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Changes in Perceptions of Social Support, Constructive Communication and Marital Satisfaction in Couples Participating in a Marital Enrichment Program

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To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Nikki N. Frousakis entitled "Changes in Perceptions of Social Support, Constructive Communication and Marital Satisfaction in Couples Participating in a Marital Enrichment Program." I have examined the final electronic copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in Psychology.

Kristina Coop Gordon, Major Professor

We have read this thesis and recommend its acceptance:

Robert G. Wahler, Deborah P. Welsh

Accepted for the Council:

Carolyn R. Hodges

Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)

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Major Professor

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and recommend its acceptance:

Robert G. Wahler

Deborah P. Welsh

Accepted for the Council:

Linda Painter
Interim Dean of Graduate Studies

(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)

**CHANGES IN PERCEPTIONS OF SOCIAL SUPPORT, CONSTRUCTIVE
COMMUNICATION AND MARITAL SATISFACTION IN COUPLES
PARTICIPATING IN A MARITAL ENRICHMENT PROGRAM**

A Thesis

Presented for the

Master of Arts

Degree

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Nikki N. Frousakis

December 2006

DEDICATION

To my mom, Eleni

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ABSTRACT

Marital enrichment programs have been gaining considerable recognition in the past several decades. Thousands of individuals participate in these programs yearly. However, the particular effects of enrichment programs are still under investigation, and many remain empirically unanalyzed and their effectiveness undetermined. Also, many dyadic interventions focus on helping couples improve their communication skills and become more socially supportive of their partner. This study explored changes in levels of perceived social support, constructive communication, and marital satisfaction in couples participating in a marital enrichment program, Marriage Alive. Couples who completed all 3 phases of the study (i.e., pre-seminar, post-seminar, 2 month follow-up) were included in these analyses. Results indicated that levels of support, communication, and satisfaction increased by the end of the enrichment seminar for husbands and wives. However, only gains in communication were fully maintained at follow-up. The finding of sustained improvements in communication skills has far-reaching implications, which will be discussed here. This study also explored whether changes in social support from pre-seminar to follow-up mediate the relationship between changes in constructive communication and changes in marital satisfaction; however, this model was not supported. Implications and future directions for the specific seminar under investigation are also discussed.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Today, myriad marital enrichment programs are being offered in religious and community settings across the United States. Enrichment programs have the ability to impact anywhere from 3 to 150 couples at the same time, depending on the venue, local interest, and the design of that particular seminar. Their accessibility and attendance rates alone make them an important and potentially powerful point of intervention for couples. Therefore, understanding how these programs actually work is critical. Over a dozen such programs have been reviewed in the psychological literature (e.g., Berger & Hannah, 1999). However, this figure is an underestimation of the actual number available since many have not been scientifically examined. The current study sought to explore a particular marital enrichment program that has not before been reviewed.

In an effort to boost (or maintain) levels of relationship satisfaction, enrichment seminars often concentrate on fostering a supportive relationship within a dyad and improving couples' communication skills (Halford, Markman, Kline, & Stanley, 2003). The associations between marital satisfaction and perceptions of social support, as well as those between marital satisfaction and constructive couple communication, are well-documented in the literature (e.g., Beach, Fincham, Katz, & Bradbury, 1996; Eldridge & Christensen, 2002; Heavy, Christensen, & Malamuth, 1996; Julien & Markman, 1991; Pasch & Bradbury, 1998). How these constructs of interest (i.e., social support,

constructive communication, marital satisfaction) change for couples participating in dyadic interventions has been explored primarily in newlywed samples (e.g., Pasch & Bradbury, 1998; Stanley, Blumber, & Markman, 1999) but not as in depth for those in lengthier and more established relationships. Thus in the context of the particular marital enrichment program reviewed below, the current research will offer insight into how these constructs might change in more stable relationships.

Thus, the purposes of the current study were to examine a specific marital enrichment program and to explore the following for those individuals participating in this seminar: (a) how perceptions of support and communication change over time; (b) if support and communication independently impact levels of marital satisfaction after the seminar; and (c) how these two constructs might function together to impact changes in satisfaction after the seminar. More specifically, this study proposed and evaluated a model in which social support partially mediates the relationship between constructive communication and marital satisfaction.

Marital Enrichment Programs

Marital enrichment programs have been growing in popularity since their inception in the 1960's (Dyer & Dyer, 1999) when social upheaval gave way to a reexamination of social institutions including that of marriage (Allyn, 2000). The 60's and 70's saw the advent of several enrichment programs including Marriage Encounter, Association for Couples in Marriage Enrichment (A.C.M.E.), Couple Communication, and Relationship Enhancement (Dyer & Dyer, 1999). Scores of such programs currently

exist and are being offered in communities throughout the United States and abroad.

Enrichment programs primarily target couples who are not severely distressed. Although highly distressed couples may attend such seminars, they often are encouraged to seek marital therapy as an additional and perhaps more appropriate intervention for their level of distress.

The design of enrichment programs seems particularly appealing to those interested in the prevention of marital distress and relationship deterioration. Specifically, these programs often have the ability to impact a large number of couples simultaneously. For example, in the current study, which examines a series of one particular enrichment program, one of the twelve seminars offered was attended by 73 couples, while the others averaged around 50 couples each. In total, over the course of one year more than 1000 individuals went through this program world-wide. In addition, these programs usually are administered in community or religious settings, where members can offer each other a sense of support and solidarity. In light of the far-reaching and clearly documented personal and societal costs of this nation's 50% divorce rate (e.g., Amato & Keith, 1991; Bloom, Asher, & White, 1979; Halford, Markman, Kline, & Stanley, 2003; Tucker et al., 1997), enrichment programs seem promising in offering a possible cost-effective method for benefiting couples.

Enrichment programs appear to be tied together by a common thread: a didactic component directed at teaching couples the skills thought necessary for a healthy and satisfying marriage (Halford et al., 2003; Gingras, Dyane, & Chagnon, 1983; Zimpfer, 1988). For example, teaching communication skills seems to be a staple of enrichment

programs (e.g., Halford et al., 2003; Zimpfer, 1988). A popular technique used to achieve improved communication is implementing The Floor or the Listener/Speaker Technique (Stanley, Blumber, & Markman, 1999), which offers couples a structured approach to sharing emotions and active listening. Just as there are many similarities amongst programs, there are also a variety of differences. The variations lie primarily in which principle components the program administrators place the focus of the program (e.g., communication skills, empathic attunement, sexual intimacy enhancement). For example, LoPiccolo and Miller (1975) developed the Enhancing Marital Sexuality (EMS) program to help couples improve their levels of marital satisfaction by improving their sexual relationship.

Many programs have been developed by motivated persons in the community (e.g., active community educators, members of the clergy). Others are based out of university settings, in which marital researchers have developed interventions that are informed by their expertise and understanding of the marital literature. Regardless of the origin of the seminar, overall they seem to be effective in improving marital satisfaction or quality. In their meta-analysis of programs that had been empirically researched, Giblin, Sprenkle, and Sheehan (1985) found a .44 effect size at post-test. This statistic is an overall medium effect, with findings ranging from .96 for the Relationship Enhancement program to .42 for the Marriage Encounter intervention. More recent reviews support previous findings that various aspects of relationships are improved (e.g., communication skills) and that marital satisfaction increases on average over the course

of the program (Halford et al., 2003; Silliman, Stanley, Coffin, Markman, & Jordan, 2002).

