have demonstrated that lay and clergy leaders can deliver PREP as effectively as, (Stanley et al., 2001) or more effectively than, the university faculty and students who had typically delivered the program, at least in the short term (Laurenceau et al., 2004). Finally, the clergy and lay leaders reported feeling confident in using the programs after training and appreciated the opportunity to bring this type of program to their community (Markman et al., 2004). Stanley et al. (2001) speculate that the leaders in the religious organizations who were trained in PREP and distributed the program were able to make use of their general familiarity with marriage education and benefited from working in a setting familiar to them and to the couples with whom they worked.

Working from the three-level model of couple functioning outlined by Epstein and Baucom (2002), we can propose an additional explanation for these findings. Epstein and Baucom highlight the importance of a couple's environment in their functioning. A significant aspect of the environment is the community in which the couple lives and how the couple experiences support from the community. A couple's community may provide a variety of resources to the couple, both tangible and intangible, including social support,

companionship, financial support, and other types of instrumental support (McKenry & Price, 2000). A couple who has the opportunity to participate in a program such as BOOST or PREP that is offered by and in the context of their community might receive multiple types of support through that program. This support might be experienced as even more meaningful coming from familiar community members instead of being offered by professionals visiting the community to deliver the program. Again, Stanley (2001) argues that one of the benefits of premarital education is that it sends the message the marriage is worthwhile. While this message is important to send from a government level, it might be more powerful to hear this message from close people in one's community.

Research into religiosity and marriage may also shed some light on the effectiveness of programs delivered in religious organizations. The implementation of premarital programs in the context of a religious organization communicates that marriage is important to that religious community. Often, the message is not only that marriage is important, but that it is also sacred. Research into such spiritual perceptions of marriage has found a positive correlation between these perceptions and less marital conflict, more collaboration, and greater global marital adjustment (Mahoney et al., 1999).

Research has also examined how participation in religious activities is correlated with marital satisfaction. While some research has been limited to confirming that couples who participate in more religious activities together show higher levels of marital satisfaction (Mahoney et al., 1999), other research has more deeply explored this relationship. Clayton (2000) has examined the interplay between participation in religious activities, general religious commitment, religious relationship standards, and marital quality. In his study, he found that general religious commitment was correlated with marital satisfaction. He further

found that men's religious relationship standards (i.e., values about how to behave in relationships generally taught by the major world religions) mediated the relationship between their commitment and their relationship satisfaction; men's standards also mediated the relationship between the couples' joint participation in religious activities and the wife's satisfaction. A premarital program offered in the context of a religious organization offers a couple the opportunity to engage in a joint religious activity, and premarital programs taught in this context reinforce the religious relationship standards that are associated with greater marital satisfaction, at least when men display higher levels of them.

Recently, some religious leaders and organizations have begun encouraging a specific method for supporting the couples in their communities: marriage mentoring (Benson, 2005; Parrott & Parrott, 1995, 1997, 2005). In an attempt to make community support for couples more available, some religious organizations are either formally or informally creating marriage mentoring relationships in their communities. What is marriage mentoring? This phenomenon is still fairly young, and different individuals have conceptualized it in different ways. The Parrotts (2005) and Benson (2005) have written books for marriage mentors to explain what a mentoring couple is and how to go about mentoring other couples. Both have written from their personal experience in mentoring couples and from training mentoring couples.

Parrott and Parrott (2005) describe marriage mentors as an older, more experienced couple who enters into a relationship with a younger couple (newlywed or engaged) with the explicit purpose of mentoring them. Mentoring, according to Parrott and Parrott, involves a number of roles. A mentoring couple serves as a source of information about marriage-related skills or materials. A mentoring couple models a healthy, more mature relationship to

the younger couple. A mentoring couple is invested in the younger couple's development and well-being. A mentoring couple supports and encourages a younger couple in their relationship development. A mentoring couple shows a younger couple new perspectives on marriage. And a mentoring couple has more expertise but views themselves as equals with the younger couple. The Parrotts also explain that a mentoring couple is not intended to serve as parents for the younger couple, nor is the mentoring couple to have a relationship with the younger couple for the purpose of socializing. They also indicate that a mentoring couple is not to be on call for each crisis that arises for the younger couple or to be a professor with all the answers for the younger couple. The mentoring couple does not need to be perfect or to have a perfect marriage to help younger couples. The Parrotts propose that the essence of the marriage mentoring relationship is an agreement between a more experienced couple and a younger couple with the expressed intent of helping the younger couple's relationship.

Benson (2005) offers a slightly different perspective on marriage mentoring. He compares a mentoring couple, or support couple, as he calls them, to extended family and says that, as such, they offer three main benefits. First, they offer a source of values; particularly, Benson argues, they communicate that marriage is valuable. Second, they offer opportunities to learn from observing another couple. Third, they offer support, encouragement, and new ideas to the younger couple. Benson says that, to the extent that they offer these things, mentoring couples are somewhat like aunts and uncles to the younger couples. He points out that this means that a mentoring couple does not have to be a professional counselor, restating the roles of the mentoring couple: to show the younger couple that their marriage is valued, to talk about their own experience of marriage (both

positive and negative), and to talk with the younger couple about that couple's experience of marriage. Benson asserts that it is in fact helpful for a mentoring couple to be less than perfect so that they can show a younger couple how to survive the stress of the bad times. Like the Parrotts, Benson describes the mentoring relationship as a relationship between an older couple and a younger couple with the focus on helping the younger couple's relationship.

Examining these two perspectives on mentoring couples for overlap may help us to tease out the common (and hopefully most important) threads proposed for effective mentoring. Both Benson (2005) and the Parrotts (2005) indicate that a mentoring couple serves as a model for the younger couple. The younger couple can (hopefully) learn good communication skills and caring interactions from the mentoring couple. Both also state that a mentoring couple encourages and supports the younger couple, including normalizing problems to reduce anxiety. Mentoring couples have been through the "rough spots" in marriage and have worked through those times. They can show younger couples that these difficult times need not be the end of their relationship. Both the Parrotts and Benson also indicate that the mentoring couple can share the wisdom they have gained from learning to support each other through both positive and negative times in their marriage.

Looking across both approaches, we can also see similarities in the ways the authors describe their approaches to the mentoring process. Both the Parrotts (2005) and Benson (2005) provide communication skills, both to teach to younger couples and to use in conversations with them. In particular, they teach some conversational skills that allow the mentoring couples to lead the conversations that they have with the younger couples. Both the Parrotts and Benson also cover some of the information and goals of the mentoring

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relationship; both encourage exploring those goals with the younger couples. Although their actual goals may be somewhat different, they both highlight the need for direction and clarity of expectations for the mentoring relationship. Finally, both Benson and the Parrotts discuss the boundaries of the mentoring relationship, recognizing that there are some issues that a mentoring couple is not equipped to handle. They also highlight the boundaries between the mentoring relationship and other kinds of relationships; in other words, they make it clear that the mentoring couple is neither a professional counseling team nor a pair of surrogate parents. In sum, both Benson and the Parrotts cover the process of marriage mentoring, the content of marriage mentoring, and the boundaries in marriage mentoring.

These books are important steps in developing marriage mentoring programs. Nevertheless, it is important to note that they are based on the authors' experience, but the mentor training presented in these books has not been evaluated empirically. In fact, there is a dearth of research on marriage mentoring. Ripley, Parrott, Worthington, Parrott, and Smith (2001) provide the only empirical examination of mentoring training, although they focused only on how well mentoring couples retained the material presented in their training rather than evaluating the effects of mentoring.

The current study seeks to begin the exploration of the effectiveness of marriage mentoring. Given the high rates of divorce and the need for premarital interventions, methods that allow for widespread dissemination are clearly needed. The research that has begun investigating program delivery by lay and clergy members has been promising (Laurenceau et al., 2004; Markman et al., 2004; Stanley et al., 2005; Stanley et al., 2001), indicating that this may be an effective solution to the dissemination dilemma. Parrott and Parrott (2005) and Benson (2005) offer a model for this dissemination to take place wherever

communities interested in supporting marriage exist, although these marriage mentoring models have not yet been evaluated empirically. The field of premarital education has made strong advancements over the years, and we can now be confident that our interventions are effective, at least in the short term (Carroll & Doherty, 2003). However, we must continue researching different methods of delivery to ensure that we maintain or increase these levels of effectiveness as we evaluate ways to disseminate these programs more broadly.

The current study proposes to do exactly that. A significant amount of research has demonstrated the effectiveness of premarital programs based in teaching communication skills, such as PREP, and further refinement of our approaches to working with couples has led to the development of increasingly sophisticated premarital programs, such as BOOST. Recent studies have also begun examining alternate methods of dissemination, methods that better match the typical implementation of premarital programs and that are more feasible for large-scale distribution. The current study seeks to extend this line of research by developing, implementing, and evaluating a premarital program that utilizes mentoring couples in its delivery.

The program developed for this study, called Side by Side, incorporates the empirically-based communication skills training used in PREP and BOOST, the empirically-based conceptual model of relationships used in BOOST, and the mentoring model, which has the benefits of making dissemination more practical, creating deeper connections between the participants and their community, and, when provided in the context of a religious organization, teaching religious relationship standards and the sanctification of marriage – spiritual domains that are empirically related to marital adjustment. To this end, the current study evaluates how well a mentor training program that draws from the Parrotts'

(2005) and Benson's (2005) mentoring models equips mentoring couples to deliver a premarital program. This study examines (a) the effects of the mentor training on the mentoring couples' relationship satisfaction, communication, and relationship beliefs, (b) the effects of participation in the Side by Side program on the relationships of younger couples who are paired with mentoring couples, (c) the effects of participation in the Side by Side program on the mentoring couples above and beyond the effects of the mentoring training, and (d) whether certain patterns of personality traits among the mentoring and younger couples are associated with the effectiveness of the mentoring relationship (e.g., is the mentoring relationship better when the mentoring couple and younger couple are both more extraverted?).

To examine these effects, the mentoring couples and the younger couples completed global assessments of their communication skills and relationship satisfaction and questionnaires on joint religious activities, perceptions of the sanctity of marriage, social support in their relationships, and their religious relationship standards. To evaluate how the relationship between a mentoring couple and a younger couple affects the younger couple's experience of the program, the younger couples completed an alliance inventory that is typically used in couple therapy and was modified for use with a mentoring relationship. All participants also completed a brief personality assessment to examine whether certain combinations of personalities in the mentoring couples and the younger couples affected the mentoring relationship. For example, are the mentoring relationships in which both members of the younger couple and both members of the mentoring couple are extraverted rated the best by the younger couples, or does some mix of introverts and extraverts correlate with higher ratings? A general assessment of mental health also was used for all participants as a

screening tool for the mentors and to help identify younger couples who may benefit from help outside the context of the Side by Side program.

The mentoring couples were evaluated at three time points in this study: (a) before the mentor training (Time 1), (b) after the mentor training and before the implementation of the Side by Side program (Time 2), and (c) after completion of the Side by Side program (Time 3). The mentoring couples were assessed at these three time points in order to determine what aspects of their participation are associated with different changes in their own relationships. For example, the mentor training included communication skills training but did not offer an opportunity to practice those communication skills with specific relationship issues. Did the mentoring couples receive benefits to their communication but not to their relationship satisfaction as a result? What further effects did participation in the Side by Side program itself have? Did the mentoring couple experience a further boost in their communication skills after participating in the full program? Assessing the mentoring couples at these three time points allowed us to parse out these effects. The younger couples participating in the Side by Side program were evaluated at two time points in a straightforward pre-test/post-test design. These two time points corresponded with the second and third time points at which the mentoring couples are assessed; in other words, the mentoring couples were assessed at all three time points, and the younger couples were assessed at Times 2 and 3. The predictions for this study are presented for the mentoring couple by time point and then for the younger couples.

The proposed study did not include a control group for comparison. As Baucom, Hahlweg, and Kuschel (2003) explain, the course of couples who do not receive intervention is well-documented in the research literature. Given this abundance of research on the

trajectory of couples in control groups, it is unnecessary to continue assigning couples who are willing to participate in research to a control condition. Doing so provides no information that is not already available in the literature; instead, assigning participants to treatment conditions avoids the ethical dilemma of withholding treatment from couples seeking it and makes better use of those participants willing to take part in research. Therefore, this study evaluated the effectiveness of the Side by Side program by calculating within-group effect sizes and comparing these effects sizes to those of prevention programs described in the literature instead of using a control group.

The first predictions were for the mentoring couples' participation in the mentoring training, examining change between Times 1 and 2. The mentoring training included communication skills training, an overview of the Side by Side program, and training in the role of the mentoring couples. The second group of predictions focuses on the effects of participating in the Side by Side program on the mentoring couples' relationships. Third, the predicted effects of the Side by Side program on the younger couples' relationships are presented.

Hypothesis 1: From Time 1 to Time 2, mentoring couples will exhibit higher scores on communication skills, relationship satisfaction, social support, sanctification of marriage, and religious relationship standards. *Hypothesis 1a*: The mentor training targeted communication skills, so an increase in communication skills is expected. Specifically, scores on positive communication behaviors will increase, and scores on negative communication behaviors will decrease for mentoring couples. *Hypothesis 1b*: Relationship satisfaction is predicted to rise with mentor training. *Hypothesis 1c*: The mentoring training encouraged the mentoring couples to think about their relationship and to work as a team,

which is anticipated to lead to higher scores on a measure of social support. *Hypotheses 1d*:

Participating in marriage mentor training in their church community is expected to raise

scores on the sanctification of marriage scale. The church community itself implicitly and

explicitly communicates a view of marriage as sacred and that God is active in marriage.

Participation in the program brought the couples closer to this message, which is anticipated

to influence their beliefs about and experience of their marriages. *Hypothesis 1e*: Finally, the

Side by Side program taught relationship values that are consistent with religious relationship

standards, which is expected to lead to higher scores on that scale as well.

