

The Role of Participant-Facilitator Demographic Match in Couple and Relationship Education

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Introduction & Purpose

- The literature on change across time in Marriage and Relationship Education (MRE) programs has typically been lacking in the area of diversity. Most samples are minimally diverse, comprising middle-class participants who are not representative of minority populations (Halford, Markman, & Stanley, 2008).
- Typically, outcomes have been assessed without regard for facilitator characteristics and abilities. Assessing the impact of facilitator characteristics and homogeneity/heterogeneity between facilitator and participant demographic characteristics on program outcomes is supported by studies of therapeutic interventions that have found that similarities between clients and therapists may matter (e.g., Flicker et al., 2008; Mamodhoussen et al., 2005)
- Ecocultural theory** (Phenice et al., 2009) proposes that families' ecocultural niches should be considered in research. Utilizing this lens and the propositions of the **matching hypothesis** (Jemmott et al., 1999) suggest that similar demographic characteristics are important considerations in program implementation.
- Although the value of facilitator/participant similarity in MRE has been speculated (e.g., Adler-Baeder & Higginbotham, 2004), there is only one published study to date addressing facilitator/participant characteristics as factors impacting satisfaction with MRE program participation (Higginbotham & Myler, 2010).
- This study extends the findings of the previous study by examining an in-depth model for predicting CRE program outcomes based on facilitator abilities and facilitator/participant demographic similarity.

RQ1: Does participant-facilitator match of ethnicity, sex, education, and/or relationship status predict reported facilitator quality?

RQ2: Does reported facilitator quality predict change in relationship and/or individual outcomes?

RQ3: Does participant-facilitator match of ethnicity, sex, education, and/or relationship status predict change in participant relationship and/or individual outcomes?

Method

Participant Sample

- $N = 3080$ (70.0% female, 30.0% male)
- 55% are African American; 45% are European American
- Education levels: Less than HS (22.0%), HS or GED (27.0%), some college (21.0%) or a 2-year technical/college degree (12.0%), 4-year college degree (12.0%), more than 4 years of college (6.0%)
- Relationship status: married (27%), engaged and never been married (4%), remarried (5%), engaged to be remarried (3%), not previously married and in a couple relationship (21%), divorced or widowed and in a couple relationship (9%), and single or no current relationship (22%)

Methods (cont.)

Facilitators

- $N = 119$ (67.0% female, 33.0% male)
- 52% are African American; 46% are European American; 2% "other"
- Education levels: Less than HS (1.0%), HS or GED (5.0%), some college (13.0%) or a 2-year technical/college degree (2.0%), 4-year college degree (42.0%), more than 4 years of college (38.0%)
- Relationship status: married (72%), engaged and never been married (1%), remarried (12%), engaged to be remarried (3%), not previously married and in a couple relationship (2%), divorced or widowed and in a couple relationship (2%), and single or no current relationship (10%)

Procedure

Four, research-based relationship education curricula were implemented throughout Alabama by community-level relationship educators as part of a US DHHS/ACF funded healthy marriage demonstration project. All curricula contained seven core relationship skills training components. Community educators were trained by the authors of each curriculum to ensure curriculum fidelity. Participants provided pre- and post- program evaluations, including demographic data and ratings of facilitator and program quality