However, findings at follow-up are mixed. While some studies demonstrate that intervention gains are maintained 2 to 5 months or up to a year after the conclusion of the intervention, other reports indicate that gains, particularly with marital satisfaction, ultimately return to or closely approach pre-seminar levels (Giblin, Sprenkle, & Sheehan, 1985; Zimpfer, 1988). In reviewing 34 studies that included follow-up testing of an enrichment program, Giblin and colleagues (1985) observed that seminar effect sizes dropped significantly from post-test to follow-up (i.e., from .44 to .34). Follow-up scores remained significant, nonetheless. Additionally, effect sizes for relationship skills (e.g., communication) tended to be greater than effect sizes attained when assessing changes in levels of relationship satisfaction (Giblin, Sprenkle, & Sheehan, 1985). In short, Giblin and colleagues (1985) found a pattern where satisfaction levels remain relatively stable over time while other areas of couples' relationships change. This pattern has been explained by some to be a result of a ceiling effect on marital satisfaction (e.g., Giblin, Sprenkle, & Sheehan, 1985). Generally and as expected, marital enrichment participants are not as highly distressed as clinical populations, and they are also more invested in improving their relationship than the average couple who does not pursue any methods of enrichment; thus, their levels of overall satisfaction may reach a point where they plateau. Further support for this conclusion is the finding that highly distressed couples demonstrate greater pre- to post-seminar gains than less distressed couples (Giblin, Sprenkle, & Sheehan, 1985). These large gains seen in highly distressed couples may be

due to a regression back to the mean (Giblin, Sprenkle, & Sheehan, 1985). This pattern of relatively stable levels of marital satisfaction seems to suggest that longitudinal research is important in studying enrichment programs. Changes in scores from pre- to post-seminar may be misleading; examining if seminar gains are maintained at follow-up offers a richer understanding of the effects of a program. Consequently, these results suggest that in a non-severely distressed population monitoring changes in various constructs over time in addition to satisfaction may be more informative of how successful a program is rather than solely looking for changes in a relatively stable construct like marital satisfaction.

Considering the amount of potential enrichment programs possess and the sheer numbers of seminars being offered in communities today, it becomes clear that this method of intervention is an important way of reaching out to couples. Understanding whether and how these programs work for couples is critical. While some programs have been empirically evaluated and supported, others remain untested and their claims to enriching relationships have gone unexplored. A particular enrichment program that has yet to be evaluated or introduced in the (non-self-help) psychological literature is called Marriage Alive.

Marriage Alive

Marriage Alive is a community-based program created in 1983 by David and Claudia Arp, who founded a “marriage and family enrichment resource organization for churches, community organizations, the US military, schools and businesses” (Arp &

Arp, 2006). Through their marital enrichment seminar, the Arps target couples in various communities who are interested in enhancing their marital quality. They conduct their seminars primarily in the United States and in Germany. As a married couple, they developed their community-based program borrowing from their own marital experiences, their knowledge of the relevant literature, and their interactions with thousands of couples. They did not have any formal education in marital research until David Arp earned a Masters in Social Work after they had already developed their program.

The Marriage Alive seminar is generally divided into two 3 hour sessions that take place on consecutive days (i.e., over a weekend). The content of the seminar (Arp & Arp, 2002) includes communication skills building exercises, conflict resolution or problem-solving techniques, anger management resolutions, goal-setting opportunities, and exercises that encourage reflection on one's relationship. The seminar spends time reminding participants what attracted them to their spouse and encouraging them to renew their commitment to each other and to their marriage. The seminar also stresses the importance of sexuality in a healthy marriage. Additionally, Marriage Alive prompts couples to increase the fun in their relationships, work as a team, and kiss regularly. The Arps particularly stress the importance of (a) making one's marital relationship a number one priority, (b) supporting one's spouse, and (c) improving communication within one's relationship. Their companion book *10 Great Dates to Energize Your Marriage* breaks down the components of the seminar into 10 separate tasks or dates (Arp & Arp, 1997).

Thus, building a supportive relationship in which partners communicate well together lies at the heart of every date.

The Marriage Alive program is similar in theory to the Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program (PREP; Stanley, Blumber, & Markman, 1999) for engaged couples. In fact, the Arps borrowed heavily from the techniques (e.g., the Floor) and topics emphasized in the PREP sessions (Arp & Arp, 2002). Additionally, they have incorporated instruments (e.g., anger contract) developed by Mace & Mace for their program, Association for Couples in Marriage Enrichment (A.C.M.E.).

In summary, as with several other enrichment programs, Marriage Alive places a premium on encouraging couples to be supportive of each other and to engage in life's struggles and excitements as a cohesive team that communicates effectively. The developers of this particular enrichment program chose to focus great attention on communication skills building and on modeling ways spouses can offer each other support. They based this choice on their personal experiences, their experiences working with couples, and their knowledge of the considerable evidence suggesting that increasing levels of support within the dyad and improving communication skills will positively impact relationship quality. The following is a brief review of the support and communication literature, which is consistent with the basis of this program.

Social Support

The literature on social support and its effects on individual and dyadic functioning has grown considerably in recent decades. Hobfoll (1988, p.121) defines

social support as “those social interactions or relationships that provide individuals with actual assistance or that embed individuals within a social system believed to provide love, caring, or sense of attachment to a values social group or dyad.” In the context of this paper, which is also consistent with the use of the term in the field of marital research, social support is examined in the context of a romantic dyad. Previous research suggests that being supported during times of stress is associated with how well one can adjust and manage a stressful situation (Bolger, Zuckerman, & Kessler, 2000; Holland & Holahan, 2003; Wethington & Kessler, 1986). Social support seems to function as a buffer against stressful life events and stressful transitions (Dolbier & Steinhardt, 2000). Additionally, individuals who are recovering from significant surgical procedures (e.g., heart bypass surgery) or from cancer seem to recover much quicker than those who do not have a supportive person in their life (Helgeson, 1993; Scott, Halford, & Ward, 2004). There are also mental health benefits to having a supportive partner in one’s life (Beach, Fincham, Katz & Bradbury, 1996; Cohen, Sherrod, & Clark, 1988; Dolbier & Steinhardt, 2000). In a study by Cohen and colleagues (1988), social support was negatively associated with levels of depressive affect. Feeling supported by one’s partner can also combat against feeling emotionally lonely (Weiss, 1974).

It appears that having a supportive person nearby as one recovers from ailments and faces life’s struggles has a significant impact on adjustment, recovery, and mental health. However, having one’s spouse there seems particularly important. People tend to consider their intimate partner to be their primary source of social support (Cutrona, 1996; Levinger & Huston, 1990), and prefer to turn to him or her in time of need over

anyone else (Beach et al., 1996). In fact, there seems to be something unique to the support provided by one's partner such that support offered by others cannot adequately compensate for a deficit in the support one's intimate partner could offer (Cutrona & Suhr, 1994).

In addition to the positive effects on individual functioning, the perception that one's partner is supportive is strongly associated with marital satisfaction (Acitelli, 1996; Beach, Fincham, Katz, & Bradbury, 1996; Julien & Markman, 1991; Pasch & Bradbury, 1998). Specifically, this perception of social support seems to play an important role in both increasing levels of satisfaction with one's marriage (Cutrona, 1996) and guarding against the development of future marital distress (Pasch & Bradbury, 1998).

Interestingly, the association between social support and relationship satisfaction seems to be stronger for women than for men (Acitelli & Antonucci, 1994; Julien & Markman, 1991). Acitelli and Antonucci (1994) review various interpretations of this finding. One of their conclusions is that since many women are stay-at-home mothers, they lack the support network their husbands have created at work. They then rely heavily on their partner for social support and are more focused on their marital relationship to fill their needs because of a lack of other kinds of close relationships. Another one of their conclusions is that men and women value different types of supportive behaviors, and that most measures tend not to inquire about those methods valued primarily by men (e.g., affirmation and sexual intimacy). Thus, the importance of spousal support for men possibly has been underestimated, and the stronger relationship between support and

satisfaction often found for women may be misleading and a byproduct of using a less valid measure of social support.