     Hypothesis 2: From Time 2 to Time 3, mentoring couples will exhibit a similar

increase in scores on communication skills, relationship satisfaction, social support,

sanctification of marriage, and religious relationship standards. *Hypothesis 2a*: The

mentoring couples received more training in communication skills and more opportunities to

practice those skills, which is expected to be associated with a further increase in scales

assessing communication. *Hypothesis 2b*: Participation in the Side by Side program gave the

mentoring couples a chance to practice communication, address their own relationship issues,

and give back to their community; all of these are expected to result in higher levels of

relationship satisfaction. *Hypothesis 2c*: The Side by Side program included a module

targeting ways in which individuals can support their partners; thus it is expected that scores

on a measure of social support will increase. *Hypothesis 2d*: It is predicted that the

mentoring couples will also score more highly on a sanctification of marriage scale following

participation in Side by Side. Side by Side included a section on practicing spirituality in

marriage that encouraged the couples to consider how they wish to incorporate spirituality in

their relationships. *Hypothesis 2e*: Lastly, mentoring couples were exposed to more

relationship topics, such as supporting each other and how to attend to each other's needs, that are consistent with general religious relationships standards. As a result, it is expected that their religious relationship standards scores will rise again.

Hypothesis 3: From Time 2 to Time 3, the younger couples will experience similar gains in communication skills, relationship satisfaction, social support, sanctification of marriage, and religious relationship standards for reasons similar to the expected gains for the mentoring couples across the same time points.

Hypothesis 4: The quality of the relationship between the mentoring couples and the younger couples that have been paired together is expected to be important for the effectiveness of the intervention for the younger couples. The quality of the relationship between the two couples was assessed with a modified couple alliance inventory, and it is expected that the quality of the relationship between the mentoring couple and younger couple will predict the effects presented in Hypothesis 3. That is, the quality of the mentoring relationship will be correlated with the degree of improvement the younger couple experiences during the course of this program.

Hypothesis 5: For the younger couples, participation in the Side by Side program will be associated with within group effect sizes on relationship satisfaction that are equal to or greater than the within group effect sizes of PREP. As indicated above, Laurenceau et al. (2004) have conducted a study of PREP delivered by two different groups, university personnel and religious organization leaders. They report the between-group effect sizes in their article, making comparisons to a treatment-as-usual group included in their study. Because the proposed study will rely on within-group effect sizes, we contacted Laurenceau et al. to obtain the data from their study to calculate within-groups effect sizes for PREP

delivered by university personnel, by religious organization leaders, and treatment-as-usual so that we can compare the effect sizes from the proposed study to the effect sizes from the Laurenceau et al. study. Because the Laurenceau et al. study included both university personnel and religious organization leaders, it provides appropriate comparisons for the proposed study. Comparing to the implementation by the university personnel will indicate how well Side by Side performs when compared to a traditional implementation of an empirically supported program. Comparing to PREP delivered by religious leaders will provide a comparison of an implementation more similar to the Side by Side program in that both implementations rely on the church community members to deliver the program.

Exploratory analyses. In addition to testing the above hypotheses, exploratory analyses will be conducted on the personality variables of the participants and their associations with the quality of the mentoring relationship. These analyses will consider whether particular patterns of personality traits within a mentoring group are associated with a better mentoring relationship. For example, lower overall levels of extraversion in a mentoring group may be related to less conversation and interaction, which could be associated with less positive experiences of the mentoring relationship by the younger couple. On the other hand, more diverse levels of extraversion within a mentoring group might be associated with a sense of vitality within the group, with members with different personalities contributing in diverse and complementary ways. Exploratory analyses will be conducted to explore these different possibilities.

Methods

Participants

The participants in this study were recruited from a moderately sized church in a large Southern city. Participants consisted of two groups, the mentoring couples and the younger couples.

Recruitment for the mentoring couples was conducted first. Because the mentoring couples were partially responsible for the delivery of the program, only couples from the church membership that met certain criteria were contacted about participation in this study as mentoring couples. The selection criteria were employed in two phases. The first phase was overseen by a committee whose focus is to support the marriages and families of the church. This committee solicited names of couples who were perceived to have the following characteristics and qualities: (a) having been married for at least 5 years, (b) displaying healthy communication in and satisfaction with their marriage, (c) an ability to interact with younger couples in a supportive and non-judgmental manner, and (d) upholding the teachings of their church community. The six-person committee then compiled a list of these suggestions and discussed in a private meeting which of the suggested couples best fit these criteria, refining the list of potential mentoring couples. The committee then contacted the remaining potential mentoring couples to describe the Side by Side program and the research involved; in all, 30 potential mentoring couples were contacted. Of those 30 couples, 10 expressed interest in participating and requested more information. The most common reasons for declining to participate were due to scheduling conflicts or a lack of

time to devote to the program. The interested couples received a packet of materials for participation in the study, part of the second phase of screening. This packet included the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS; Spanier, 1976) and the Brief Symptom Inventory – 18 (BSI-18; Derogatis, Fitzpatrick, & Maruish, 2004), which were used as screening tools. All 10 of the interested mentoring couples agreed to participate in the study, and none of the members of the mentoring couples showed distress on either scale. Scores below 97 on the DAS indicate that a couple is experiencing distress in their relationship; the lowest score on the DAS among the mentoring couples was 109, well above the threshold. Scores above 10 for men and 14 for women on the BSI-18 indicate elevated levels of individual distress; the highest score on the BSI-18 among the mentoring couples was 8, below the threshold indicating distress. Demographics for the mentoring couples are presented in Table 1. In addition to the demographics reported in this table, participants were asked to indicate how religious they are, from 1, "Not religious", to 7, "Very religious", and how spiritual they are, on a similar scale. The average response on the item assessing religiousness among mentoring couples was 6.5, ranging from 5 to 7; for spirituality, the average was 6.3, ranging from 5 to 7 as well.

The younger couples were recruited more broadly through advertisements in a weekly church bulletin and a monthly church newsletter and during services held on Sunday mornings. These advertisements included a brief description of the program and research and contact information for the principal investigator, as well as the only criterion for the younger couples: that they be married for five years or less, or that they be currently engaged to be married. The principal investigator described more details of the program and research to the couples who contacted him; these conversations took place over the phone or, in a few

Table 1

Demographics for Mentoring Couples and Younger Couples in the Side by Side Program

	Mentoring Couples			Younger Couples		
	M	Min	Max	*M*	Min	Max
Age	52.3	43	74	28.4	22	47
Years Married	25.6	15	49	1.6	0.1	4.5
Children	2.5	0	4	0.1	0	1
Years of Education	17.5	15	20	18.7	16	23
Number of Previous Marriages	0.2	0	2	0.1	0	1
Ethnicity	All Caucasian			18 Caucasian, 2 Asian		
Religion	All Protestant Christian			19 Protestant Christian, 1 Catholic		

Note: *N* = 10 mentoring couples and 10 younger couples. All couples were heterosexual.

instances, in person. The principal investigator stressed that this program focused on

relationship education and was not couples therapy, indicating that distressed couples would

be better served elsewhere. Fourteen couples expressed interest in the program, and 11

indicated that they would like to participate after these discussions. The three potential

younger couples who chose not to participate cited scheduling conflicts, and the last couple

to express interest was informed that there were not enough mentoring couples for them to

participate, and they were referred to the pastor of the church for premarital counseling. The

principal investigator sent a packet of materials for participation in the study to the 10

couples. These materials contained the same screening inventories used for the mentoring

couples, and the younger couples were screened with the same criteria as the mentoring

couples. The screening of the younger couples served two purposes. First, this was to ensure

that distressed couples did not seek this program out as a substitute for therapy. This

program is not designed to replace therapy, and this step was included to prevent a younger

couple's using it as such. Second, it would be unethical to expect a mentoring couple to

participate in this program paired with a younger couple experiencing significant distress.

None of the younger couples reported distress in their relationships; the lowest score on the

DAS among the younger couples was 101, above the threshold indicating distress of 97.

However, three members of younger couples showed elevations on the BSI-18, with two

women scoring at 15 and 27 (above the threshold of 14 for women) and one man scoring at

32 (above the threshold of 10 for men). The principal investigator contacted each of these

three participants and, in consultation with his dissertation advisor, determined whether these

elevated symptoms would interfere with their participation in the program or put undue stress

on their mentoring couples. Through these discussions, it was determined that these

elevations were either transient (in the case of the highest score, due to a recent medication change in treatment of a medical condition) or were being addressed through psychotherapy and/or pharmacotherapy and that they would not interfere with the mentoring relationship or their participation in the program. See Table 1 for demographics for the younger couples. The younger couples were also asked to rate their own religiousness and spirituality. Among the younger couples, the average response on the item assessing religiousness was 5.8, ranging from 4 to 7; for spirituality, the average response was 5.7, ranging from 4 to 7 as well.

All mentoring couples completed the mentor training and the Side by Side program, and all younger couples completed the Side by Side program, resulting in a 100% retention rate for participation in the program. All mentoring couples also completed their questionnaires for Time 1 and Time 2, and 18 of the 20 mentoring participants completed their questionnaires for Time 3; the two non-responders at this time point were members of the same couple. All younger couples completed their questionnaires for Time 2 and Time 3.

Materials

Measures

Participants in this study completed a variety of inventories assessing communication, relationship satisfaction, beliefs about relationships, and demographics. These inventories were administered to the couples at different time points in the study, described in the Procedure section. Generally, these inventories were selected to measure constructs targeted by the Side by Side program. The Side by Side program targets the quality of the participants' relationships; therefore, a measure of relationship adjustment was included. The measure of relationship adjustment was also used as a screening tool, as described in the

Participants section. As a program based in the cognitive-behavioral tradition, Side by Side

also targets communication skills; to assess its effectiveness in this realm, a measure of

communication patterns was included. In addition to these communication skills, the Side by

Side program also raises other relationship issues for the couples to address, such as

supporting each other and practicing their faith together. To measure the effectiveness of the

program in these areas, instruments assessing participation in religious activities together,

views of marriage as sanctified, social support in their relationships, and relationship

standards consistent with the teachings of the major world religions were included. Finally,

participants also completed other measures that do not assess targeted areas of the program

but that were used in other ways. A demographics questionnaire was included to assess the

type of sample included in this study. A brief assessment of mental health was included to

screen the mentoring couples. To examine whether the relationships between the mentoring

couples and the younger couples predict the effectiveness of the program for the younger

couples, an inventory assessing a couple's sense of alliance with a therapist was modified for

the mentoring context. Mentoring couples and younger couples completed a brief

personality assessment for the purpose of exploring whether certain personality combinations

are correlated with a better mentoring relationship. All participants also completed a Side by

Side evaluation form to gather feedback on the participants' experience of the program.

Table 2 presents an overview of when the couples completed the various inventories.

   Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS; Spanier, 1976). The 32-item DAS is a commonly

used self-report assessment of global marital adjustment, with higher scores reflecting greater

adjustment. Scores above 103 typically indicate a non-distressed couple, whereas scores

below that point indicate a distressed couple. The DAS has demonstrated adequate validity

Table 2

Questionnaires Administered across the Three Time Points

	Time Points					
	1: Prior to Mentor Training		2: Post-Training and Prior to Side by Side Program		3: Post-Program	
	Mentoring Couples	Younger Couples	Mentoring Couples	Younger Couples	Mentoring Couples	Younger Couples
Demographics	X			X		
DAS	X		X	X	X	X
CPQ	X		X	X	X	X
BSI-18	X			X		
Big 5	X			X		
SOMQ	X		X	X	X	X
SIRRS-R	X		X	X	X	X
IRRS	X		X	X	X	X
Evaluation					X	X
CAI						X

in that it has been used to discriminate between married and divorced couples and to track

response to marital therapy (Baucom & Lester, 1986). The DAS has also shown good

internal consistency, with alpha coefficients ranging from .96 to .73 for the various subscales.

Communication Patterns Questionnaire (CPQ; Christensen & Sullaway, 1984). The

CPQ is a 23-item measure of how a couple communicates before, during, and after

discussion of a relationship problem, and assesses aspects of communication like avoidance

of discussion of the conflict, negotiation, criticizing, reconciliation, or withholding after a

conflict. Scores on three CPQ subscales have been shown to differentiate between distressed

and non-distressed couples: the Mutual Constructive Communication subscale (five items),

the Mutual Avoidance subscale (three items), and the Demand/Withdraw subscale (six items).

These three subscales have alpha coefficients ranging from .86 to .62, with a mean of .71

(Christensen & Shenk, 1991). Scores on the Mutual Constructive Communication subscale

represent positive communication, and negative communication is assessed by the Mutual

Avoidance and Demand/Withdraw subscales.

Joint Religious Activities Questionnaire[1] (JRAQ; Mahoney et al., 1999). The JRAQ

is a measure of how often a couple engages in religious activities together, such as attending

church, talking about God's will, or praying. The JRAQ consists of 13 items and has shown

high internal consistency, with alpha coefficients of .92 for wives and .90 for husbands.

Scores on the JRAQ have been associated with greater marital adjustment, less marital

conflict, more verbal collaboration, and less use of verbal aggression and stalemate. It has

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[1] It should be noted that changes assessed by this scale are anticipated for longer-term follow-up of participation in this program; as such, these effects are not likely to be seen until a longer-term follow-up time point, which is beyond the scope of this dissertation. As a result, no predictions are made for the scores on this scale, and no results are included for this scale.

been argued that higher scores on this scale reflect greater integration of religion and marriage.

Sanctification of Marriage Questionnaires (SOMQ; Mahoney et al., 1999). Two questionnaires were used to assess participants' perceptions of the sanctification of marriage. The first, the Perceived Sacred Qualities of Marriage Scale (PSQMS), was designed to assess an individual's subjective characterization of marriage in terms of sacredness. The nine items of this scale are made up of opposing adjectives (e.g., religious–nonreligious, spiritual–worldly) placed at the ends of a seven-point scale. The PSQMS has acceptable internal consistency, with an alpha coefficient of .87 for wives and .88 for husbands. The second, the Manifestation of God Scale (MGS), was designed to assess a more traditional understanding of the sanctification of marriage. Scores on this scale represent the extent to which an individual believes that God is present and active in his or her marriage. This 14-item scale consists of statements with which the participants agree or disagree. The MGS has high internal consistency, with an alpha coefficient of .97 for both wives and husbands. Higher scores on the SOMQ have been associated with lower marital conflict and greater collaboration.

Support in Intimate Relationships Ratings Scale - Revised (SIRRS-R; adapted from Dehle, Larsen, & Landers, 2001). The SIRRS-R is a 20-item scale assessing the types of social support partners give each other in close relationships. The SIRRS-R is a shortened version of the original 48-item SIRRS. The original SIRRS had high internal consistency with an alpha coefficient of .97 and a split half reliability of .88. It also correlates with other global measures of social support in the expected direction. The original SIRRS was modified to create a briefer inventory. The SIRRS-R has not been evaluated for reliability or

validity, but the high reliability of the SIRRS suggested that paring down the number of items would not significantly reduce the utility of the scale.

