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

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, 2000).

- 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.

Methods

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?

Facilitators

- N = 199 (67.0% female, 33.0% male)
- 52% are African American; 48% are European American
- Education levels: Less than HS (21.0%), HS or GED (27.0%), some college (20.0%) or a 2-year technical/college degree (20.0%), 4-year college degree (42.0%), more than 4 years of college (38.0%)
- Relationship status: married (72%), engaged and never been married (6%), remarried (6%), engaged (2%), separated (2%), and single or no current relationship (22%)

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.

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 (χ²(278) = 883.79, p < .05; CFI = .95; TLI=.92; RMSEA = .04, p > .05).
- A significant path was identified for the effect of participant-facilitator match on reports of perceived Facilitator Quality (γ1 = .36, SE = .040, p < .001; R² = 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 = .021, p < .001).
- Additionally, participant-facilitator education match was related to change in individual functioning (γ = .066, SE = .034, p < .05; R² = 4.6%).
- Participant-facilitator relationship status match was related to change in couple functioning (γ = .195, SE = .032, p < .05; R² = 4.4%).
References