Additionally, the general feeling one has about the availability of social support from his or her partner (i.e., perception of support) appears to be more important to marital satisfaction and adjustment than precisely how or what type of support is objectively received and in what quantity (i.e., received support; Wethington & Kessler, 1986). Thus, it appears that changes in the participants' *perceptions* of their spouses' support would be a more appropriate focus, rather than having participants recall and sum up specific supportive behaviors. Thus, the present study focused on these perceptions of social support.

In sum, it is clear that feeling supported by one's spouse has important implications for levels of marital satisfaction and individual functioning. As stated earlier, this association is a major reason why Marriage Alive focuses on helping couples increase their supportive interactions. Another way in which this program attempts to help improve couples' interactions is through focusing on building communication skills, which also has been shown to have a robust association with marital satisfaction.

Constructive Communication

Communication is central to relationships and marital quality (e.g., Markman & Floyd, 1980; Noller & Feeney, 2002; Stanley, Markman, & Whitton, 2002). Poor communication has been linked to the development and continuation of marital distress (Markman & Floyd, 1980) and to intimate partner violence (Cordova, Jacobson,

Gottman, Rushe, & Cox, 1993; Roberts & Noller, 1998). Past research clearly shows that non-distressed couples communicate more effectively than distressed couples (Christensen & Shenk, 1991; Noller, 1985). Christensen and Shenk (1991) found that divorcing couples reported lower levels of constructive communication compared to other distressed couples and much lower levels than non-distressed couples. Non-distressed couples tend to communicate in a way that conveys support for their partner (Gottman, 1979). Moreover, happier couples are less likely to enter into negative patterns of interacting, such as the demand/withdrawal cycle, which has been linked to lower levels of marital satisfaction (Heavy, Christensen, & Malamuth, 1996; Eldridge & Christensen, 2002).

Furthermore, couples typically cite problematic communication as one of their main reasons for entering marital therapy (Doss, Simpson, & Christensen, 2004). Research suggests that improving communication skills has been effective in increasing levels of relationship satisfaction over time (Gill, Christensen, & Fincham, 1999; Markman, Floyd, Stanley, & Storaasli, 1988), and that improvements in communication is one of the main mechanisms driving positive changes in couples seeking treatment (Doss, Thum, Sevier, Atkins, & Christensen, 2005). In essence, improving the quality of communication within a dyad is one of the primary ways therapists help couples improve the quality of their relationship. Given the importance of being able to communicate constructively in a relationship and the well-documented detrimental effects of poor communication on relationship satisfaction and stability, it seems fitting to make communication skills a primary focus of intervention when approaching all couples. In

fact, one of the hallmarks of a marital enrichment program is building on participants' communication skills (Halford et al., 2003).

Marriage Alive not only focuses on communication skills but also, as stated earlier, on helping couples create more supportive relationships with each other. These concepts are presented separately within the program; however, it is possible that these two constructs work together to facilitate changes in marital satisfaction.

A Mediated Pathway to Satisfaction

In addition to facilitating problem-solving, communicating constructively with one's partner also meets the goal of creating certain feelings in one's partner. In this way, constructive communication appears to have an affective component. Specifically, if a couple feels that they are communicating well, they likely are feeling understood, encouraged, and validated. In essence, they are likely to feel supported by their spouse. Support for one's partner often is communicated through the kind, encouraging words of one's mate. The support communicated through validating statements during conflict has been found to be particularly important in preventing disagreements from escalating into hurtful arguments (Gottman, 1979). Gottman found that non-distressed couples are more validating in their conflict resolutions than distressed couples, and that this has been related to them feeling more supported by their partner when assessed after a problem-solving exercise. Thus, there appears to be an important link between support and communication.

However, how social support and constructive communication combine to impact levels of satisfaction has yet to be empirically explored in the literature. Do social support and constructive communication change together or work independently to impact marital satisfaction over time? Since non-distressed couples seem to communicate in a way that creates emotions such as feeling understood and validated after an interaction, it is expected that the change in how supported one feels in one's marriage will partially mediate the relationship between the changes in reported levels of constructive communication and in marital satisfaction from pre-seminar to follow-up.

Hypotheses

This study proposed three hypotheses. First, due to Marriage Alive's focus on improving levels of communication and support in their participants' relationships, it was expected that levels of social support and constructive communication would increase after attending this seminar. Second, previous research has established a strong association between support and relationship satisfaction as well as communication and satisfaction. Thus, it was anticipated that improvements in social support and constructive communication following the attendance of this marital enrichment seminar would predict improvements in marital satisfaction from pre-seminar to follow-up. Finally, this study proposed that communication and support work together in impacting satisfaction. Specifically, the third hypothesis predicted that better communication would lead to better perceived support, which in turn would influence changes in satisfaction levels.

CHAPTER 2

METHOD

Participants

Participants were couples attending one of the 12 Marriage Alive seminars offered by David and Claudia Arp in 12 different cities across the United States during a one year period. A total of 540 females and 533 males attended the seminars, consented to participate in the study, and completed the pre- and post-seminar questionnaires. A 2 month follow-up was conducted, which received approximately a 25% response rate (27% for wives and 22% for husbands). At no point in the study were incentives offered for participation. The seminar administrators also were not allowed to contact the couples to encourage their participation in fear that this would create a social desirability effect. After replacing missing values, treating outliers, and discarding those who did not complete all 3 of the measures explored here, the final sample for this study consisted of 129 females and 109 males.

At the time of the initial survey (pre-seminar), all couples reported being married, except for one couple who was engaged. At follow-up, the engaged couple still had not married, and two couples had separated. Length of marriage ranged from 3 months to 57 years; females averaged 14.5 years (S.D. = 11.6) and males 15.8 years (S.D. = 13.5). 71% of the participating wives reported that this is their first marriage, 21% reported being in their second marriage, and 7 % were either in their third or fourth marriage.

73% of husbands had only been married once, while 22% reported that this is their second marriage, and 4% stated that they are currently in their third or fourth marriage.

Average age was 42.24 (S.D. = 11.00) for females and 46.48 (S.D. = 12.84) for males. The sample was primarily Caucasian (90% females, 84% males). Men reported having an average of 16.70 (S.D. = 2.87) years of education and earning \$75,000 a year (range 50,000 – 99,999). Females reported having an average of 15.64 (S.D. = 2.36) years of education and earning \$75,000 a year (range 50,000 – 99,999). Couples had an average of 2.4 children (S.D. = 1.60, range from 0 to 8).

Compared to the average American household income (U.S. Census, 2004), participants earned considerably more (approximately \$25,000). In comparison to attendees of marital enrichment programs who have reported an income demographic, this sample again earned more per year. The participants in this sample were approximately 10 years older than the average participant in several marital enrichment seminars (e.g., Adam & Gingras, 1982; Giblin, Sprenkle, & Sheehan, 1985; Hickmon, Protinsky, & Singh, 1997; Joanning, 1982). Additionally, this sample had more education than the average person in the United States (U.S. Census, 2004). However, education level was similar to those participating in other enrichment programs (e.g., Adam & Gingras, 1982; Giblin, Sprenkle, & Sheehan, 1985; Hickmon, Protinsky, & Singh, 1997; Witteman & Fitzpatrick, 1986). The sample in this study was 84% - 90% Caucasian, which is more than this nation's average, 80% (U.S. Census, 2004), though approximately equal to a recent study comparing two enrichment programs conducted by Burchard, Yarhouse, Kilian, Worthington, Berry, and Canter (2003). In summary, the

current sample was wealthier, more educated, and older than the average American citizen. This sample also included more individuals of Caucasian descent than the U.S. average. In comparison to other studies exploring the effects of marital enrichment programs, the current sample was wealthier and older, though similarly educated and of similar racial breakdown.