Inventory of Religious Relationship Standards (IRRS; Clayton, 2000). The IRRS is a 25-item scale that assesses the extent to which a person believes certain relationship standards that are religiously influenced. In other words, it assesses certain values about how one should behave in relationships that are taught by most of the world's religions. The scale contains four subscales: (a) Relationship Priority, (b) Love, (c) Forgiveness, and (d) Negative Reciprocity. High scores on these subscales and on the overall score are associated with greater relationship focus. The scale has demonstrated acceptable internal consistency, with alpha coefficients ranging from .84 to .90.

Brief Symptom Inventory - 18 (BSI-18; Derogatis et al., 2004). The 18-item version of the Brief Symptom Inventory assesses psychological distress and disorders. This scale has been shown to correlate highly with other assessments of psychological distress, such as the Symptom Checklist-90-Revised. The total score for the BSI-18 is composed of the scores on three subscales: Depression, Anxiety, and Somatization. The internal consistency of the BSI-18 is acceptable with an alpha coefficient of .89 (Zabora et al., 2001).

Couples Alliance Inventory - Modified (CAI-M; Pinsof & Catherall, 1986). The CAI is an assessment of a couple's perceptions of the alliance they have with their therapist while in couples therapy. It measures three aspects of the therapeutic alliance: the content of the therapy, the interpersonal system in therapy, and the couples' views of the therapist. It has shown acceptable retest reliability with correlations of .76 to .91 on the three subscales, with a mean of .85. The scale's validity has been demonstrated through positive correlations of the subscales with therapist-measured patient progress (Catherall, 1984). A modified version

of this measure was used to assess the relationship between the mentoring couples and the younger couples; the modifications consist of replacing the word "therapist" with "mentoring couple" and "therapy" with "program" and making the necessary grammatical changes. Thus, a sample item of the modified version reads, "Our mentoring couple understands my goals in this program."

Big Five Inventory (BFI; John, Donahue, & Kentle, 1991). The BFI was used as a brief personality assessment in this study. It consists of a list of 44 brief descriptions with agreement scales on which an individual indicates to what degree he or she believes these descriptions describes him or her. Five subscales assess the "Big Five" personality traits (Goldberg, 1981): Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Neuroticism, and Openness. The internal consistency of each of the subscales is acceptable with alpha coefficients ranging from .79 to .88, with a mean alpha of .83.

Program Materials

The materials for this study consist of two manuals and a notebook. The first manual covers the training of the mentors, which took place approximately a month before the Side by Side program itself. The second manual provides outlines of important information to cover during the Side by Side program itself, which both the mentoring couples and the younger couples attended. A copy of the notebook was provided to each couple and contains handouts, homework, and discussion questions.

Side by Side Mentor Training Manual. Created for this study, this manual covers the elements of the mentor training. The mentor training manual includes presentations on Side by Side's general approach to relationships, specific communication skills for couple discussions and decision-making conversations, an overview of the relationship topics

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covered in Side by Side, the role of the mentoring couples, and boundaries necessary for an effective mentoring relationship. A sample module from the mentor training manual is attached in Appendix A.

The mentoring manual includes training and practice sessions in communication skills, encouraging the mentoring couples to learn these skills well so that they can both model these skills for the younger couples and employ these skills in developing a relationship with the younger couples. The manual then moves on to provide an overview of the Side by Side program so that the mentoring couples may have a grasp on the broader understanding of the program's approach to relationships.

After the foundational communication skills are taught and the framework of the program is provided, the training manual moves on to cover the role of the mentoring couples and the boundaries necessary for an effective mentoring relationship. The manual highlights the various aspects of the role of the mentoring couples. These include such things as sharing their own challenges and successes to normalize problems and offer suggestions on one way to approach similar problems, encouraging and directing discussion to develop rapport and to maintain an appropriate focus on the program's content, to encourage the younger couple in reaching their goals, and to learn and grow from this experience themselves.

After covering the role of the mentoring couple (i.e., what to do as a mentoring couple), the manual discusses appropriate boundaries for the mentoring relationship (i.e., what not to do as a mentoring couple). These boundaries cover a range of matters, such as what types of self-disclosure to avoid to how to prevent problems with confidentiality emerging, especially given the various contexts in which the mentoring couples and younger

couples may encounter each other in a church community. One boundary that is emphasized

is the limits of this program and of the mentoring couples. Addressing significant

relationship distress, infidelity, sexual dysfunction, or individual psychopathology is beyond

the scope of this program. If these problems emerge during the program for a younger

couple, their mentoring couple will seek to support them through the difficulty, but they are

trained not to attempt to address such issues on their own. Instead, the manual instructs the

mentoring couples to bring these issues to the attention of the principal investigator so that he

and his dissertation advisor can provide an appropriate referral to the younger couple

experiencing the distress.

Side by Side Presentation Manual. Similar to the manual for the mentor training, the

presentation manual for the Side by Side program itself is designed to guide presenters as

they deliver the program to the couples; this manual is an adaptation of the BOOST manual

with an addition of a module on forgiveness. A sample module from this manual is attached

in Appendix B.

The Side by Side presentation manual contains 12 modules teaching the following

communication skills and relationship topics: (a) an overview of the program, (b) skills for

couple discussions, (c) skills for decision-making conversations, (d) different communication

styles that individuals employ, (e) different motives and needs that individuals bring to

relationships, (f) maintaining the couple connection, (g) connecting through sensuality and

sexuality, (h) supporting each other, (i) giving and receiving support in a community, (j)

practicing one's faith in a relationship, (k) practicing forgiveness in one's relationship, (l) a

review and wrap-up. In addition to topics for the presentation, the manual includes

homework assignments that the couples complete between sessions.

The presentation manual is organized such that the participants in the program have the opportunity to complete homework and have discussions about the material before moving on to new material. The manual organizes the presentation and discussion of the 12 modules over 12 sessions, but not in a one-to-one fashion. Instead, the organization follows a general pattern of large group presentations of two modules in one session alternating with small group discussions of those modules in the next session. Thus, in a large group session, two related modules are presented to all the couples, with homework assigned to complete before the next session; in that next session, each mentoring couple meets with their younger couple as a foursome to review the homework and have a discussion about the previous session's presentation topics. The subsequent session then presents new topics, followed by a session to discuss the new topics, and so on. The first and last sessions are the exceptions; they have no discussion sessions associated with them.

Thus, the first session consists of module (a), the introduction and overview. The second session consists of modules (b) and (c), the modules that focus on communication skills. The third session is a time for each mentoring couple to meet with their younger couple as a foursome (or "small group") to review homework from the second session and have a discussion guided by assigned discussion questions. In the fourth session, the presentation covers individual differences, modules (d) and (e). The fifth session is the small group discussion of homework and topics from the individual differences presentation. The couple connection, modules (f) and (g), is the topic for the presentation in the sixth session, followed by discussion of these topics in the seventh session. The eighth session covers social support, modules (h) and (i), with the ninth session providing a chance to discuss those issues. The tenth session introduces practicing faith and forgiveness in the marriage context,

modules (j) and (k), and the small groups meet to discuss these issues for the eleventh session. The twelfth and final session is the review and wrap-up for the whole group. The organization of the program is presented visually in Table 3.

Side by Side Couple Notebook. Each mentoring couple and each younger couple received a copy of the Side by Side Couple Notebook, which contains handouts from each lecture and homework and discussion questions for the following session. The handouts contain key elements from the presentations, such as the guidelines for a decision-making conversation, and the homework assignments are provided so that the participants can practice the skills or discuss the topics from the presentations. The discussion questions are provided for guidance during the small group meetings. Appendix C contains samples from the couple notebook.

<center>*Procedure*</center>

The primary elements in this study are the mentor training, the implementation of the Side by Side program, and the assessments conducted at three time points. The first set of assessments was completed by the mentoring couples before they receive training (Time 1). The second set was completed by all participants after the mentor training and before the Side by Side program began (Time 2). The final assessment was also completed by all participants and took place after the participants the Side by Side program concluded (Time 3).

Implementation of the Side by Side Program

Mentor Training. The mentor training took place in one weekend day approximately a month before the Side by Side program began. This training was conducted in a group setting at the church and was led by a graduate student who was both a member of the

Table 3

Side by Side Schedule for Presentations and Discussion Groups

Topic	Format
Week 1 – Introduction and Overview	Large Group Presentation
Week 2 – Communication Presentations	Large Group Presentation
Week 3 – Communication Discussion	Small Group Discussion
Week 4 – Individual Differences Presentations	Large Group Presentation
Week 5 – Individual Differences Discussion	Small Group Discussion
Week 6 – Couple Connection Presentations	Large Group Presentation
Week 7 – Couple Connection Discussion	Small Group Discussion
Week 8 – Social Support Presentations	Large Group Presentation
Week 9 – Social Support Discussion	Small Group Discussion
Week 10 – Faith and Forgiveness Presentations	Large Group Presentation
Week 11 – Faith and Forgiveness Discussion	Small Group Discussion
Week 12 – Review and Wrap-up	Large Group Presentation

research team and of the church. The mentor training primarily consisted of presentations of the material in the mentor training manual, along with practice sessions to allow the mentoring couples to employ the communication skills included in the training.

Side by Side. Approximately a month after the mentor training took place, the Side by Side program itself began. Mentoring couples were assigned to younger couples in an attempt to match couples who were not too close in age; for example, the older mentoring couples were generally paired with the older younger couples. This step was taken because of the potential overlap in the ages of the mentoring couples and the younger couples; it would not be consistent with the mentoring model to pair a mentoring couple to a couple who is older than the mentoring couple.

The Side by Side program was conducted over the course of 12 weeks with one session per week (see Table 3). The large group presentations was held at the church. These large group gatherings lasted approximately 90 minutes, allowing for time for the presentations and for socializing. Light snacks and drinks were provided at these gatherings. The presentations were delivered by the same graduate student who led the mentor training, with the exception of the module on practicing faith in marriage, which was delivered by the church's pastor. These sessions were well attended, with 1 to 4 absentees out of the 40 participants at each session; the mean number of absentees at a presentation session was 1.57. Of all 40 participants, 9 individuals missed one presentation session or more, and no participant missed more than 2 of the 7 presentations sessions. Among the 9 individuals who missed any presentations, the average number of sessions missed was 1.22. The small groups met in a place of the small group's choosing; they met as a foursome in a private setting (e.g., for dinner or coffee at one of the couples' homes) and were asked to commit an

hour to the provided discussion topics. They were encouraged to meet for two hours to allow time for both socializing and for an hour of program-focused discussion. This program-focused discussion consisted of reviewing the homework from the previous week and discussing the questions provided in the Couple Notebook. It was the responsibility of the mentoring couple to monitor the discussion times to keep the small group on task. The mentoring couples reported that they were able to reschedule any small group discussions that resulted in scheduling conflicts for them or for the younger couples and that neither they nor the younger couples missed any small group discussions.

In addition to these meetings, the mentoring couples met with the principal investigator for 30 minutes just before three of the large group sessions (Week 4, Week 8, and Week 12; see Table 3 for the Side by Side schedule) to discuss their mentoring relationships and raise any questions or concerns they had. This was done with all the mentoring couples together so that they could learn from each other's questions and experiences. However, the mentoring couples were asked to raise any particularly personal matters with the principal investigator in private. For example, if a member of a younger couple reveals a history of sexual abuse to their mentoring couple, it would be inappropriate to share that with all of the mentoring couples.

Assessments

As described above, assessments were conducted at three time points relative to the mentor training and the beginning and end of the Side by Side program itself. See Table 2 for a list of the measures used at each time point.

Time 1. Before the mentoring couples participated in any aspect of the program, including the mentor training, we assessed their baseline levels of relationship satisfaction,

communication skills, and other relationship variables of interest. The assessments for Time 1 were mailed to the mentoring couples along with the informed consent forms and a stamped, self-addressed envelope. Mentoring couple were asked to mail the completed questionnaires back before the mentor training date. The mentor couples who had not completed the questionnaires by the day of the training were asked to finish the assessments before participating. This time point served as the pretest assessment for the mentoring couples. The younger couples received no questionnaires at Time 1.

Time 2. Both the younger couples and the mentoring couples completed assessments at this time point. The mentoring couples were assessed at this time point to evaluate the changes that they experience over the course of the mentor training itself, independent of participation in the rest of the program. They were given these questionnaires at the conclusion of the mentor training along with a stamped, self-addressed envelope and were asked to mail them in before Side by Side began. The younger couples received the questionnaires for this time point with their informed consent forms and stamped, self-addressed envelopes and were also asked to return these before Side by Side began. This time point served as the pretest assessment for the younger couples. The couples who had not finished their assessments before the beginning of the Side by Side program were asked to complete the questionnaires before participating.

Time 3. Again, both the younger couples and the mentoring couples completed assessments at this time point. The mentoring couples were assessed at this point as a post-test assessment for the entire program. Assessing them at each of the time points enabled us to follow the changes that they experienced over the mentor training, over the course of the Side by Side program, and over participation in the study as a whole. The younger couples'

assessment at this time point also served as a posttest for the program. All couples received

their packets of questionnaires at the end of the final session of the Side by Side program

with self-addressed, stamped envelopes and were asked to complete them and return them by

mail.

Results

Hypothesis Testing

Because this study did not include a control or treatment-as-usual group and because

of the small sample size, the data analytic strategies used in this study consist of within-group

effect sizes and correlations. The within-group effect sizes are used to compare participants

across time points, and the correlational analyses are used to examine the associations

between variables. In addition, the within-group effect sizes of this study are compared to

the within-group effect sizes from Laurenceau et al.'s (2004) study of disseminating PREP.

Descriptive statistics for the primary scales used in this study are presented across time points

and by gender in Tables 4 through 7.