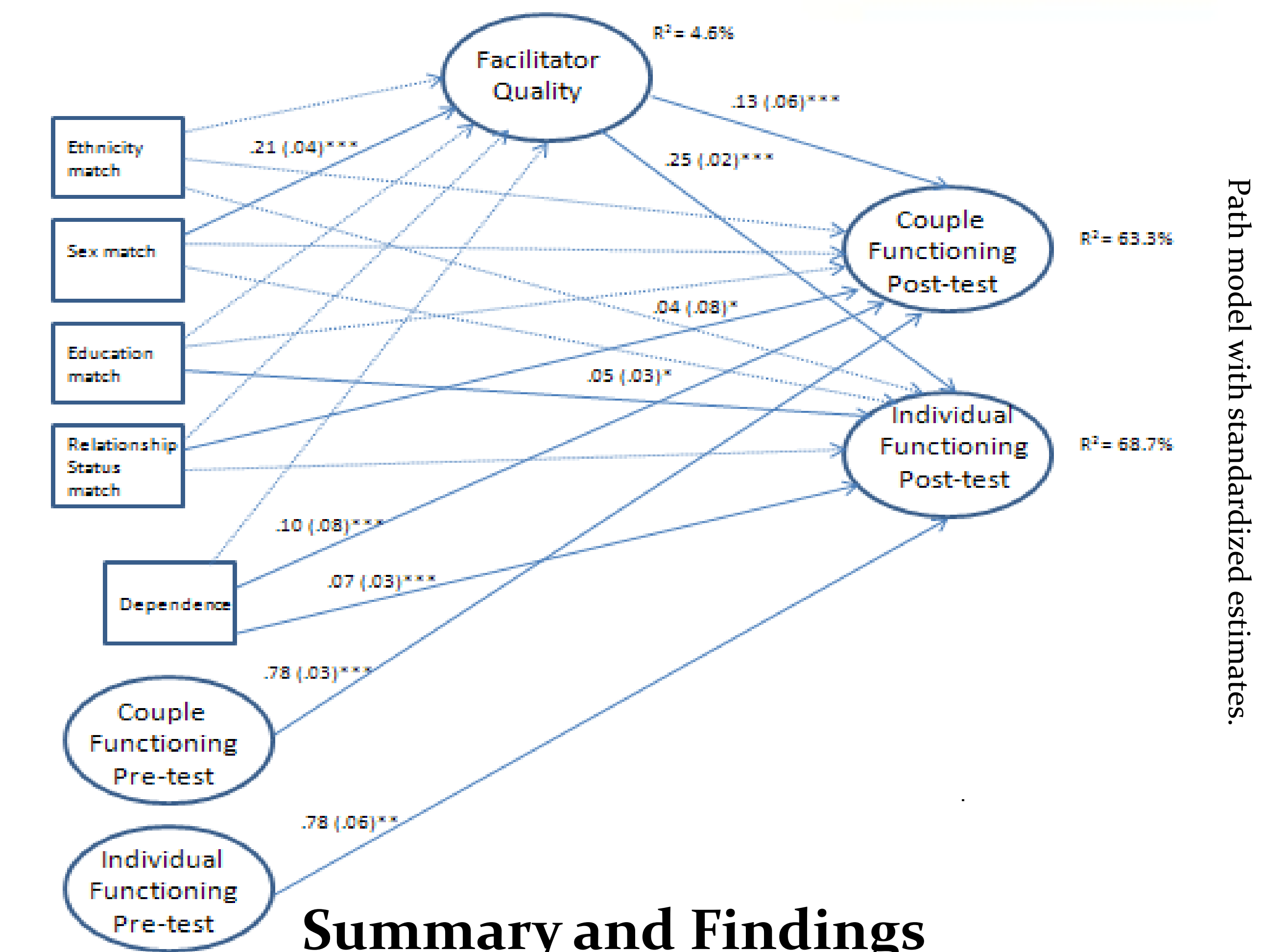
Measures

- Participant-facilitator match on sex, ethnicity, education level, and relationship status
- Outcomes: *Facilitator Quality* (measured by clear explanation of course material, effectiveness in encouraging participation, caring/support for group members, good management of time/session, and drawing on own experiences usefully, and a global indicator of overall facilitator quality).
- Final outcomes were factor scores for change in *Relationship Functioning* (as measured by Couple Quality, Happiness, and Positive Interaction) and change in *Individual Functioning* (as measured by Individual Empowerment, Depression, and Conflict Management) (see Adler-Baeder et al., 2010).

Results

Analysis and Results

- A structural equation model was fit to examine the relationship between participant-facilitator match of sex, ethnicity, education, and facilitator quality, relationship status and the change in Couple Functioning and Individual Functioning.
- Model fit indices suggest excellent fit ($\chi^2(278) = 1853.70$, $p < .05$; CFI=.93; TLI=.92; RMSEA=.04, $p = 1.0$).
- A significant path was identified for the effect of participant-facilitator sex match on reports of perceived Facilitator Quality ($\gamma = .36$, $SE = .040$, $p < .001$; $R^2 = 4.6\%$).
- Significant paths were identified for the effects of Facilitator Quality on individual functioning ($B = .187$, $SE = .021$, $p < .001$) and couple functioning ($B = .379$, $SE = .057$, $p < .001$).
- Additionally, participant-facilitator education match was related to change in individual functioning ($\gamma = .066$, $SE = .034$, $p = .05$; $R^2 = 4.6\%$). Participant-facilitator relationship status match was related to change in couple functioning ($\gamma = .165$, $SE = .082$, $p < .05$; $R^2 = 1.4\%$).



Summary and Findings

- Participant-facilitator match on sex was significantly related to facilitator quality.
- Facilitator quality is predictive of change in individual and couple functioning.
- In addition - participant-facilitator match on education is predictive of change in individual functioning; participant-facilitator match on relationship match is predictive of change in couple functioning
- The finding that higher Facilitator Quality predicts program outcomes suggests the importance of emphasizing attainment and use of good facilitation skills. It is not curriculum content alone, but rather, the quality of the deliver that matters for program effects.
- The findings that demographic match are related to program outcomes may be due to perceptions of the participants that the facilitator is more capable due to similarity. Facilitators with shared experiences may more easily empathize with their participants, may be viewed as more credible, and can speak to the specific challenges associated with particular experiences, often in the context of the CRE program.
- Additionally, participant-facilitator experience similarity may be influential in the development of a good alliance (e.g., Mamodhoussen et al, 2005). Just as we assume that higher Facilitator Quality ratings may reflect a stronger facilitation alliance, it may also be that that we are tapping this alliance (i.e., an element of the process) in our measures of experience match. Therapy literature has estimated the "alliance" between therapist and client to be responsible for approximately 1/3 of change in therapy (Hubble, Duncan, & Miller, 1999). It is possible that change in CRE programs follows similar trends.
- Because we found some indication that both facilitator quality and participant-facilitator demographic match were related to participants' post-program change in our study, it will be helpful for future research and implementation designs to give consideration to the role of demographic match on program outcomes. Rather than focusing on the influence of either facilitator quality and skills or participant-facilitator demographic match, utilizing an "and" approach will lead to greater understanding and potentially, enhanced program impact.

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