Measures

Participants completed a brief demographic questionnaire before the seminar began that inquired about age, gender, race, children, income, education, number of times married, length of relationship, and relationship status (e.g, married, engaged, separated, divorced). Relationship status was reassessed at follow-up, at which point two couples reported being separated. Participants also completed a host of measures commonly administered in marital research.

Quality of Marriage Index

The Quality of Marriage Index (QMI; Norton, 1983) is a global measure of marital quality. It is a six-item questionnaire which assesses the relationship as a whole. The items' intercorrelation scores range from .68 to .86 (Norton, 1983; Heyman, Sayers, & Bellack, 1994). The QMI is strongly correlated to a commonly used and accepted measure of marital adjustment, the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS; Spanier, 1976). The intercorrelations between the two measures are .87 for men and .85 for women (Heyman, Sayers, & Bellack, 1994). The QMI is briefer than the DAS and attempts to remove any

limitations of the DAS by offering only one global dimension of marital quality. In the present sample, the alphas for the six items of the QMI were .97 for women and .95 for men.

Constructive Communication

Heavey, Larson, Zumbotel, and Christensen (1996) developed the Constructive Communication subscale (CPQ-CC) by combining seven items from the original Communication Patterns Questionnaire (CPQ; Christensen & Sullaway, 1984). The measure assesses the self-reported constructiveness of spouses' behavior during problem-solving discussions, and included three constructive items and four reverse-scored destructive items. Psychometric data give strong support to the reliability and validity of this subscale (Heavey, Larson, Zumbotel, & Christensen, 1996). The alphas for this scale in this study also confirm that it is a reliable measure of communication. The alpha score for wives was .86, and the alpha for husbands was .88.

Social Support

This measure was adapted from Norbeck's social support instrument (Norbeck, Lindsey, & Carrieri, 1981, 1983). The construct of support is comprised of three dimensions: affect, affirmation, and aid. The six items of this scale (i.e., two items measuring each component) are highly intercorrelated ($r = .72$ to $.97$) and have a high test-retest reliability with alphas ranging from .85 to .92 (Norbeck, Lindsey, & Carrieri, 1983). To make this scale more appropriate for the current sample comprised of married

couples, the items were edited to reflect how supported one feels one's romantic partner is or would be. The revision was done simply by adding the person of reference to the item. For example, in the original format item 1 read, "How much does this person make you feel loved?" However, in the current study, item 1 read, "How much does your partner make you feel loved?" Analyses with the current sample indicate that this measure was highly reliable with alphas of .91 and .93 for females and males, respectively.

Procedures

Participants for this study were couples recruited while attending Marriage Alive seminars in 12 cities across the United States. The leaders of the seminars, David and Claudia Arp, invited the voluntary participation of all seminar attendees before they commenced their program. They distributed both the pre-seminar and post-seminar questionnaires. When they collected the packets, they immediately sealed them in a box and mailed it to the authors. Participants were allotted approximately 15-20 minutes before and after the seminar concluded to complete these surveys.

The 2 month follow-up questionnaire was mailed out once to all participants. Individuals were given the option of completing the survey online or returning their packet of measures in an enclosed stamped envelope to the authors at the University of Tennessee. In either case, the only identifying information appearing with their answers was their pre-assigned identification number which indicated to the authors in which city they had participated. Participants were guaranteed that the seminar administrators

would not have access to their identifying information or their responses. Participants received no incentives for their participation in this study.

CHAPTER 3

RESULTS

Preliminary analyses were conducted to explore possible demographic differences between those individuals who participated in the 2 month follow-up and those who only participated in the pre- and post-seminar evaluations. ANOVAs revealed a significant difference among male participants. Those husbands who participated in the follow-up reported slightly, yet significantly, higher levels of education than those who did not participate, $F(1, 513) = 5.80, p < .05$. Thus, level of education was controlled in every regression equation analyzing the male participants in this sample.

In addition, the group of individuals who participated in the 2 month follow-up presented with significantly higher levels of marital satisfaction at pre-seminar than those who did not complete the follow-up questionnaires. This was the case for both wives, $F(1, 521) = 8.71, p < .01$, and husbands, $F(1, 514) = 6.42, p < .05$. Initial levels of satisfaction also were controlled in every regression equation analyzing this sample.

A repeated measures ANCOVA exploring the change in levels of marital satisfaction over time was significant for wives, $F(1, 118) = 9.83, p < .001$. (See Table A-1.) However, it appears that on average the boost in satisfaction from pre- to post-seminar was short-lived. Levels of satisfaction increased significantly by the end of the seminar ($p < .001$), but gains were not maintained by the time of the follow-up, though they were not entirely lost either; levels of follow-up were not significantly different from

pre-seminar, yet follow-up was also not significantly different from post-test either. Reported levels of marital satisfaction in husbands followed a similar trajectory, $F(1, 103) = 14.91, p < .001$. On average, husbands reported a significant boost in satisfaction from pre- to post-seminar ($p < .001$); however, their scores then decreased significantly from post-seminar to follow-up ($p < .01$). Thus, seminar gains were not maintained at all. In short, pre-seminar and follow-up marital satisfaction scores did not significantly differ for participating husbands or wives.

Hypothesis 1

The first hypothesis predicted that reported levels of constructive communication and social support would increase over time. Specifically, a significant increase was expected in levels of communication and support from pre-seminar to the 2 month follow-up. As in all analyses conducted for this study, husbands and wives were examined separately. For the participating males, a repeated measures ANCOVA revealed that reported levels of constructive communication changed significantly over time, $F(1, 103) = 12.81, p < .001$. Communication levels significantly increased from pre- to post-seminar ($p < .001$). There was no significant change from post-seminar to follow-up, and the change from pre-seminar to follow-up remained significant ($p < .05$). Additionally, the overall change in levels of social support was significant for husbands, $F(1, 103) = 8.41, p < .001$. Husbands perceived an increased level of support from their partner by the end of the seminar ($p < .001$); however, seminar gains were not maintained at follow-up. In fact, average levels of perceived support from one's wife decreased

significantly from post-seminar to follow-up ($p < .05$). Means and relevant statistics for husbands are listed in Table A-2.

Results for wives also indicated a significant change over time in levels of constructive communication, $F(1, 119) = 25.04, p < .001$. The general direction of change was similar to that of the participating husbands. Levels of communication increased from pre- to post-seminar ($p < .001$), and seminar gains were maintained by the time of the 2 month follow-up ($p < .001$). There was no significant change from post-seminar to follow-up. In addition, reported levels of social support also reflected the pattern of change demonstrated by the participating husbands, $F(1, 119) = 12.02, p < .001$. Perceived levels of support increased from pre- to post-seminar ($p < .001$), then decreased significantly by the time of the follow-up ($p < .001$). Thus, the change from pre-seminar to follow-up was not found to be significant for wives. Means and relevant statistics for wives are listed in Table A-3.

In summary, the first hypothesis was partially supported. Perceived levels of constructive communication increased significantly for both males and females from pre-seminar to follow-up, suggesting that this seminar had an impact on how well individuals believe they communicate with their partners. Also, participants seemed to feel significantly more supported by their partner after having participated in the seminar together. However, this boost in perceptions of support appeared to be temporary, and on average participants seemed to feel the same level of support at follow-up as they did upon first arriving to the seminar.