Hypotheses 1-3 involved predictions regarding changes in scores of positive and

negative communication, relationship satisfaction, social support, sanctification of marriage,

and religious relationship standards across time for both younger and mentoring couples. To

test these predictions, effect sizes were calculated across the various time points. An effect

size is a statistic that measures the magnitude of the difference between two groups or time

points by using a common metric across different measures (Cohen, 1988). An advantage to

using the effect size in this study is related to the small number of participants; whereas

inferential statistics require a certain sample size to obtain sufficient power, effect sizes can

be calculated without such concerns. An effect size is calculated by dividing the difference

of the means of the two time points by the pooled standard deviation of the two time points,

as in the following formula where d is the effect size, M_a and M_b are the means at each time

Table 4

Descriptive Statistics for the Men in the Mentoring Couples across Time Points

Measure	Time 1		Time 2		Time 3	
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
Dyadic Adjustment Scale	119.20	8.06	119.69	7.54	116.44	7.65
CPQ – Mutual Constructive Communication	36.10	3.35	33.40	3.50	36.33	3.32
CPQ – Total Demand/Withdraw Communication	16.30	6.13	17.90	4.79	17.11	5.56
CPQ – Man Demand/Woman Withdraw Communication	6.10	2.56	6.60	2.55	5.56	1.81
CPQ – Woman Demand/Man Withdraw Communication	10.20	4.71	11.30	2.95	11.56	4.64
CPQ – Mutual Avoidance and Withholding	7.70	2.54	7.20	2.57	7.78	3.19
SIRRS-R – Frequency Ratings	60.46	14.65	62.40	8.78	57.00	10.44
SIRRS-R – Satisfaction Ratings	78.05	8.18	77.40	5.17	73.00	7.14
SOMQ – Perceived Sacred Qualities	68.50	11.11	70.60	7.99	66.44	8.17
SOMQ – Manifestation of God	71.30	13.95	76.89	5.53	73.44	7.54
IRRS – Agreement Ratings	92.50	4.35	90.20	3.68	91.67	4.42
IRRS – Satisfaction Ratings	110.20	7.33	112.70	5.29	111.45	6.29

Note: $N = 10$ at Time 1 and Time 2. $N = 9$ at Time 3.

Table 5

Descriptive Statistics for the Women in the Mentoring Couples across Time Points

Measure	Time 1		Time 2		Time 3	
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
Dyadic Adjustment Scale	122.27	8.39	117.22	6.25	118.89	7.79
CPQ – Mutual Constructive Communication	38.00	5.94	36.70	6.99	36.41	5.77
CPQ – Total Demand/Withdraw Communication	15.65	6.84	14.30	6.17	21.22	7.77
CPQ – Man Demand/Woman Withdraw Communication	6.15	3.64	5.50	3.06	8.89	4.04
CPQ – Woman Demand/Man Withdraw Communication	9.50	4.55	8.80	4.02	12.33	4.56
CPQ – Mutual Avoidance and Withholding	5.60	3.81	6.20	2.94	8.33	4.69
SIRRS-R – Frequency Ratings	76.17	14.06	69.56	11.51	71.44	11.93
SIRRS-R – Satisfaction Ratings	87.05	6.88	83.15	11.55	79.00	10.10
SOMQ – Perceived Sacred Qualities	71.10	7.40	67.90	5.67	68.56	6.00
SOMQ – Manifestation of God	69.40	21.59	69.78	18.12	72.37	10.83
IRRS – Agreement Ratings	91.50	5.97	88.80	6.88	91.00	6.98
IRRS – Satisfaction Ratings	109.80	7.64	108.38	6.81	107.11	6.95

Note: $N = 10$ at Time 1 and Time 2. $N = 9$ at Time 3.

Table 6

Descriptive Statistics for the Men in the Younger Couples across Time Points

Measure	Time 2		Time 3	
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
Dyadic Adjustment Scale	119.4	7.01	117.35	9.96
CPQ – Mutual Constructive Communication	36.3	3.33	35.10	4.46
CPQ – Total Demand/Withdraw Communication	18.5	8.51	19.70	6.09
CPQ – Man Demand/Woman Withdraw Communication	7.9	4.04	8.10	2.56
CPQ – Woman Demand/Man Withdraw Communication	10.6	5.62	11.60	5.40
CPQ – Mutual Avoidance and Withholding	7.4	2.46	8.10	3.87
SIRRS-R – Frequency Ratings	68.9	9.19	70.58	6.82
SIRRS-R – Satisfaction Ratings	78.2	11.21	82.97	8.62
SOMQ – Perceived Sacred Qualities	62.6	12.68	63.30	9.38
SOMQ – Manifestation of God	69.2	10.20	72.30	8.23
IRRS – Agreement Ratings	87.6	7.56	87.90	5.32
IRRS – Satisfaction Ratings	110.4	4.14	109.45	4.94

Note: *N* = 10.

Table 7

Descriptive Statistics for the Women in the Younger Couples across Time Points

Measure	Time 2		Time 3	
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
Dyadic Adjustment Scale	117.45	8.74	117.70	8.81
CPQ – Mutual Constructive Communication	33.90	8.17	34.90	6.26
CPQ – Total Demand/Withdraw Communication	22.40	8.66	24.50	8.20
CPQ – Man Demand/Woman Withdraw Communication	10.60	6.10	11.10	5.22
CPQ – Woman Demand/Man Withdraw Communication	11.80	5.18	13.40	5.62
CPQ – Mutual Avoidance and Withholding	8.00	3.33	7.60	3.72
SIRRS-R – Frequency Ratings	68.85	12.92	71.60	12.13
SIRRS-R – Satisfaction Ratings	75.14	13.86	81.00	9.49
SOMQ – Perceived Sacred Qualities	59.70	8.49	62.60	11.16
SOMQ – Manifestation of God	69.00	10.51	70.50	11.87
IRRS – Agreement Ratings	87.10	6.81	88.30	5.77
IRRS – Satisfaction Ratings	104.17	8.91	104.13	8.25

Note: *N* = 10.

point, and S_{ab} is the pooled standard deviation:

$$d = \frac{M_b - M_a}{S_{ab}}$$

An effect size of 0.20 is considered a small effect size; 0.50 a medium effect, and 0.80 a large effect. Additionally, these hypotheses were examined separately for men and women, due to research that indicates that men and women may benefit from communication skills training differently (Schilling et al., 2003). The effect sizes for Hypotheses 1 and 2 are presented in Table 8 for men and Table 9 for women, and the effect sizes for Hypothesis 3 are presented in Table 10.

Hypothesis 1 predicted that the mentoring couples would exhibit higher scores on communication skills, relationship satisfaction, social support, sanctification of marriage, and religious relationship standards after participating in the mentor training program. As displayed in Tables 8 and 9, few of the predicted effects were found. Consistent with predictions, men experienced increases in the frequency of their partners' social support, the perceived sacred qualities of their relationships, and in their own religious standards regarding relationships. Contrary to predictions, they reported increases in negative communication, decreases in positive communication, lower satisfaction with their partner's social support and with their adherence to relationship standards, and lower perceptions of God manifesting in their relationships.

Women displayed a somewhat different pattern of results in which they experienced decreases in demand/withdraw communication and an increase in their satisfaction with their own adherence to relationship standards, both consistent with predictions. Contrary to predictions, they experienced decreases in relationship satisfaction, in positive communication, in their ratings of frequency of and satisfaction with their partners' social

Table 8

Within Group Effect Sizes for the Men in the Mentoring Couples across Time Points

Measure	Time 1 to Time 2 Mentor Training	Time 2 to Time 3 Side by Side	Time 1 to Time 3 Overall
Dyadic Adjustment Scale	0.06	<u>-0.43</u>	<u>-0.35</u>
CPQ – Mutual Constructive Communication	<u>-0.75</u>	**0.80**	0.07
CPQ – Total Demand/Withdraw Communication	<u>0.30</u>	**-0.16**	<u>0.14</u>
CPQ – Man Demand/Woman Withdraw Communication	<u>0.20</u>	**-0.47**	**-0.25**
CPQ – Woman Demand/Man Withdraw Communication	<u>0.28</u>	0.07	<u>0.29</u>
CPQ – Mutual Avoidance and Withholding	<u>-0.20</u>	<u>0.21</u>	0.03
SIRRS-R – Frequency Ratings	**0.16**	<u>-0.55</u>	<u>-0.27</u>
SIRRS-R – Satisfaction Ratings	<u>-0.10</u>	<u>-0.69</u>	<u>-0.64</u>
SOMQ – Perceived Sacred Qualities	**0.51**	<u>-0.52</u>	**0.19**
SOMQ – Manifestation of God	<u>-0.56</u>	**0.37**	<u>-0.19</u>
IRRS – Agreement Ratings	**0.39**	<u>-0.22</u>	**0.19**
IRRS – Satisfaction Ratings	<u>-0.19</u>	0.07	-0.09

Note: *N* ranged from 9 to 10. Effect sizes in the predicted direction are printed in **bold**. Effects sizes in the opposite direction are <u>underlined</u>. Effect sizes indicating little change are printed in normal font.

Table 9

Within Group Effect Sizes for the Women in the Mentoring Couples across Time Points

Measure	Time 1 to Time 2 Mentor Training	Time 2 to Time 3 Side by Side	Time 1 to Time 3 Overall
Dyadic Adjustment Scale	<u>-0.66</u>	**0.24**	<u>-0.42</u>
CPQ – Mutual Constructive Communication	<u>-0.20</u>	-0.05	<u>-0.28</u>
CPQ – Total Demand/Withdraw Communication	**-0.21**	<u>0.91</u>	<u>0.73</u>
CPQ – Man Demand/Woman Withdraw Communication	**-0.20**	<u>0.88</u>	<u>0.69</u>
CPQ – Woman Demand/Man Withdraw Communication	**-0.17**	<u>0.78</u>	<u>0.61</u>
CPQ – Mutual Avoidance and Withholding	<u>0.18</u>	<u>0.55</u>	<u>0.63</u>
SIRRS-R – Frequency Ratings	<u>-0.51</u>	**0.17**	<u>-0.36</u>
SIRRS-R – Satisfaction Ratings	<u>-0.41</u>	<u>-0.38</u>	<u>-0.87</u>
SOMQ – Perceived Sacred Qualities	0.02	**0.18**	**0.17**
SOMQ – Manifestation of God	<u>-0.42</u>	**0.32**	-0.08
IRRS – Agreement Ratings	<u>-0.20</u>	<u>-0.19</u>	<u>-0.37</u>
IRRS – Satisfaction Ratings	**0.12**	**0.50**	**0.65**

N ranged from 9 to 10. Effect sizes in the predicted direction are printed in **bold**. Effects sizes in the opposite direction are <u>underlined</u>. Effect sizes indicating little change are printed in normal font.

Table 10

Within Group Effect Sizes of Participating in Side by Side for Younger Couples by Gender

Measure	Effect Sizes	
	Men	Women
Dyadic Adjustment Scale	<u>-0.24</u>	0.03
CPQ – Mutual Constructive Communication	<u>-0.31</u>	**0.14**
CPQ – Total Demand/Withdraw Communication	<u>0.17</u>	<u>0.25</u>
CPQ – Man Demand/Woman Withdraw Communication	0.06	0.09
CPQ – Woman Demand/Man Withdraw Communication	<u>0.19</u>	<u>0.30</u>
CPQ – Mutual Avoidance and Withholding	<u>0.22</u>	**-0.12**
SIRRS-R – Frequency Ratings	**0.21**	**0.22**
SIRRS-R – Satisfaction Ratings	**0.48**	**0.49**
SOMQ – Perceived Sacred Qualities	**0.34**	**0.14**
SOMQ – Manifestation of God	0.05	**0.19**
IRRS – Agreement Ratings	<u>-0.21</u>	-0.01
IRRS – Satisfaction Ratings	-0.07	**0.41**

Note: *N* = 10. Effect sizes in the predicted direction are printed in **bold**. Effects sizes in the opposite direction are <u>underlined</u>. Effect sizes indicating little change are printed in normal font.

support, in perceptions of God manifesting in their marriage, and in agreement with relationship standards and an increase in mutual withdrawal. The pattern of results for women suggests that they experienced an overall decrease in communication: less mutually constructive communication, less demand/withdraw communication, and more mutual withdrawal. Overall, most results were contrary to Hypothesis 1.

Hypothesis 2 predicted that the mentoring couples would exhibit similar increases on communication skills, relationship satisfaction, social support, sanctification of marriage, and religious relationship standards after participating in the Side by Side program, comparing (a) Time 2, after the mentor training and before Side by Side, with (b) Time 3, after Side by Side. The effect sizes presented in Tables 7 and 8 demonstrate varied results for this set of hypotheses. Consistent with predictions, the men in the mentoring couples experienced increases in positive communication and in perceptions of God manifesting in their relationships, as well as decreases in demand/withdraw communication, particularly communication in which the men demanded and the women withdrew. Conversely, they experienced decreases in relationship satisfaction, in their perceptions of how often and how well their partners' supported them, in their perceptions of sacred qualities their relationships possess, and in their agreement with relationship standards.

Again, women displayed a different pattern of results from the men. Consistent with predictions, women in the mentoring couples displayed increases in their relationship satisfaction, in their rating of the frequency of their partners' social support, in their perceptions that their relationships possess sacred qualities and that God manifests in their relationships, and in their satisfaction with their own adherence to religious relationships standards. Contrary to predictions, they experienced increases in demand/withdraw

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communication and mutual avoidance and decreases in their satisfaction with their partners'

social support and in their agreement with relationship standards. Overall, both men and

women experienced more positive changes after participating in the Side by Side program

than after participating in the mentor training, although these results only offer partial support

for Hypothesis 2.

The final sets of effect sizes displayed in Table 7 and 8 represents the overall set of

changes from prior to participating in both the mentor training to following the Side by Side

program for the mentoring couples, that is, comparing Time 1 with Time 3. Table 7 displays

changes consisting mainly of decreases in relationship satisfaction and in experiences of

social support for the men in the mentoring couples. Men also experienced changes in

communication such that men were demanding and women withdrawing less often, whereas

women were demanding and men withdrawing more often. Table 8 illustrates changes

among the women in the mentoring couples that consist primarily of decreases in relationship

satisfaction, in positive communication, in experiences of social support, and in agreement

with relationship standards, as well as an increase in their satisfaction with their own

adherence to relationship standards. Overall, men and women in the mentoring couples

experienced negative effects as a result of participating in the mentor training and Side by

Side program.

Hypothesis 3 predicted that the younger couples would experience gains in

communication skills, relationship satisfaction, social support, sanctification of marriage, and

religious relationship standards after participating in the Side by Side program. Table 9

presents the effect sizes associated with this hypothesis by gender. This hypothesis also

received mixed support. Men in the younger couples experienced some changes that were

consistent with predictions, including increases in perceptions of how often and how well their partners provided social support and in the sacred qualities their relationships possessed. However, they experienced a number of changes that we contrary to predictions, including decreases in relationship satisfaction, positive communication, and relationship standards and increases in communication in which the women demanded and the men withdrew and in mutual withdrawal.

The women in the younger couples experienced the most changes consistent with predictions, including increases in mutual constructive communication, perceptions of how often and how well their partners supported them, perception of how sacred their marriage is, and how satisfied they are with their own adherence to their relationship standards. Contrary to predictions, women in the younger couples experienced an increase in demand/withdraw communication in which the woman demanded and the man withdrew. Overall, men in the younger couples experienced positive changes in their experiences of social support and how sacred their marriages are and negative changes in relationship satisfaction and communication. Women in the younger couples experienced the most positive changes of all the participants.

To further understand these findings and prompted by research suggesting that such relationship education programs show differing levels of effectiveness for couples with different levels of risk (Halford et al., 2001, van Widenfelt, 1996 #161), initial relationship satisfaction scores were considered as an indication of relative risk for the couples. Couples reporting lower relationship satisfaction may be considered at higher risk than those reporting higher relationship satisfaction. To determine whether initial DAS scores were associated with different responses to the program, changes in DAS scores across the time points were

calculated; and correlations were calculated between the initial DAS scores and the change

scores. A significant correlation was found between the initial DAS scores and the DAS

difference scores from Time 1 to Time 2 for the mentoring couples, ($r = -.58$, $p < .05$),

indicating that the mentoring couples with higher initial DAS scores experienced the least

positive changes in DAS after participating in the mentor training, and the mentoring couples

with lower initial DAS scores experienced the most positive changes after participating in the

mentor training. Figure 1 displays this relationship and indicates that those with the highest

DAS scores at Time 1 experienced *decreases* in their DAS scores, whereas those with the

lowest DAS scores at Time 1 experienced *boosts* in their DAS scores after participating in

the mentor training. No correlations were found between initial DAS scores and the

difference scores for the younger couples or from Time 2 to Time 3 for the mentoring

couples.

Hypothesis 4 predicted a correlation between the younger couples' improvement on

these scales and the younger couples' experience of the mentoring relationship. To test this

hypothesis, change scores for the CPQ subscales, the DAS, the SIRRS-R subscales, the

SOMQ subscales, and the IRRS subscales were calculated for the younger couples from

Time 2 to Time 3. Correlational analyses were then conducted to test whether significant

correlations exist between these variables and the modified Couples Alliance Inventory

(CAI-M) scores from the younger couples. These correlations are presented in Table 11.

Nearly all correlations were in the predicted directions, such that stronger reports of alliance

between younger participants and their mentoring couple were associated with greater

improvements in the younger participants' ratings of their relationship satisfaction, mutual

constructive communication, frequency of and satisfaction with social support, perceptions of

Figure 1

Relationship between Initial DAS Scores and DAS Difference Scores for Mentoring Couples

from Time 1 to Time 2
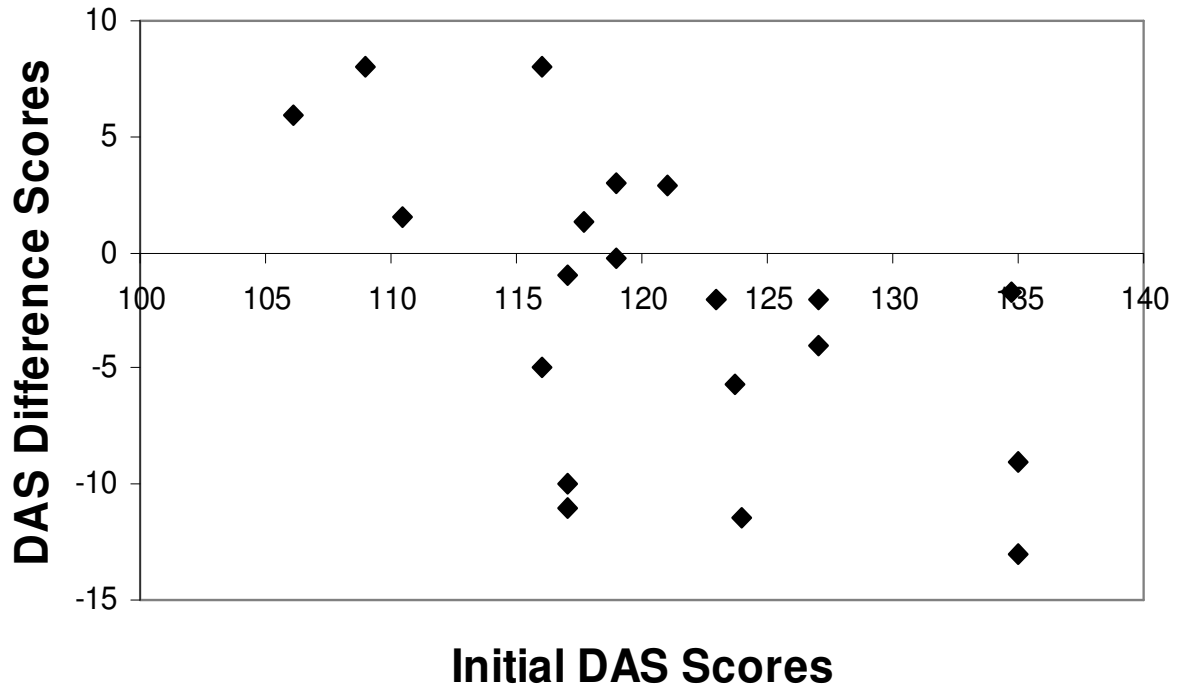
sanctification of marriage, and endorsement of religious relationships standards, as well as with greater drops in demand/withdraw communication and mutual avoidance and withholding communication. Scores on the CAI-M were not correlated with satisfaction scores on the IRRS. It should be noted that only two of these correlations were statistically significant, the correlations between the CAI-M and the two subscales of the SIRRS-R. However, the lack of statistical significance in these correlational analyses may be due to the small sample size.

A further evaluation of the correlation of the quality of the mentoring relationship with the other dependent variables can be conducted using the sign test. The sign test can be used to determine whether the proportion of correlations that are in the predicted directions is due to chance. The sign test uses the following formula, where $p(C)$ is the probability that the observed proportion is due to chance, P is the probability of obtaining each predicted outcome by chance, C is the number of observations that occurred in the prediction direction, and N is the total number of observations:

$$p(C) = P^C \left(\frac{N!}{C!(N-C)!} \right) \left(1 - P \right)^{N-C}$$

To evaluate the proportion of correlations in the predicted direction in this hypothesis, the chance of the correlation occurring in the predicted direction by chance (P) is 0.5, the number of correlations in the predicted direction (C) is 11, and the total number of correlations (N) is 12. This use of the sign test indicates that the proportion of correlations in the direction predicted in Hypothesis 4 was statistically significant ($p < .01$).

Hypothesis 5 predicted that the within-group effect sizes of participating in the program on relationship satisfaction will be equal to or greater than the within-group effect sizes of participating in the implementations of PREP delivered by university personnel and

Table 11

Correlations between Dependent Variables and the Couples Alliance Inventory – Modified

   for the Younger Couples

Measure	Correlation
Dyadic Adjustment Scale	0.37
CPQ – Mutual Constructive Communication	0.32
CPQ – Total Demand/Withdraw Communication	-0.24
CPQ – Man Demand/Woman Withdraw Communication	-0.15
CPQ – Woman Demand/Man Withdraw Communication	-0.25
CPQ – Mutual Avoidance and Withholding	-0.25
SIRRS-R – Frequency Ratings	0.49*
SIRRS-R – Satisfaction Ratings	0.46*
SOMQ – Perceived Sacred Qualities	0.16
SOMQ – Manifestation of God	0.25
IRRS – Agreement Ratings	0.17
IRRS – Satisfaction Ratings	-0.07

Note: $N = 10$. * $p < .05$

religious organization leaders described in Laurenceau et al. (2004). Because this study does

not report descriptive statistics, we obtained the means and standard deviations of the Marital

Adjustment Test for the various groups in the study categorized by gender and time point

from J.-P. Laurenceau (personal communication, November 6, 2007). These descriptive

statistics are presented in Table 12. The following formula was used to calculate Cohen's *d*

from these descriptives:

$$d = \frac{M_1 - M_2}{\sqrt{\left(SD_1{}^2 + SD_2{}^2\right)/2}}$$

Cohen's *d* has the advantage of being a standardized statistic, which allows for meaningful

comparisons of the effect sizes in the current study, calculated from DAS scores, with the

effects sizes from the Laurenceau et al. study, calculated from the Marital Adjustment Test

(MAT; Locke & Wallace, 1959) scores. Table 12 presents the effects sizes for the

participants in both studies categorized by group and gender. Examining the effect sizes in

Table 13, we can see that Hypothesis 5 is not supported. Men in both the younger couples

and the mentoring couples in the current study experienced more negative changes than men

in any of the conditions of the Laurenceau et al. study. The women in the younger couples of

the current study experienced changes most similar to the women who participated in PREP

delivered by university personnel, experiencing more positive changes than the treatment-as-

usual group and less positive changes than the women who participated in PREP delivered by

the leaders of the religious organizations. Finally, the women in the mentoring couples of the

current study experienced the most negative changes of all the groups, whereas the women

who participated in PREP delivered by the leaders of the religious organizations experienced

the most positive changes.

Table 12

Descriptive Statistics for the Marital Adjustment Test in the Laurenceau et al. (2004) Study

by Group, Time Point, and Gender

Group	Time Point	Gender	*M*	*SD*
Naturally Occurring	Pre-Test	M	126.43	14.63
		F	128.35	16.41
	Post-Test	M	126.23	14.86
		F	124.44	16.76
PREP Delivered by University Personnel	Pre-Test	M	125.07	18.57
		F	123.89	16.62
	Post-Test	M	122.31	19.79
		F	124.04	15.61
PREP Delivered by Leaders of Religious Organizations	Pre-Test	M	124.35	16.69
		F	124.96	16.29
	Post-Test	M	124.03	19.11
		F	126.88	17.29

Note: *N* ranged from 61 to 82.

Table 13

Comparing Within Group Effect Sizes for Relationship Satisfaction across Studies by Group

  and by Gender

Study	Group within Study	Gender	Relationship Satisfaction
Current Study	Younger Couples	Male	-0.24
		Female	0.03
	Mentoring Couples	Male	-0.35
		Female	-0.42
Laurenceau et al. (2004) Study	Naturally Occurring	Male	-0.01
		Female	-0.24
	PREP delivered by University Personnel	Male	-0.14
		Female	0.01
	PREP delivered by Religious Organization Leaders	Male	-0.02
		Female	0.11

Note: $N = 10$ for each gender within each group in the current study. N ranged from 61 to 82 for the groups in the Laurenceau et al. (2004) study. Relationship satisfaction was measured with the DAS in the current study and the MAT in the Laurenceau et al. study. Effect sizes for the younger couples in the current study and all groups in the Laurenceau et al. study are pre-test to post-test comparisons. Effects sizes for the mentoring couples in the current study are comparisons before the mentor training (Time 1) to after participation in Side by Side (Time 3), i.e., the overall effect size for participating in this study.

Exploratory Analyses

The final set of analyses explored possible associations between (a) the quality of the mentoring relationship and (b) patterns of personality traits among the mentoring and younger couples. These analyses were limited by the sample size, and particular caution should be exercised in interpreting these results since they are exploratory rather than theory-driven. Nonetheless, they do provide suggestions for further research. In order to examine the relationships between the personality traits of the participants and the ratings of the alliance between the younger couples and the mentoring couples, the participants' data were clustered into the groups of four individuals (one mentoring couple and one younger couple) to which they were assigned in the program. Thus, each cluster contained personality data for each of the four people in the mentoring group as well as two scores rating the quality of the mentoring relationship as rated by the two members of the younger couple in that group.

In order to examine any associations between the personality traits of the people in the mentoring groups with the younger couples' ratings of the quality of the mentoring relationship, aggregate scores were created for both the personality variables and for the ratings of the mentoring relationship as follows. The personality variables consisted of the Big Five personality traits assessed by the BFI: extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, emotional stability (the inversion of neuroticism), and openness. For each mentoring group, the four persons' scores on a given personality trait (e.g., extraversion) were averaged to represent an aggregate measure of the overall level of those traits within each group. For example, the four extraversion scores from the members of a given group were averaged to represent the overall level of extraversion within that group. The mean scores within a group were calculated to determine whether overall levels of a personality

trait within a mentoring group were associated with the quality of the mentoring relationship as reported by the younger couple. For instance, lower levels of extraversion in a mentoring group may result in less conversation and interaction, which could be associated with less positive experiences of the mentoring relationship by the younger couple. The standard deviation within each group of four persons was calculated as well to represent the diversity of a given personality trait within each group. Such scores were developed in order to examine whether diverse personalities within a group were associated with a more or less positive experience of the mentoring relationship by the younger couple. For example, more diverse levels of extraversion within a group might contribute to a sense of vitality within the group, with some members carrying the conversation while others interject more thoughtful reflections. In order to determine whether the means or standard deviations of the personality traits were associated with the ratings of the mentoring relationship by the younger couples, the two scores on the modified Couples Alliance Inventory (CAI-M) from the younger couple in each group were averaged to represent an aggregate rating of the mentoring relationship by the younger couple. The CAI-M scores correlated significantly between the members of the couples ($r = .84$, $p < .01$), so averaging their scores results in an aggregate score that does not lose a significant amount of variance among the data.

Thus, each mentoring group had a mean score for each of the personality traits, a standard deviation for each of the traits, and a mean score of the younger couple's ratings of the quality of the mentoring relationship. Correlational analyses were then conducted on these aggregate scores examining the association between the means and standard deviations of the personality traits with the mean scores of the quality of the mentoring relationship.

This approach resulted in three findings. The first, a correlation between the average level of emotional stability (again, the inversion of neuroticism) in a group and the average alliance scores for the younger couple in that group ($r = .26$) suggests that greater levels of overall emotional stability in a group are associated with a more positive mentoring relationship. The second and third findings are represented in positive correlations between the standard deviations of extraversion and conscientiousness within a group of four and the average alliance scores for the younger couples ($r = .33$ and $r = .32$, respectively), suggesting that greater diversity on the traits of extraversion and conscientiousness is associated with more positive mentoring relationships. No associations between the traits of agreeableness or openness were found with the quality of the mentoring relationship in this study.

Finally, it should be noted that participants in this study completed evaluations of the Side by Side program. The participants provided universally positive feedback on these evaluations. When asked about how satisfied they were with the program, all participants indicated that they were either satisfied or very satisfied with the program. Younger participants had an average response of 4.55 on a scale of 1 to 5, and mentoring participants had an average response of 4.61. When asked how they would rate the quality of their experience with Side by Side, all participants responded by rating the program as "good" or "excellent". Younger participants had an average response of 3.66 out of 4, and mentoring couples had an average response of 3.62 out of 4.