Hypothesis 2

To begin addressing the second and third hypotheses, gain or difference scores for constructive communication, social support, and marital satisfaction were calculated to account for the degree of change between the pre-seminar and follow-up assessments. In each case, the earlier time point (i.e., pre-seminar) was subtracted from the later time point (i.e., follow-up) to determine the change over time in a particular construct. The creation of difference scores is a preferable way to account for pre-seminar scores not being equivalent (Giblin, Sprenkle, & Sheehan, 1985). It is preferable because difference scores capture the degree of change each participant reports experiencing. Additionally in this study, all regression analyses using difference scores also controlled for initial levels of satisfaction. Controlling for pre-seminar satisfaction takes into account that those who participated in the follow-up assessment reported higher levels of marital satisfaction at pre-seminar compared to those who did not participate in the follow-up. Using difference scores as well as controlling for initial satisfaction is a conservative approach to analyzing these data, which allows for the ability to hold constant the different pre-seminar levels and also to look at changes over time.¹

Hypothesis 2 predicted that the changes in levels of communication and support would each separately predict changes in satisfaction from pre-seminar to follow-up. A correlation matrix of the pertinent pre-seminar variables is presented in Table A-4 for husbands and Table A-5 for wives. Results of linear regression analyses indicated that

¹ Post hoc manipulations indicate that whether or not pre-seminar satisfaction was controlled for, or whether or not difference scores were created, the betas results remained the same. The F score changed; however, the significance values remained constant.

for wives, the change in communication, $F(3, 128) = 151.49, p < .001$, and support, $F(3, 128) = 136.17, p < .001$ from pre-seminar to follow-up predict the change in marital satisfaction from pre-seminar to follow-up in a positive direction. Controlling for level of education, analyses demonstrated for husbands that the change in communication, $F(4, 107) = 95.60, p < .001$, and support, $F(4, 107) = 78.47, p < .001$, also predict changes in marital satisfaction. (See Tables A-6, A-7, A-8, and A-9) Thus, the second hypothesis was supported.

Hypothesis 3

To address the issue of mediation, first the relationship between constructive communication and social support was explored. It was expected that the change in how well participants feel they are communicating as a couple from pre-seminar to follow-up would predict changes in how supported they feel by their partner. Linear regression analyses for husbands, $F(4, 107) = 31.89, p < .001$, and wives, $F(3, 128) = 36.37, p < .001$, indicated a significant relationship. (See Tables A-10 & A-11.) Again, difference scores were created to capture the change from pre-seminar to post-seminar.

Consequently, it appears that pre-seminar to follow-up changes in constructive communication predict changes in social support as well as changes in marital satisfaction for the husbands and wives participating in this study. Also, changes in perceived support predict changes in satisfaction. The third hypothesis also predicted that the relationship between communication and satisfaction would be at least partially mediated by changes in levels of social support. For partial mediation to be indicated, the

effect of communication on satisfaction should decrease after accounting for social support. However, the changes in their respective Beta weights were not significant for husbands or wives. A Sobel Test further confirmed that changes in social support neither partially nor fully mediate the relationship between changes in constructive communication and marital satisfaction.

Post hoc analyses were performed to explore if communication mediates the relationship between support and satisfaction in this sample rather than the mediation explored above. Changes in social support were found to be predictive of changes in constructive communication. However, a mediating relationship (i.e., full or partial) again was not established.

Effect Sizes and Overall Effectiveness

Effect sizes for this program were calculated by taking the difference in marital satisfaction and dividing by the pre-seminar standard deviation for satisfaction. Effect sizes also were calculated for constructive communication and social support. Table A-12 reflects effect sizes for all individuals who participated in the pre- and post-seminar surveys, regardless of their participation in the follow-up (N = 452 wives, 441 husbands). Tables A-13 and A-14, however, indicate scores only for those individuals who participated in all 3 phases of the study (i.e., pre-seminar, post-seminar, and 2 month follow-up). Table A-13 lists scores at post-test, and Table A-14 lists scores at follow-up.

Effect sizes for marital satisfaction in this seminar were compared to those reported in Giblin, Sprenkle and Sheehan's (1985) meta-analysis of marital enrichment

programs. Giblin and colleagues (1985) report an effect size of .34 for marital satisfaction at post-seminar. Specifically considering the effect sizes calculated from those individuals who participated at pre- and post-seminar, regardless of follow-up participation (see Table A-12), it appears that Marriage Alive's overall effect in increasing satisfaction levels is only slightly above the average score for the discussion-attention placebo groups ($ES = .22$) presented in the aforementioned meta-analysis. These comparisons should be interpreted with caution, since the design of the current research did not include a control group. Thus, effect sizes for this study could not be calculated using the exact equation Giblin and colleagues used in their analyses (i.e., experimental mean minus control mean, divided by the standard deviation of the control group; Glass, McGraw, & Smith, 1981). The comparison, however, can still be qualitatively useful.

CHAPTER 4

DISCUSSION

The purposes of this study were to examine how perceptions of social support and constructive communication change and affect marital satisfaction for those couples participating in a popular marital enrichment program called Marriage Alive. In addition, this study sought to investigate how changes in these two constructs might work together to impact changes in relationship satisfaction over time. There has been limited research on these particular constructs of interest in generally lengthier and more established marital relationships. Moreover, the enrichment program under review here had not previously been empirically examined.

Changes in averaged levels of marital satisfaction were explored first. Results indicated that levels of satisfaction appear to have remained relatively stable in this sample, with a temporary boost immediately following the seminar. For both husbands and wives, levels of marital satisfaction increased significantly by post-seminar. However for husbands, gains were entirely lost by the time of the follow-up with satisfaction scores returning to baseline levels. Wives' reports of satisfaction at the two month follow-up were slightly above baseline levels, but the difference was not significant. This pattern of satisfaction levels remaining relatively stable over time, while other constructs (e.g., communication) are more malleable, is evidenced in some research on enrichment programs (Giblin, Sprenkle, & Sheehan, 1985; Zimpfer, 1988). In

addition, although some studies (Zimpfer, 1988) indicate that follow-up levels of satisfaction continue to be significantly greater than pre-seminar levels, in general, these studies still note that follow-up levels are not as high as reports of satisfaction taken immediately following the conclusion of an enrichment seminar. In short, there generally appears to be a regression back to the mean, even if the regression is only minimal in many cases.

This pattern of stability in satisfaction levels also may be indicative of a ceiling effect for marital satisfaction. Giblin, Sprenkle and Sheehan (1985) found that gains in satisfaction were greater in enrichment studies that included highly distressed couples or who included participants who were not highly educated. In the current sample, however, participants reported being considerably satisfied with their marriage at the time of the pre-seminar assessment, and the average amount of education ranked at the college level. In addition to the possibility of there being a ceiling effect for marital satisfaction in educated and already satisfied couples, this particular construct may be inherently stable for those in lengthier and more established relationships. In sum, the data are inconclusive; it cannot yet be determined whether the stability of marital satisfaction levels is due to the make-up of the sample (i.e., more stable and lengthier, relationships, that are on average not highly distressed, and in which partners are highly educated), or whether it is due to the program falling short of achieving one of its goals (i.e., sustained increase in marital satisfaction). A comparison of effect sizes to those Giblin, Sprenkle and Sheehan (1985) report in their meta-analysis would suggest the latter: Marriage Alive's effectiveness is comparable to placebo. However, this comparison must be

interpreted with caution. The calculation of effect sizes for this study could not follow the same procedures used in the meta-analyses conducted by Giblin and colleagues (1985) because the design of this study did not include a control group. Nevertheless, this analysis remains informative albeit inconclusive. A broader look at these data suggests that perhaps a desirable outcome is not necessarily a significant increase in global marital satisfaction but rather a sustained maintenance of satisfaction levels over time and an increase in other important and related variables (e.g., communication and support).