Discussion

This study represents the first empirical examination of the effectiveness of a relationship education program incorporating mentoring couples. Training mentoring couples from a given community to participate alongside younger couples from that community in a relationship education program has the potential to address some limitations of other models of dissemination. The current study was conducted to evaluate whether this model of dissemination is effective in improving relationship skills and satisfaction for both the younger and mentoring couples.

The Mentoring Couples

The results of this investigation indicate that the answer to this question of effectiveness for mentoring couples is not a simple one. The first and second sets of hypotheses proposed that mentoring couples would benefit in a variety of ways from participating in the mentor training and in the Side by Side program. Overall, the results indicated that this was not the case, at least on an immediate basis; instead, both men and women in the mentoring couples experienced negative change in the majority of the variables examined in this study. Both men and women in the mentoring couples experienced decreases in their relationship satisfaction and generally negative changes in their communication. Both men and women displayed negative changes in their experiences of social support and in their perceptions that God is present in their marriage, while both did experience positive changes in a sense of their marriage as sacred. Men and women in the mentoring couples displayed somewhat different changes in the area of religious relationship

standards, with men experiencing a small positive change in relationship standards and little change in their satisfaction with their own adherence to their standards, whereas women experienced a moderate decrease in their standards and a somewhat larger increase in their satisfaction with their own adherence.

Comparisons to Laurenceau et al.'s (2004) study highlight the negative changes that the mentoring couples experienced over the course of their participation in this study. The mentoring couples displayed nearly universally negative changes in the current study, and their specific changes in relationship satisfaction were notably worse than the younger couples' changes in the current study and the couples in Laurenceau et al.'s study. Given the general effectiveness of such relationship education programs (Carroll & Doherty, 2003) and the more positive results for the younger couples (particularly the younger women) in the current investigation, how can we understand the results for the mentoring couples?

First, it should be noted that not all of the mentoring couples experienced decreases in relationship satisfaction over the course of the study. Instead, the couples who began the program with lower levels of relationship satisfaction consistently experienced *increases* in their relationship satisfaction. Those with already high levels of relationship satisfaction (whom we might consider low risk couples) experienced no change or decreases in their relationship satisfaction. These results are consistent with past findings that higher risk couples benefit from relationship education programs more than lower risk couples and that some low risk couples may actually experience decreases in satisfaction from such programs (Halford et al., 2001; Schilling et al., 2003).

While noting this variability in response, the mentoring couples still experienced negative changes as a group overall. However, this is not the first study to find negative

changes for couples participating in a relationship education program. van Widenfelt et al. (1996) delivered a variation of PREP adapted for the Dutch population to a group of participants in the Netherlands. Participants in the intervention condition fared worse over the course of the study than those who were assigned to the control condition and those who declined the intervention. One explanation that van Widenfelt et al. offered for these unexpected findings was that the norms around relationships and marriage differ from American norms in that Dutch couples tend to cohabitate, have children, then marry. This resulted in the participants in their study having been in their relationships for a longer period of time when they participated in the relationship education program. The participants in the intervention condition had been in their relationships for 9.1 years, on average, much longer than couples getting married in the U.S. Given the negative changes seen in both the mentoring couples in the current investigation and the participants in van Widenfelt et al.'s study, it is possible that relationship education programs that typically have been created for newlywed couples are not optimal in their current form for couples who have been together for longer periods of time. Such couples may have long-standing concerns or conflicts that are difficult for them to address. Participation in a program designed to encourage communication may raise these concerns without providing the time or individual assistance that might be necessary to address concerns with significant histories. Relationship education programs targeting couples who have been together for longer periods of time may need to develop different strategies for addressing such long-standing concerns, either consisting of different skill sets, greater attention to specific areas of concern, or simply more time in the program to allow for more discussion of the couples' concerns. What is interesting is that mentoring couples did not present as maritally distressed. Perhaps these

couples have found ways to "live with" various concerns in their relationship prior to the intervention, but now the program causes them to confront these concerns.

Another possible explanation of the negative changes seen among the mentoring couples can be drawn from research on concurrent versus long-term effects in relationships. Gottman and Krokoff (1989) found that couples who engaged in denial of their problems initially experienced greater marital distress several years later, whereas those couples who engaged in disagreements and exchanges of anger experienced unhappiness at home concurrently, but greater marital satisfaction in the long term. Schilling et al. (2003) found results with a similar pattern. When women in their study became too positive in their communication and avoided problem-solving discussions, men and women were both at higher risk for distress in the long-term. This finding by Schilling et al. was incorporated into the message of the Side by Side program, encouraging women to raise important concerns they have in their relationships. The results of the current study may represent a response to this recommendation in which these couples engage in more difficult and distressing conversations as part of the Side by Side program, which result in experiencing lower relationship satisfaction concurrently but perhaps in higher relationship satisfaction in the future.

The uniformly positive evaluations of the Side by Side program by participants in all of the groups in the current study are also consistent with this interpretation. While participants may have experienced increases in negative communication and decreases in relationship satisfaction, they also indicated that they were quite satisfied with the program. How do we understand these two seemingly contradictory findings? Participants may have had a sense that the discussions in which they engaged as part of the Side by Side program

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were both difficult and needed at the same time, resulting in lower relationship satisfaction now and potentially protective effects for the future. It will be important to examine the longer term effects of such programs in order to differentiate between these two very different interpretations of the findings: (a) such interventions need to be adapted for longer married couples, versus (b) the program is appropriate for longer married couple and may have beneficial long term effects, but confronting concerns leads to short term distress.

An interesting pattern that may be related to these two possibilities exists among the changes on the subscales of the Inventory of Religious Relationship Standards, specifically among the women in the mentoring couples. These women displayed increases in their satisfaction with their own adherence to religious relationship standards, with concurrent reductions in their endorsement of the standards themselves. This greater satisfaction with their own behavior occurring with a decrease in an endorsement of the standards themselves may reflect a relaxation of their standards as they address more negative communication in their relationship, particularly when they receive the message in the program that women need to address important concerns in their relationships, as mentioned above. It is possible that the women in the mentoring couples heard the message that they need to address important concerns but did not attend as well to the need to raise these concerns in a gentle and constructive manner, as reflected in their lower endorsement of religious relationship standards. If this interpretation of the findings is accurate, then the message that women should raise important concerns must also be balanced with a stronger message about how to raise those concerns constructively. Given the central role that communication skills training already plays in this program, this interpretation would suggest that such interventions would indeed need to be altered to be appropriate for couples with longer histories.

Further research is needed to explore these aspects of the marriage mentoring model and its impact on the mentoring couples. The mentoring couples in this study experienced consistently negative changes in their experiences of their relationships in the short term. Whether such negative changes at post-test are associated with positive changes in the long term can only be ascertained with a longitudinal evaluation of these changes. The current study has a follow-up assessment for one year past the end of the Side by Side program, which might provide some answers to this question, although longer term follow-up might be necessary. Specifically, the follow-up assessment will allow us to explore whether there are changes consistent with lag effects for this intervention. If such lag effects exist, then negative changes at the post-test may be correlated with positive changes at the follow-up. If such associations are not found long term, then it would appear that current relationship education programs are not effective for couples with longer histories and that these interventions would need to be altered for those couples.

If relationship education programs do need to be adapted for the couples with longer relationships, two adaptations seem most relevant: (a) a greater amount of the same intervention or (b) a different type of intervention. Research to determine which of these adaptations is most appropriate is needed and must address a number of questions: If couples with longer histories need larger "doses" of the same intervention, what dosage is necessary? At what point does a couple need a larger dose? If these couples need a different type of intervention, what differences are needed? Are these couples facing different concerns? Do they need different skills? There is a significant absence in the literature regarding these questions, and much research is needed to fill these gaps.

The Younger Couples

The younger couples displayed more straightforward results than the mentoring couples. The women in the younger couples showed changes that were generally consistent with predictions, and the changes they displayed that were not predicted may be understood with further thought. As predicted, women displayed increases in mutual constructive communication and decreases in mutual withdrawal, as well as positive changes in their experiences of social support in their marriages, in the sense that their marriage is sacred, and in their satisfaction with their own adherence to relationship standards. The lack of change in their relationship satisfaction, while contrary to our predictions, is consistent with the prevention orientation of the program and with the amount of change in relationship satisfaction displayed among women who participated in the University Personnel condition in the Laurenceau et al. (2004) study. Our predictions that participation in this program would be associated with positive changes were not consistent with past research, such as Laurenceau et al.'s study, which suggest that participation in relationship education programs is not associated with immediate positive changes in relationship satisfaction, even when participation is associated with protective effects in the long term. Thus, our results for women in the younger couples are consistent with past research; it was the predictions of the current study that were not consistent with past research. The addition of the mentoring couples to the intervention was hoped to provide stronger short term effects, similar to those more positive changes experienced by the participants in PREP delivered by religious organization leaders in Laurenceau et al.'s study. However, the results in the current study suggest that the inclusion of the leaders of the religious organization had a unique effect in

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Laurenceau et al.'s study that was not duplicated by the inclusion of the mentoring couples in the current study.

The increase in woman demand/man withdraw communication that both the men and women in the younger couples report was also contrary to predictions, but it is consistent with the message conveyed in the Side by Side program that women need to address important concerns in their relationships, as drawn from Schilling et al.'s (2003) study and mentioned above. This message also may explain women's increase in their satisfaction with their own adherence to relationship standards; after hearing this message, they may feel more justified in raising complaints rather than just responding with positives. As with the mentoring couples, this message was communicated in recognition of research that has indicated that women's avoidance of addressing such concerns is problematic for both men and women in the long term. The increase in woman demand/man withdraw communication in the current study may therefore be related to positive changes in relationship satisfaction at the follow-up assessment.

The men in the younger couples experienced more mixed results, although these findings also may be more understandable upon further reflection. Men in the younger couples displayed negative changes in relationship satisfaction and negative changes in communication. Again, these findings may be best understood in context. Men in the University Personnel condition of the Laurenceau et al. (2004) study also experienced a decrease in relationship satisfaction, albeit one not as large; nevertheless, it seems that men may experience a small decrease in relationship satisfaction as part of the typical course over participation in a relationship education program. The negative changes in the men's experience of communication in their relationships may also be related to our suggestion that

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women address important concerns in their relationship; men may find that their conversations about their relationship are more focused on addressing concerns than they were before participating in Side by Side. Such a shift in the younger couples' communication may also offer an explanation for why the men in the younger couples experienced a decrease in relationship satisfaction. Consistent with predictions and similar to the women, men did display positive changes in their experiences of social support and in their perception of their marriage as sacred, although the men in the younger couples only experienced changes in perceptions of their marriages possessing sacred qualities, not in their perceptions of God being present in their marriages.

These positive changes in specifics domains of the younger couples' experiences of their relationships (e.g., positive changes in experiences of social support) also suggest the possibility of lag effects on the younger couples' relationship satisfaction. That is, it is possible that participation in the Side by Side program was associated with concurrent changes in specifics such as experiences of social support and beliefs about marriage, whereas these specific changes may take time to result in broader changes in global relationship satisfaction.

Participation in the Side by Side program was predicted to be associated with changes in relationship satisfaction for the younger couples in the current study that would be comparable or superior to those found among the participants in PREP delivered by the leaders of religious organizations in Laurenceau et al.'s (2004) study. Instead, the lack of positive change for relationship satisfaction among the women in the younger couples and the small negative change among the men in the younger couples in this study are most similar to the changes seen among the participants in the University Personnel condition of

Laurenceau et al.'s study. Thus, while the current study displayed results similar to one implementation of PREP, Laurenceau et al. found more positive changes in relationship satisfaction among those who participated in PREP delivered by leaders of the religious organizations. The current study examined a new method of delivery that seemed to have the potential for achieving such positive increases in relationship satisfaction for young couples, given its delivery in a religious organization and its incorporation of community members in that delivery. Yet, the results in this current study do not bear out this hope on an immediate basis. Adding the mentoring couples to an implementation of a relationship education program did not result in more positive changes for young couples. At this point, the comparisons with Laurenceau et al. indicate that PREP delivered by leaders of religious organization produce the most positive changes. One significant difference may be that the presenter of the modules in the Side by Side program was a graduate student who attended the church in which the program was offered and was considered to be a part of that community. It might be that the program would be more effective if an actual leader in the religious organization who is viewed as having "religious authority" would have a greater positive impact on the participants of such a program. It will be important to understand what characteristics of the program leader are important in such implementations in religious communities. Is it enough that the leader be a part of the religious community and, therefore, be seen as "one of us" who shares similar values? Or is it important that such programs be led by priests, pastors, rabbis, etc. who also are viewed as having specific insight and religious/spiritual authority and related implications for marriage?

Exploration of Results

In addition to considering the current findings in the context of the extant literature, further examination of the patterns of the results may provide some suggestions as to how the various constructs examined in this study are related. Given that these explorations are not based on specific predictions, these observations are merely speculations about how these patterns may be understood; nonetheless, they may serve as predictions for future research investigating the mechanisms of interventions similar to the one employed in the current study.