Results for the first hypothesis, which predicted that levels of social support and communication would increase over time, suggest that men and women changed in similar ways. Participating husbands and wives reported, on average, feeling significantly more supported by their spouse after attending the program than when they first arrived to take part in the seminar. At post-test, participants were reporting feeling more loved and respected by their partners; that they felt they could confide in their spouse more; that their actions would be supported; and that their partner was more likely to be there for them if needed. This boost in perceived social support was short-lived, however. By the time of the follow-up assessment period, two months after the seminar, participants' reports of levels of support returned to pre-seminar levels. After having had positive experiences at this particular enrichment seminar, individuals likely carried their positive feelings into answering the post-test questionnaires; thus, the change was possibly an effect of positive sentiment override (Weiss, 1980; Hawkins, Carrere, & Gottman, 2002). This overly positive sentiment, however, likely regressed back to the

mean by follow-up. As has been noted with marital satisfaction, perceived social support may be a more stable construct (Dolbier & Steinhardt, 2000) than originally considered by the author. Although occasional fluctuations may occur, the level of support one could sense from his or her partner may be more influenced by one's own personality dynamics than by the actual give-and-take in a relationship (Sarason, Pierce, Shearin, Sarason, & Waltz 1991).

Levels of constructive communication also changed in similar trajectories for male and female participants. By the end of the seminar, participants reported feeling that they had begun communicating more constructively. It seems that they genuinely may have learned some important information about their own style of communicating as well as their partner's. In addition, they had several opportunities to discuss important relationship issues in a non-threatening or non-blaming manner and in an environment that fosters mutual respect and encourages compromise. Evidently, their improved skills were not forgotten after the seminar as they reported communicating just as well two months later as they did immediately after the seminar.

The seminar administrators focused more explicitly on teaching communication skills than on directly teaching couples how to create a supportive environment in one's relationship. Perhaps this is why a distinct difference was noticed between the ways support and communication changed over time. Also, what may be contributing to the diverging results for constructive communication and social support is that the task of improving communication is skill-based and can be taught. Increasing support within a couple, on the other hand, may not be a skill one can learn or, at least, learn in a brief

period of time such as during this enrichment program. This finding is consistent with previous research reporting that enrichment programs which focus on teaching couples skills are more effective than those programs that do not incorporate a skills-building component (Giblin, Sprenkle, & Sheehan, 1985).

The second hypothesis explored in this study was that improvements in social support and constructive communication following the attendance of this marital enrichment seminar would predict improvements in marital satisfaction from pre-seminar to follow-up. Results indicated that changes in perceptions of social support predicted changes in marital satisfaction for participating husbands and wives. In addition, improvements in constructive communication predicted improvements in satisfaction for all participants, independent of the effects of changes in levels of social support. These findings are consistent with previous research.

Although communication and support predict each other, they still maintain their own separate predictive value for marital satisfaction. The third hypothesis explored whether the relationship between changes in constructive communication and changes in levels of marital satisfaction could be mediated, at least partially, by how levels of perceived support change from pre-seminar to follow-up. This hypothesis was not supported. Post hoc analyses also sought to discover if communication could be mediating the association between support and satisfaction. However, this was not the case. Although the constructs of constructive communication and social support are related, the data of the current study indicated that neither mediates the other's relationship to marital satisfaction levels and how they might change over time. This

mediation model has not been explored in previous published research. It is possible that the lack of findings for social support and for this mediation model may be related to the use of a measure of support that is not nuanced enough to capture important fluctuations in this construct for this sample. This limitation is discussed below.

Limitations

The design of this study did not incorporate a control group. This makes it difficult to conclude whether the seminar is wholly responsible for the changes that were found. Baucom, Hahlweg, and Kuschel (2003), however, would assert that researchers may compare their study's results to effect sizes attained by control groups used in past research, thereby eliminating the need for a control group in the current study. They argue that recruiting participation for control can be costly, inconvenient, and waste important resources (Baucom, Hahlweg, & Kuschel, 2003); thus, if scores for control groups have been established in the literature, future studies could compare their experimental groups to these already determined scores. In the research area of marital enrichment, Giblin, Sprenkle, & Sheehan (1985) present comparison effect sizes in their meta-analysis. Effect sizes were calculated for this study and are reported in Tables 9, 10 and 11. Effect sizes for communication exceed those of marital satisfaction. Scores for marital satisfaction in the current study, Marriage Alive, were slightly above placebo. Scores for communication, however, seem to be well above what one might expect of a control group, indicating that the seminar was instrumental in helping couples improve how constructively they communicate with each other even if it did not help create large

gains in marital satisfaction. This finding is consistent with past research, which found that effect sizes for relationship skills, such as communication, tended to be higher than the effect sizes attained when assessing changes in satisfaction levels (Giblin, Sprenkle, & Sheehan, 1985). A limitation of this approach, however, is that the equation for calculating effects sizes in this study differed from Giblin et al. (1985) approach, which again incorporated data from control groups. In essence, comparing effect sizes remains useful; it seems to offer important information regarding the overall effectiveness of the program. Nevertheless, all results should be interpreted in light of the fact that the current research design did not include a control group. In regard to changes in levels of constructive communication, changes were consistent with the goals of the seminar and suggest that the seminar might likely be impacting how well participating couples are communicating months after attending the program.

An additional limitation of the current study is that the questionnaires included an instrument that measured social support globally, rather than using an instrument that might have been more sensitive to the complexities of this construct. In an effort to keep the seminar questionnaires brief so as not to interfere with the actual enrichment program's focus, to be less laborious for couples, and to encourage a greater response rate at the follow-up period, a brief, global measure of support was administered. Future research may consider incorporating a measure such as Cutron and Russell's (1987) measure, which is more nuanced and more widely accepted in the marital field.

Another reason, which may potential account for the lack of sustained findings for social support, may be that the seminar did not provide participants with concrete

methods of how to specifically go about being more supportive of one's partner or increasing the partner's perceived support. For example, the seminar provided tools like the Speaker/Listener Technique to help improve communication levels. This was a tool which couples could literally hold on to (i.e., a small, square piece of paper that couples could use when taking turns speaking and listening). With regard to social support, however, the seminar did not offer as vivid a method for being supportive. The lack of concrete examples teaching support behavior may thus explain why gains in perceived support were not maintained beyond what could be accounted for by positive sentiment override. In addition, demonstrations of supportive behavior were often described in terms of strengthening the "bond" between two partners. Thus, it appears that the construct being studied here (i.e., social support) may be better accounted for by the general concept of intimacy.

Marital intimacy is also associated with marital satisfaction (e.g., Greeff & Malherbe 2001; Cordova, Gee, & Warren, 2005; Laurenceau, Barrett, & Rovine, 2005), and social support and intimacy are positively related (Cutrona, 1996). Thus, the social support may be subsumed within the construct of intimacy, particularly as it has been measured in this study. Thus, there is reason to believe that the construct of intimacy might be better able to grasp what is changing for couples than could the notion of social support. This seems particularly relevant since the seminar focused on trying to increase intimacy within couples more so than on directly increasing levels of support between them. For example, the seminar's recommendations for couples to kiss everyday and value their sexual intimacy were salient. Specific techniques/tools (e.g., the 10 Second

Kiss) were taught as was the case with teaching communication skills. In short, not considering the seminar's potential affects on intimacy may be overlooking an important contribution this seminar could offer couples. A measure of marital intimacy such as Van den Broucke, Vertommen, and Vandereycken's (1995) scales may offer further insight. However, both of these measures are substantially longer than the support measure used in the study, and consequently more time will need to be allotted for their completion.