First, an examination of the gender differences in the patterns of the results and in the changes over the different components of the study may be informative. For example, men and women in the mentoring couples displayed different patterns of change over the mentor training and the Side by Side program. The men in the mentoring couples maintained fairly consistent relationship satisfaction from before the mentor training to afterward, but these men experienced decreases in relationship satisfaction over the course of the Side by Side program itself. Women in the mentoring couples, on the other hand, experienced decreases in relationship satisfaction over the course of the mentor training and a smaller increase over the course of the Side by Side program. Also of interest is that the decline in relationship satisfaction for men (from Time 2 to Time 3) occurs simultaneously with their reports of increases in positive communication and decreases in demand/withdraw communication, whereas women's decrease in satisfaction (from Time 1 to Time 2) occurs simultaneously with an overall decrease in communication, and their increase in satisfaction (from Time 2 to Time 3) occurs at the same time as an increase in negative communication, especially demand/withdraw communication. While we cannot draw certain conclusions from such

concurrent changes, these patterns may suggest that men and women in the mentoring couples are experiencing their communication in very different ways. It is possible that more engaging conversation is associated with more negative changes in relationship satisfaction for men, whereas it may be that any communication, even negative demand/withdraw communication, is associated with increases in relationship satisfaction for women. Consistent with this possibility is that men's relationship satisfaction maintained from pre-mentor training to post-mentor training, an experience that required little actual interaction, whereas women experienced a decrease in relationship satisfaction across the same time points. When the mentoring couples engaged in more direct conversation about their relationship in the Side by Side program, men experienced negative changes in their relationship satisfaction and women experienced positive changes. Previous research has indicated that men experience greater physiological arousal in interpersonal emotional situations with their partners than do women (Gottman, Levenson, Noller, & Fitzpatrick, 1988). The pattern in the current study may reflect greater discomfort among the men when they confront important topics in their relationships, whereas the women may experience less of the physiological arousal and more satisfaction with having these discussions. Whatever the explanation, it is clear that the men and women in the mentoring couples experience their communication patterns quite differently. Men and women in the mentoring couples report changes in their communication patterns in opposite directions, both when comparing Time 1 to Time 2 and when comparing Time 2 to Time 3. For example, women report a large decrease in man demand/woman withdraw communication from Time 2 to Time 3, whereas men report a moderate increase in the same communication across the same time points. The source of such discrepant experiences for the genders in the mentoring couples is unclear.

Different changes in participants' perceptions of their marriages as sacred were observed among the different groups of participants as well. Both the men and the women in the mentoring couples experienced general increases in perceptions that their marriages possess sacred qualities with simultaneous decreases in perceptions that God is manifesting in their marriage. A similar pattern is found among the men in the younger couples, for whom perceptions of sacred qualities increase and perceptions of God manifesting do not change. Women in the younger couples are the only group to experience increases in both perceptions of sacred qualities and God manifesting in their relationship. This distinction seems noteworthy, since the women in the younger couples experienced the most positive changes in this study. A perusal of the Sanctification of Marriage Questionnaires may offer some insight into this set of findings. The questionnaire that assesses perceptions of sacred qualities asks participants to evaluate their marriages in abstract terms of sacredness (e.g., "Holy" or "Unholy"), whereas the questionnaire that assesses perceptions of God's manifestation assesses what seem to be more experiential aspects of the relationship (e.g., "God is present in my marriage."). Given that the program was offered in the context of a religious community and included a section on spirituality, it is understandable that participants displayed increases in abstract beliefs about marriage. At the same time, given that the women in the younger couples were the only group to experience consistently positive changes in the functioning of their relationship (e.g., more positive communication and better experiences of social support), it is also understandable that they are the only group to display increases in their perceptions of God manifesting in their relationships. This pattern suggests that these two instruments assessing the sanctification of marriage may examine different aspects of this global construct, with the sacred qualities questionnaire

assessing more abstract beliefs about participants' marriages and the manifestation of God questionnaire assessing the participants' actual experiences of God playing a role in their marriage. It also may be that interventions targeting beliefs about marriage are likely to produce changes in the first instrument, which assesses perceptions of sacred qualities of their marriage, whereas changes on the second instrument, which assesses perceptions of God as present in their marriage, are more dependent on actual changes in experiences of the relationship itself.

The Mentoring Relationship

Although the findings to a large degree were not as expected, the results of the current study do not suggest that the marriage mentoring model is without merit. Although based on a very small sample for the analyses, the results suggest that the marriage mentoring model is more effective when the quality of the mentoring relationship is high. The quality of the mentoring relationship, as reported by the younger couples, was correlated with positive changes in nearly all the variables examined in this study. This finding clearly illustrates the need to discover what contributes to a positive mentoring relationship.

The exploratory analyses of the current study began to address this question. As mentioned above, such exploratory analyses must be interpreted cautiously, but they can serve as hypotheses for future research. In exploring patterns of personality traits of the four people in the mentoring groups, it appears that the mentoring relationship was rated most highly by the younger couple when the group had a higher level of emotional stability overall and greater diversity on the traits of extraversion and conscientiousness. Higher levels of emotional stability in the group may be important for healthy discussion of potentially emotional and conflictual topics. Greater diversity on the trait of extraversion may be

beneficial for the group dynamic in that some members of the group may carry the conversation with their talkativeness, while the more introvert members may be more reflective and contribute in other ways. A group composed entirely of extraverts might result in a challenge in sharing the speaking role, whereas a group composed entirely of introverts may experience uncomfortable silence. Greater diversity in the levels of conscientiousness in the group may also draw on strengths from both ends of the spectrum. A more diverse group may stay on schedule and on topic because of those high in this trait while maintaining a sense of spontaneity and vitality because of those members low in this trait. A group composed entirely of more conscientious members may be too focused on the structure of the small group sessions, whereas a group composed solely of less conscientious members may not utilize the recommended topics of conversation or even set aside time for the assigned discussions at all. Of course, the actual interactions of the various groups were not observed, so the above interpretations are highly speculative.

Further research certainly needs to be conducted to explore these possibilities. If these results are replicated, then they suggest some further information to consider when selecting mentoring couples and assigning mentoring couples and younger couples to each other. First, if higher levels of emotional stability are associated with more positive mentoring relationships, then an evaluation of emotional stability may be added to the screening tools already in place. Higher levels of emotional stability among the mentoring couples might help to raise the overall level of emotional stability in the mentoring groups, which then may result in more positive experiences of the mentoring relationships. Additionally, this finding may suggest that this type of intervention is less suitable for younger couples who are lower in emotional stability. A different type of intervention that is

less dependent on the relationship with a mentoring couple may be more appropriate for younger couples who are lower in emotional stability. Second, if greater diversity on extraversion and conscientiousness is associated with more positive mentoring relationships, this information can be used in assigning mentoring couples to younger couples. A personality assessment of all the participants would allow for the creation of the mentoring groups in a way that ensured a balance of different levels of these traits within each group, again resulting in more positive experiences of the mentoring relationship. Further research replicating these findings and more thorough investigation into associations between personality traits and the quality of the mentoring relationship would help us to understand this more fully, potentially identifying ways to enhance the quality of the mentoring relationship and the positive effects of a mentoring program on the younger couples.

Further Research

The current study is limited by both the size and the representativeness of its sample. Due to the size of its sample, including all of the participants in the intervention was judged to be the best use of their willingness to participate rather than assigning some couples to a no treatment condition. This approach is consistent with Schilling and Baucom's (2004) suggestion that research has documented the typical course of a newlywed couple who has not participated in an intervention. Nevertheless, interpretations of the current study without a control group must be made with caution, and research into the marriage mentoring model that includes a control group will be necessary to gain a better and more reliable understanding of this model.

The current study's sample also has limited representativeness for the larger population. Of particular note is that all participating couples were heterosexual. This is

particularly important because of the focus of role models in the marriage mentoring approach. A significant concern among clinicians working with gay and lesbian couples has been that such couples do not have role models for their relationships in the way that heterosexual couples have:

> Heterosexual couples have a wide variety of models for their partnerships -- Adam and Eve, Romeo and Juliet, Ozzie and Harriet, Kramer and Kramer. [Gay and lesbian couples] have only the same heterosexual models, including their own families, which they may try to emulate but find unsuitable. (McWhirter & Mattison, 1984, p. 3)

Given this concern raised by McWhirter and Mattison along with other clinicians (Ossana, 2000), it may be uniquely helpful for gay and lesbian couples to participate in a relationship education program in which they are paired with older, more experienced gay or lesbian couples who can provide those role models that are difficult to find in our culture.

The current study just begins to explore a new model for relationship education programs, marriage mentoring. The findings from this study suggest that the changes experienced by the younger couples in this marriage mentoring program are most similar to those experienced by participants in the typical model of relationship education programs delivered by university personnel. However, the results from this study were not as positive as the results of a relationship education program delivered by leaders of religious organizations in their own communities. This greater effectiveness of a relationship education program delivered by the leaders of religious organizations suggests that future implementations of such programs would benefit from continued incorporation of these leaders. It is possible that further research into what enhances the mentoring relationship may result in a more effective mentoring model than the one in the current study. If a superior mentoring model is developed, a powerful model incorporating both the leaders of religious organizations (or communities with any other focus) and mentoring couples from those

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communities could be created, allowing for extensive dissemination of relationship education programs. Such a model would require training the leaders and the mentoring couples and then allowing them to conduct relationship education programs without direct interventions by university personnel or other professionals. This method of dissemination could potentially reach significantly greater numbers of couples than methods that require professionals to have direct contact with the participating couples.

With this first empirical exploration of the marriage mentoring model, it appears we have raised more questions than answers. Of significant concern were the largely negative changes experienced by the mentoring couples in this program, although such negative changes appear to be consistent with the experiences of other couples with longer histories who have participated in relationship education programs. What is required for a program to be effective for the mentoring couples? Further research is needed both in the general area of relationship education programs for couple with longer histories and in the specifics of the marriage mentoring model. What factors contribute to a positive experience of the mentoring relationship? What are the long-term effects of participation in a mentoring program, both for the mentoring couples and the younger couples? How effective would a mentoring program be in conjunction with delivery by leaders of religious organizations? Would this model be particularly helpful for populations such as same gender couples who may lack as many models of committed relationships? The current study begins this exploration, but much more research is needed to fully understand the marriage mentoring model for relationship education.

Sample from the Side by Side Mentor Training Manual

Session 5 – The Role of the Mentoring Couple

MAIN POINT: Describe the mentoring role, outlining how the mentoring couple can help the younger couple move through the Side by Side program.

OUTLINE OF SESSION:
Describe the following aspects of the role of the mentoring couple:
1. Modeling a healthy relationship
2. Sharing your own challenges
3. Prompting/facilitating discussions, both casual and program-focused
4. Encouraging the couple toward their goals
5. Learning and growing

❖ DESCRIBING THE MENTORING ROLE

➢ Now we're going to move on to describe what role you will have as mentoring couples. We're going to cover five main aspects of your role, and we'll practice some of the skills that will help you mentor a younger couple.

➢ The five aspects of the mentoring role that we'll cover are:

- Modeling healthy communication and a healthy relationship
- Sharing the challenges you've faced in your marriage and how you've worked through them
- Prompting and facilitating discussions, both casual conversation and program-focused discussions
- Encouraging the younger couple as they work toward their goals
- Learning from and growing in your relationship with the younger couple

➢ Let's look at these more closely.

➢ Modeling a healthy relationship

- One of the benefits to the younger couples going through this program is that they get to see a happy, healthy couple interact with each other. The younger couples in this program will be watching you to see how you behave when you talk with each other, and they will learn how to relate to each other from you. Some couples may not have seen healthy interactions in their homes, so this will be an opportunity for them to see a good relationship.

- OK – feeling any pressure yet? What are your thoughts on this? Does anyone have any fears about this?
  [*Group discussion of thoughts and feelings, especially fears, about serving as models.*]

- The good news is that we're not asking you to be perfect. In fact, the really good news is that we're asking you to model imperfection! The younger couples will benefit most from seeing how two imperfect people come together in an imperfect relationship and work to love each other.

- So, we do want you to take this aspect of the mentoring relationship seriously and take some time to think about how you want to present yourselves to the younger couples. Let's do that now. Take 10 minutes to talk with your spouse about how you want to present yourselves to the younger couples in the program. Think about how you hope to come across to the younger couple and about how you can present yourselves in a genuine way. Then we'll come back together and hear from each couple; you may hear something else that you and your spouse want to incorporate as well.
  [*Group discussion of how the mentoring couples hope to present themselves in a genuine way. Look for a segue into the next aspect, sharing the challenges they've faced.*]

➢ Sharing your challenges and how you have worked them

- Part of any marriage is working through difficult times in your relationship. Research indicates that every couple, no matter how happy, faces some irreconcilable differences. What differentiates the happy couples from the unhappy ones is how they attempt to work through these differences.

- Of course, we've all tried to work through these differences in ways that weren't too successful. Looking back on some these can make us laugh now. I wonder if we could share some of these more humorous attempts with the group. Does anyone have a time that didn't go so well that they wouldn't mind sharing with the group? You may want to check in with your spouse before you share it though!
  [*Solicit humorous experiences in working through differences. If none are shared at first, try jumpstarting the conversation with one of your own.*]

- So, we've all had to work through some tough times in our relationships. Thanks for sharing those! Now, not all of those times are humorous, even when you have some distance between yourself and those times. Nevertheless, they may be helpful if you share them with a younger couple. Take some time now to talk with your spouse about the challenges you've faced in your relationship, which challenges you're willing to talk about with a younger couple, and which challenges you would not feel comfortable sharing with another couple. We'll have 10 minutes for that.
  [*Allow 10-minute discussion for each couple to discuss which challenges they are comfortable sharing with a younger couple.*]

- You've identified what challenges you might be willing to share with a younger couple; of course, that might change depending on the particular couple and how things progress as you get to know them. Now let's talk about when and why you might choose to share these experiences. In psychological terms, we're talking about self-disclosure: revealing something about yourselves. In a mentoring relationship, what are some reasons that you would choose to self-disclose?
  [*Lead group discussion of when a mentoring couple would choose to engage in self-disclosure. Be sure to include the following five reasons.*]
  - To normalize problems ("This doesn't mean your relationship is over.")
  - To express empathy ("We/I have been through something similar, and we know that it's difficult.")
  - For suggestions ("When we were going through something like this, here's what worked for us.")

- For humor (Sharing a humorous way you tried to address a challenge.)
- Increase intimacy (Sharing personal stories can bring people closer.)

- Let us encourage to think about why you are choosing to share a story about yourself. Self-disclosure will be most helpful in your mentoring relationship if you have a specific goal in mind when you share your stories. We'll return to self-disclosure a couple more times today.

➢ Prompting and facilitating discussions
   ▪ As mentors, you will be helping conversations move along with the younger couples. Some of these conversations are going to be more casual and focused on just getting to know each other, establishing a relationship that will enable you to better help the younger couples. Other times, you will be guiding conversation on the specific topics of the Side by Side program. We're going to talk now about some skills that will help you with both of these.

   ▪ As we talk about these skills, you may discover that some of these are skills that you already use to some degree. That's great! We hope that giving them a name and talking about them will help you use them even more effectively. You may also find with other skills that you rarely utilize them; we hope this training will be a valuable introduction to them.

   ▪ Of course, we've talked about some listening skills, in addition to speaking skills, in the first communication session this morning. We're going to add some skills to that list here that will help facilitate the younger couples that you meet with to share their thoughts and feelings with you. We'll talk about four basic listening skills that will help to keep the conversation moving.

   ▪ The first three skills focus on responding to what someone is saying and helping the speaker to elaborate or move deeper. These are useful skills for many daily conversations, and you may find yourself using them with friends and family. You may also want to practice with your spouse; I suggest letting them know that you're practicing these things when you do it.

- The first of these three active listening skills is encouraging. Encouraging is simply communicating to the speaker that you are listening and that you would like the speaker to continue. We all do this naturally to some extent. An encourager can be something as simple as making eye contact and nodding or saying "Uh-huh". These types of encouragers affect the direction of the conversation very little; they simply encourage the speaker to keep talking.

- Another powerful type of encourager is silence. Sometimes silence can be a time when the speaker is deep in thought about something, and interrupting that thought may miss something important. Often, important feelings or insights are revealed after a few moments of silence. Simply waiting in silence for the speaker to continue can be a powerful tool. Of course, you want to be sensitive to awkward silences, but try letting the silence draw out a bit longer before saying anything; you may be surprised at what you hear.

- A final type of encouraging is repetition of an important word or restatement of what the speaker has said. This may seem like a silly skill at first, as if you are parroting back what the speaker is saying. However, if you think about it, you probably already use this skill sometimes. Consider this exchange:

  - "Mom, Chris and I wanted to call because we have some big news: We're pregnant."
  - "You're pregnant?!" (hopefully with joy and excitement!)
  - "Yeah, I've been wondering if I was, and we just took the pregnancy test. You're the first person we've called."

- Just by repeating the last couple of words, the mom was able to elicit more information from her daughter. She obviously also conveyed interest and excitement in what her daughter had to say. When you use encouragers, be sure to pay attention to your tone of voice. Imagine the different meanings that "You're pregnant?!" could have with different tones of voice. What different meanings can you give that encourager with different tones of voice?

- Paying attention to your tone of voice will be important for the next skills as well. The next skill is paraphrasing. We touched on this skill this morning; we're going to expand on it some now.

- Paraphrasing is offering a summary of what the speaker has said to show that you have been listening and to make sure you understand what the speaker is saying. Paraphrases often have four components:

  1. An opening phrase, perhaps using the speaker's name. This is not a necessary component, but it can help the speaker understand what you are doing. You can introduce your paraphrase with something like, "Kathy, it sounds like you're saying..." or "If I understand you correctly, Cameron,..."
  2. Key words the speaker has used. When someone is describing a situation, a person, or her feelings, reflecting to that person with her own words can be a powerful way of making her feel heard and helping her to explore her thoughts and feelings.
  3. The essence of what the speaker has said. Hearing a clear summary of what she has just said will also help the speaker process her thoughts and feelings and may help her decide where she would like to take the conversation. Be certain to include the important feelings, not just the thoughts or ideas.
  4. A check-in with the speaker. Make sure that what you have reflected is accurate. You can do this explicitly by asking something like, "Did I get that right?" or "Is that you're saying?" You can also do this implicitly by simply raising the tone of your voice at the end of your paraphrase as if you are asking a question.

- So, a full paraphrase might look something like this: "Jerome, it sounds like you've really enjoyed a lot of the time you spend with Courtney's parents, but that are times when you get frustrated with her family too, and you're not sure what to do about those times. Is that right?"

- The third skill is similar to paraphrasing, but it covers a longer period of time. It can have the same components, but it draws on information from many conversations. For example: "Jerome, we've talked a few times now about how you find some aspects of interacting with Courtney's family to be difficult. You've tried a couple of different ways of addressing this, but you can't seem to find something that you think has worked." Summaries contain broader themes and patterns from multiple conversations.

- You can get different responses to paraphrases and summaries. Sometimes, the speaker will choose to elaborate on what he has said or clarify a particular point. Other times, he will say, "That's right! You've got it." In this case, you may find it helpful to move the conversation along with an open-ended question, the fourth skill.

- As you may know, an open-ended question is simply a question that can't be answered in a few words. For example, asking, "Did you have a good day at school today?" can be answered with a simple "Yes" or "No". It doesn't necessarily spark conversation. On the other hand, asking, "What did you do at school today?" requires more elaboration. Of course, a teenager might still say, "Nothing," but talking with teenagers is a whole different workshop!

- Open-ended questions are useful in moving the conversation along, and they allow you to shape the direction of the conversation, so they are certainly useful tools. Be careful not to overuse them though; too many questions can feel like an interrogation. Don't forget to use some of that self-disclosure!

- One final thing to think about as you chat with the younger couples is "free information" – that's a fancy term that psychologists use to describe all the little details that people drop in conversation all the time. Skilled conversationalists will pick up on these little tidbits of information and ask questions about them. Often, questions about this free information will lead the conversation in new, interesting, and sometimes surprising directions. Let me give you an example. Imagine the following conversation between a younger couple, Cameron and Simone, and their mentoring couple, Kurt and Nina:

  Cameron: Yeah, we had a busy weekend. Between getting together with friends and cleaning out our garage, we didn't have a whole lot of down time.
  Kurt: Cleaning out the garage, eh? That's a big deal! Any special reason you tackled that task?
  Simone: Well, we're starting to shop around for a second car, and we want to be able to keep it in the garage with the other one.
  Nina: A new car? That's an even bigger deal!

Simone (with a glance at Cameron, who encourages her with a nod): It is a big deal, actually. Cameron and I are looking around for a car that will be good for carrying baby stuff in. We're pregnant!

- Kurt and Nina following up on the simple detail that Cameron and Simone cleaned up their garage led them to some big news! Of course, free information won't always lead to news about something like a baby on the way, but it can certainly lead you to more interesting conversations if you pursue it. Try to pay attention in your everyday conversations to see what free information you can pick up on.

- We're going to take a few minutes now for you to practice these skills. Have a conversation with your spouse and practice using these four skills: encouraging with nods, uh-huh's, or repeating key words; paraphrasing the main points of this conversation; summarizing themes or patterns (if you can; this may not work in this short conversation, but you have talked with your spouse before hopefully!); and using open-ended questions to move the conversation along.
  [*Allow 10-minute discussion for each couple to practice these skills in a conversation with each other.*]

➢ Encouraging the couple in their goals

- The last two aspects of the mentoring role are less about learning particular skills and more about being aware of how you are interacting with the younger couples.

- The first of these two is encouraging the younger couples in their goals. During the first meeting, we'll ask you to talk with the younger couples about what goals they have in their relationship you can encourage them in. Let them know that you want to support them in their goals and ask how you can do that. As you continue meeting over the course of the program, check in with them on those goals, encourage them as they work toward them, and offer any support that you can (and that you feel comfortable with; we're not asking for you to buy them a new car. We're primarily talking about emotional support here.)

- If a younger couple seems to be experiencing some difficulties as they work toward one of their goals, they may find it helpful if you offer to problem-solve with them around those difficulties. Help them use the decision-making skills they will have learned and think about whether sharing your experiences will be helpful to them.

- It will be important as you talk with the younger couples that you *check in with them* on their goals rather than *checking up on them*. In other words, approach this as friends who want to know how things are going out of caring concern for them and a desire to help them.

➢ Learning and Growing

- The last aspect of being a mentoring couple is to learn and grow from the experience! We hope that you will find this experience to be something beneficial to your own relationship as you come alongside these younger couples. In talking with them about your relationship, you may find that you learn something about yourselves. And who knows? These younger couples may even show you something you can learn from them!

- We're going to take a break now from all this talking. Take a few minutes, and then we'll come back together for our final topic: boundaries in the mentoring role.

Appendix B

Sample from the Side by Side Presentation Manual

Week 2 (Presentation 1) – Sharing Thoughts and Feelings

MAIN POINT: introduce communication as a way to relate to your partner –
discuss types of communication and effective ways to share thoughts and
feelings

OUTLINE OF PRESENTATION:
1. Introduce communication
2. Discuss types of communication and reasons for communicating
3. Discuss guidelines for sharing thoughts and feelings
4. Assign homework for next week's small group discussion

❖ INTRODUCE COMMUNICATION

  ➢ You are entering into a committed relationship

  ➢ In doing so, one of the things you are doing is "committing to relate"

  ➢ We relate to our partners in a huge number of ways, from preparing
    meals for them, to giving a backrub, to visiting in-laws because it is
    important to your partner

  ➢ And, one very important way of relating is through communication,
    talking and discussing with your partner

  ➢ In fact, good communication is one of the very best predictors that we
    have of how well couples will do over time in their marriage

    ▪ In research study after research study, how couples communicate at
      present predicts how well they will do in their marriages in the future,
      both in terms of satisfaction with their relationship as well as divorce

    ▪ And if we ask couples at any given time, how satisfied they are with
      their marriage and how well do they communicate, marital satisfaction
      and communication correlate about 0.9; that is huge

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- From our own research with this type of program, we can predict long term how well couples do overall from their communication

➢ What this means is that one of the most important things you can do for yourself, and that we can hopefully assist with, is developing good ways of communicating

❖ DISCUSS TYPES OF COMMUNICATION AND REASONS FOR COMMUNICATING

➢ When partners sit down to talk to each other, their conversations usually have one of two major goals

- To share thoughts, feelings and experiences

- To make some decision about some issue, ranging from where to eat to whether to have a child

➢ These goals of conversations are both important and they serve different functions for the relationship

➢ Sharing thoughts, feelings, and experiences

- When we ask couples what attracted them to each other, they report all kinds of things (e.g., foxy looking, shape of the person's head, bright, funny, and so forth)

- One of the main things they say is that we were able to just talk with each other about all kinds of stuff, what we thought, what we felt, our opinions, what we enjoyed, intellectual discussions

- And over time, we felt close and intimate

- So sharing thoughts and feelings (both positive and negative) is important for developing and maintaining a sense of connectedness and closeness

➢ Decision making or problem-solving

- The second major reason for communicating is to make decisions and resolve problems

- Decision-making is important because it keeps the relationship moving forward, keeps things functioning, and helps things get done in a coordinated manner

➢ In this program, we are going to discuss both types of communication; because they have different goals, the conversations look a bit different

➢ First we want to begin with a discussion of couple conversations in which you are sharing thoughts, feelings, and experiences

❖ DISCUSS GUIDELINES FOR SHARING THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS

➢ We have a handout for you that describes some of our recommendations for having a conversation in which you want to share your thoughts and feelings with each other

- First, when you are having a conversation with each other, hopefully at any given point, you are in one of two roles, either you are the speaker or the listener

- We have some guidelines for being in each of those roles

➢ Speaker guidelines

- Emphasize that the goal is to speak for yourself, subjectively from your point of view, sharing your emotions as well as thoughts

- Briefly go over guidelines, maybe with some examples

➢ Listener guidelines

- Emphasize that the goal while listening is to try to understand the other person's point of view, regardless of whether you agree; demonstrate respect and don't prepare a rebuttal- understanding and acceptance is not agreement

- After person finishes speaking, demonstrate that you heard and understand, and one major way to do that is to reflect

- Briefly go over guidelines, perhaps with some examples
➢ Constructive communication versus avoidance

- We do not want to suggest to you that communicating constructively means you will avoid difficult issues or that you should avoid being upset at times

- Confronting difficulties isn't always pretty, and, in fact, we have found that if females become so positive in their communication that they avoid addressing their concerns or try to keep things pleasant at all costs, it actually predicts declines in relationship satisfaction over time

- So be constructive and respectful, but don't avoid important issues

  - Important to let other person know you are upset and what is upsetting- be specific

  - Avoid hostility, expressions of disgust, blame solely on the other person, for example

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❖ *In preparation for Small group meeting 1 (Week 3):*

➢ Homework
- Have a sharing thoughts and feelings conversation with your partner about a low-conflict topic. Review the sharing thoughts and feelings guidelines before having the conversation and practice those skills during the conversation. Be ready to discuss how the conversation went and what your experience of the conversation was like when you meet as a small group.

➢ Discussion
- How did the sharing thoughts and feelings conversation go for you? Is this kind of conversation usually easy or more difficult for you? What did your partner do that you particularly appreciated? Was there anything you would change about how the conversation went?

Sample from the Side by Side Couple Notebook

WEEK 4: INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES

<u>Leveling, Editing, and Communication Patterns</u>

Individual response patterns to stress

1. *Levelers* tend to approach a situation and focus directly on a stressor. They tend to engage and want to communicate about something that is bothering them.
2. *Editors* tend to pull back from a situation to create some distance from a stressor. They tend to withdraw and would prefer to take some time off to think about the situation or let it resolve itself.

Resulting couple interaction patterns

Husband

		Level: Approach, pursue, fight	Edit: Withdraw, avoid, flee
Wife	**Level: Approach, pursue, fight**	Mutual engagement Escalation	Wife demand/ Husband withdraw
	Edit: Withdraw, avoid, flee	Husband demand/ Wife withdraw	Mutual avoidance Disengagement

Individual and Communal Motives/Desires

Individual Motives

Autonomy – the desire to function as an individual, separate from your relationship, either alone or with other people.

Achievement – the desire to produce, achieve, create, and feel competent

Control/Power – the desire to be able to influence your environment in some way

Communal Motives

Affiliation – the desire for togetherness and to be part of a relationship

Intimacy – the desire to be open and close with your partner

Altruism – the desire to give to your partner, attend to your partner, and to make him or her happy

Succorance – the desire to be taken care of by your partner

Meeting Your Desires

Destructive ways of meeting your desires are ones that are harmful to your partner or that threaten the boundaries of your relationship.

Constructive ways of meeting your desires are ones that allow both partners to grow as individuals and as a couple.

WEEK 4 HOMEWORK
INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES

Please complete before your Week 5 small group gathering

- Leveling, Editing, and Communication Patterns
    - Think about what communication style you are using over the course of the week. Do you notice yourself using different styles in different contexts? Also think about what style your partner uses and what pattern the two of you have developed.

- Individual and Communal Motives/Desires
    - Consider which of the desires from the list of individual and communal motives are most important to you. Pick the top two or three and think the ways in which those desires are currently fulfilled in your relationship.

- Leveling, Editing, and Communication Patterns
    - Share your observations about what style you tend to use and whether there are times when you use a different style. Then, identify which pattern you've developed in your relationship. What benefits of that pattern have you experienced? When has it worked well? When has it not worked as well? When everyone has shared, consider what each couple can learn from the other couple.

- Individual and Communal Motives/Desires
    - Share your top motives/desires and how you see those being met in your relationship. Once everyone has shared, consider whether any conflicts in your relationship have resulted from different motives. What perspective does thinking about different motives/desires provide?

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