The sample in this study is not representative of the general population of the United States, and only partly representative of those who attend marital enrichment programs. However, the sample is representative of average couples who participate in the Marriage Alive seminars across the nation. Therefore, it is appropriate that findings be generalized to those couples interested in attending this seminar. A higher retention rate for follow-up participation would further strengthen the author's ability to generalize to those interested in Marriage Alive.

Future Directions

In the future, measures should be taken to increase the likelihood of achieving a higher retention rate. For example, email reminders, telephone call reminders, and perhaps offering the option of completing a shorter survey over the phone may prove to be instrumental in participant retention for follow-up assessments. Also, an incentive such as a coupon for another book authored by the developers of Marriage Alive or

monetary compensation should be considered as additional avenues through which to increase retention rates and subsequently generalizability of study results.

A future study investigating the effectiveness of enrichment programs could include an experimental design that incorporates a control group into which participants are randomly selected into treatment or wait-list groups. This type of design would offer more conclusive results about the effectiveness of a program and perhaps also which particular aspects of the program are most effective for couples.

Interestingly, Giblin, Sprenkle, & Sheehan (1985) observed that studies which included behavior measures in addition to self-report questionnaires to evaluate an enrichment program's effectiveness reported higher effect sizes than studies that only used self-report measures. The difference in average effect sizes was significant; studies incorporating behavioral measures yielded an average effect size of .76 for the programs reviewed, while studies only utilizing self-report measures averaged an effect of .35. Giblin and colleagues (1985) suggest that, "Participants appear to see less change in themselves following treatment than do those who observe them." This finding raises the question of whether we are missing something. Being limited to the use of self-report measures may have obstructed this study's ability to uncover a more nuanced and empirical understanding of how perceptions of social support, constructive communication, and marital satisfaction change over the course of the seminar and in the months following it. It is possible that if this study were analyzing the seminar through behavioral methods, greater increases or maintenance of gains at follow-up that are truly present may have been observed. Thus, multi-method measurements are highly

encouraged as they may give greater confidence to the current results or uncover overlooked effects.

A possible direction the developers of Marriage Alive might consider is extending the length of the actual seminar. The marital enrichment programs reviewed in a meta-analysis conducted by Giblin, Sprenkle, and Sheehan (1985) ranged in length from 2 to 36 hours, and averaged approximately 14 hours. Program length was found to be positively associated with effect size. Perhaps the seminar investigated here is short in length, and for this reason changes in the more stable constructs, such as overall satisfaction and social support, could not be more than temporarily affected.

Summary

The current study sought to explore how perceptions of social support and constructive communication change for couples, how these changes impact marital satisfaction, and how this all occurs for those attending a marital enrichment program called Marriage Alive. The author was particularly interested in considering how these constructs of interest change in couples in lengthier and more established relationships, who are seeking to benefit from a dyadic intervention. Results indicated that after attending the seminar, couples reported that they are communicating more constructively, feeling more supported in their relationships, and that they are more satisfied with their marriages. Two months after having attended the seminar, gains in constructive communication were entirely maintained. This finding is particularly significant, since communication skills have been associated with limiting the erosion of marital quality

over time and reducing the likelihood of divorce (Markman, Floyd, Stanley, & Storaasli, 1988).

However, how effective or ineffective this particular seminar was in improving levels of marital satisfaction, social support, and constructive communication cannot be ascertained conclusively. This study lacked a comparison group, and there are several limitations on comparing this study's effect sizes to those already established and published in the literature two decades ago. Nevertheless, the direction of change is consistent with the aims of the seminar and with past research, suggesting that this particular enrichment seminar may have an impact on its attendants and particularly on how well they communicate with their spouse.

The current study also sought to explore whether communicating constructively and feeling supported by one's partner work together to impact levels of marital satisfaction in the couples attending this seminar. Although the mediation model proposed in this study was not supported, a relationship was established between social support and constructive communication. These constructs are correlated and predictive of each other; yet, they each affect marital satisfaction, independent of whatever variance they might share. This finding indicates that social support is not merely another example of good communication; it has its own unique value. Additionally, not all forms of support are verbally communicated. Similarly, good communication does not only serve the purpose of providing one's partner with support. Further research is necessary to better understand how exactly perceptions of support and communication function together to affect relationships, and if changes in intimacy play an important role. It

seems possible that what has constituted social support throughout this study may be subsumed in a more general feeling of intimacy with one's partner. Future research including a measure of intimacy and more sensitive measure of support could shed light on these particular points.

In closing, enrichment programs remain a promising avenue through which to impact couples across the country and, in the case of the Marriage Alive seminar, across the globe. Last year, Marriage Alive reached over 1000 people. Its founders also have been prolific in publishing books based on the teachings of their seminar, some of which have been translated into different languages. In this way, Marriage Alive serves as an example of the scope of impact such programs can attain. For this reason, it is important to continue reviewing the effectiveness of programs that have not yet been empirically analyzed, and to decipher between those that are no more effective than placebo and those that can make a lasting and significant positive impact on marriage. Most importantly, interventions that negative changes in couples should be brought to light, better understood and improved upon, or completely eliminated. In addition, it is also critical to examine more closely the mechanisms by which these programs have their effects. In this study, we examined two such constructs, social support and constructive communication. In short, the potential enrichment programs possess demands that their influence (i.e., positive, negative, or neutral) not be overlooked or underestimated, particularly in light of the overwhelming costs of divorce and the amount of distress that comes with being in a failing marriage. This current paper places another brick in the road toward understanding a particular marital enrichment program, and how

communication, support and satisfaction change in this context and for couples in lengthier, more established relationships.

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APPENDICES

Table A-1

Marital Satisfaction for Wives and Husbands

| | Wives | | Husbands | |
|-------------------|-------|--------|----------|---------|
| | Mean | (SD) | Mean | (SD) |
| Pre-Seminar | 36.05 | (8.76) | 36.75 | (7.20) |
| Post-Seminar | 37.80 | (8.17) | 38.81 | (6.50) |
| 2 month Follow-up | 36.89 | (9.43) | 37.02 | (8.48). |

Table A-2

Social Support and Constructive Communication for Husbands

| | Support | | Communication | |
|-------------------|---------|--------|---------------|---------|
| | Mean | (SD) | Mean | (SD) |
| Pre-Seminar | 25.19 | (6.24) | 7.83 | (10.75) |
| Post-Seminar | 26.16 | (5.67) | 11.20 | (9.89) |
| 2 month Follow-up | 24.78 | (5.68) | 10.04 | (10.34) |

Table A-3

Social Support and Constructive Communication for Wives

| | Support | | Communication | |
|-------------------|---------|--------|---------------|---------|
| | Mean | (SD) | Mean | (SD) |
| Pre-Seminar | 25.46 | (5.94) | 8.95 | (10.37) |
| Post-Seminar | 26.28 | (5.46) | 12.65 | (9.73) |
| 2 month Follow-up | 24.73 | (6.38) | 11.44 | (10.15) |

Table A-4
Correlations of Variables in Regression Equations for Husbands

| | Pre-Seminar Satisf | Follow-up Satisf | Pre-Seminar Comm | Follow-up Comm | Pre-Seminar Support | Follow-up Support | Difference Satisf | Difference Comm | Difference Support |
|--------------------------------|--------------------|------------------|------------------|----------------|---------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-----------------|--------------------|
| Pre-seminar Satisfaction | - | .83** | .78** | .72** | .81** | .62** | -.06 | -.14 | -.34** |
| Follow-up Satisfaction | | - | .63** | .77** | .76** | .71** | .51** | .18 | -.16 |
| Pre-seminar Communication | | | - | .81** | .73** | .55** | -.07 | -.36** | -.32** |
| Follow-up Communication | | | | - | .74** | .66** | .27* | .26** | -.21* |
| Pre-seminar Support | | | | | - | .72** | .11 | -.02 | -.49** |
| Follow-up Support | | | | | | - | .32** | .14 | .29** |
| Difference score Satisfaction | | | | | | | - | .53** | .24* |
| Difference score Communication | | | | | | | | - | .20* |
| Difference score Support | | | | | | | | | - |

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

Table A-5

Correlations of Variables in Regression Equations for Wives

| | Pre-Seminar Satisf | Follow-up Satisf | Pre-Seminar Comm | Follow-up Comm | Pre-Seminar Support | Follow-up Support | Difference Satisf | Difference Comm | Difference Support |
|--------------------------------|--------------------|------------------|------------------|----------------|---------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-----------------|--------------------|
| Pre-seminar Satisfaction | - | .85** | .70** | .62** | .81** | .58** | -.19* | -.14 | -.23** |
| Follow-up Satisfaction | | - | .61** | .69** | .68** | .66** | .37** | .10 | .02 |
| Pre-seminar Communication | | | - | .82** | .72** | .50** | -.07 | -.36** | -.22* |
| Follow-up Communication | | | | - | .60** | .56** | .20* | .24** | -.02 |
| Pre-seminar Support | | | | | - | .64** | -.17 | -.24** | -.39** |
| Follow-up Support | | | | | | - | .20* | .06 | .47** |
| Difference score Satisfaction | | | | | | | - | .44** | .43** |
| Difference score Communication | | | | | | | | - | .34** |
| Difference score Support | | | | | | | | | - |

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

Table A-6

**Summary of Regression Analysis for Constructive Communication
Predicting Marital Satisfaction in Wives**

| Variable | <i>B</i> | <i>SE B</i> | β |
|-----------------------------|----------|-------------|---------|
| Step 1 | | | |
| Pre-seminar Satisfaction | .85 | .07 | .81*** |
| Pre-seminar Communication | .05 | .06 | .06 |
| Step 2 | | | |
| Pre-seminar Satisfaction | .80 | .06 | .75*** |
| Pre-seminar Communication | .17 | .05 | .20** |
| Difference in Communication | .42 | .07 | .28*** |

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

Note: $R^2 = .72$ for Step 1; $\Delta R^2 = .07$ for Step 2 ($p < .001$).

Table A-7

**Summary of Regression Analysis for Constructive Communication
Predicting Marital Satisfaction in Husbands**

| Variable | <i>B</i> | <i>SE B</i> | β |
|-----------------------------|----------|-------------|---------|
| Step 1 | | | |
| Year of Education | -.05 | .15 | -.02 |
| Pre-seminar Satisfaction | .38 | .10 | .49*** |
| Pre-seminar Communication | .09 | .06 | .17 |
| Step 2 | | | |
| Years of Education | -.05 | .14 | -.02 |
| Pre-seminar Satisfaction | .29 | .09 | .37** |
| Pre-seminar Communication | .20 | .07 | .38** |
| Difference in Communication | .28 | .07 | .33*** |

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

Note: $R^2 = .39$ for Step 1; $\Delta R^2 = .09$ for Step 2 ($p < .001$).

Table A-8**Summary of Regression Analysis for Social Support
Predicting Marital Satisfaction in Wives**

| Variable | <i>B</i> | <i>SE B</i> | β |
|------------------------------|----------|-------------|---------|
| Step 1 | | | |
| Pre-seminar Satisfaction | .92 | .09 | .87*** |
| Pre-seminar Social Support | -.05 | .13 | -.03 |
| Step 2 | | | |
| Pre-seminar Satisfaction | .86 | .08 | .81*** |
| Pre-seminar Social Support | .17 | .12 | .11 |
| Difference in Social Support | .44 | .08 | .25*** |

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

Note: $R^2 = .72$ for Step 1; $\Delta R^2 = .05$ for Step 2 ($p < .001$).

Table A-9
Summary of Regression Analysis for Social Support
Predicting Marital Satisfaction in Husbands

| Variable | <i>B</i> | <i>SE B</i> | β |
|------------------------------|----------|-------------|---------|
| Step 1 | | | |
| Year of Education | .22 | .16 | .08 |
| Pre-seminar Satisfaction | .70 | .11 | .60*** |
| Pre-seminar Social Support | .35 | .12 | .26** |
| Step 2 | | | |
| Years of Education | .22 | .14 | .08 |
| Pre-seminar Satisfaction | .67 | .10 | .57*** |
| Pre-seminar Social Support | .55 | .12 | .41*** |
| Difference in Social Support | .45 | .11 | .24*** |

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

Note: $R^2 = .71$ for Step 1; $\Delta R^2 = .04$ for Step 2 ($p < .001$).

Table A-10

**Summary of Regression Analysis for Constructive Communication
Predicting Social Support in Wives**

| Variable | <i>B</i> | <i>SE B</i> | β |
|-----------------------------|----------|-------------|---------|
| Step 1 | | | |
| Pre-seminar Satisfaction | .85 | .07 | .81*** |
| Pre-seminar Social Support | | | |
| Pre-seminar Communication | .05 | .06 | .06 |
| Step 2 | | | |
| Pre-seminar Satisfaction | .80 | .06 | .75*** |
| Pre-seminar Social Support | | | |
| Pre-seminar Communication | .17 | .05 | .20** |
| Difference in Communication | .42 | .07 | .28*** |

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

Note: $R^2 = .42$ for Step 1; $\Delta R^2 = .05$ for Step 2 ($p < .01$).

Table A-11

**Summary of Regression Analysis for Constructive Communication
Predicting Social Support in Husbands**

| Variable | <i>B</i> | <i>SE B</i> | β |
|-----------------------------|----------|-------------|---------|
| Step 1 | | | |
| Year of Education | -.01 | .14 | -.00 |
| Pre-seminar Satisfaction | .08 | .10 | .10 |
| Pre-seminar Social Support | .56 | .11 | .63*** |
| Pre-seminar Communication | .01 | .06 | .01 |
| Step 2 | | | |
| Years of Education | -.01 | .13 | -.01 |
| Pre-seminar Satisfaction | .07 | .10 | .09 |
| Pre-seminar Social Support | .46 | .11 | .51*** |
| Pre-seminar Communication | .10 | .07 | .19 |
| Difference in Communication | .20 | .07 | .23** |

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

Note: $R^2 = .52$ for Step 1; $\Delta R^2 = .04$ for Step 2 ($p < .01$).

Table A-12

**Effect Sizes at Post-Seminar for Wives and Husbands,
Regardless of Participation in the Follow-Up Assessment**

| | Wives | Husbands |
|----------------------|-------|----------|
| Marital Satisfaction | .25 | .24 |
| Communication | .37 | .36 |
| Social Support | .15 | .14 |

Table A-13

Effect Sizes at Post-Seminar for Wives and Husbands

| | Wives | Husbands |
|----------------------|-------|----------|
| Marital Satisfaction | .20 | .29 |
| Communication | .36 | .31 |
| Social Support | .14 | .16 |

Table A-14

Effect Sizes at Follow-Up for Wives and Husbands

| | Wives | Husbands |
|----------------------|-------|----------|
| Marital Satisfaction | .10 | .04 |
| Communication | .24 | .21 |
| Social Support | -.12 | -.07 |

VITA

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