

**Educate and Empower: An Online Intervention to Improve College Women's Knowledge  
and Confidence When Communicating in a Romantic Relationship**

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### **Educate and Empower: An Online Intervention to Improve College Women's Knowledge and Confidence When Communicating in a Romantic Relationship**

Historically, and especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, the vast majority of unpaid family care has been provided by women with devastating associated outcomes including lost jobs, increased poverty, and mental health concerns (Almeida et al., 2020; Dang et al., 2020; LeanIn, 2020; Power, 2020). In addition, many women experience relationship dissatisfaction (The Austin Institute for the Study of Family and Culture, 2014). Typically, women report lower relationship satisfaction than men (Boerner et al., 2014; Bulanda et al., 2011; Jackson et al., 2014; Lewin, 2017; Windsor & Butterworth, 2010); one study found that only 57.4% of women reported that their marriages were “very happy” (Smith et al., 2015). For many women, relationship dissatisfaction may be a contributing factor to depression (Whitton & Whisman, 2010; Woods et al., 2019). Family work distribution, defined as the way in which household labor and child care is shared between a couple, has been shown to relate to women's relationship satisfaction with relationship satisfaction increasing as the distribution of family work becomes more equal (Galovan et al., 2014; Helms et al., 2010; Ogolsky et al., 2014). In addition, communication, defined as sharing thoughts and feelings in a positive way, is a salient predictor of women's relationship satisfaction as communication quality is positively associated with satisfaction (Bannon et al., 2020; Carroll et al., 2013). Heterosexual and cisgender identifying women are the focus of this study because straight couples report greater relationship inequity in the domain of housework and communication compared to same-sex couples (Gotta et al., 2011). Young women are an especially important population to educate regarding salient predictors of relationship satisfaction because they typically have not made long-term relationship commitments (Brown, 2020). Thus, the purpose of this study was fourfold: (1) to

educate college women about family work distribution, (2) to teach college women about effective communication in a romantic relationship, (3) to educate college women about a model of effective communication, and (4) to increase college women's confidence in communicating effectively with their future partner. This intervention was aimed to empower young women to make thoughtful choices regarding their future partner based on research related to healthy romantic relationships. Ultimately this intervention may increase future relationship satisfaction, reduce depression in women, and equalize family work distribution for women.

### **Relationship Dissatisfaction and Outcomes**

Women provide the vast majority of unpaid family care (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD], 2016), and the increasing care needs due to the covid-19 pandemic are disproportionately assumed by women as they are more likely to work part-time, reduce their work hours, have less job security, and earn lower income (Alon et al., 2020; Carlson et al., 2020; Collins et al., 2020; Hess et al., 2020; LeanIn, 2020; Power, 2020). The inequitable share of unpaid care work assumed by women is related to devastating outcomes including increased stress and poverty, and reduced physical, mental, relational, and economic wellbeing (Bevans & Sternberg, 2012; Eisler & Otis, 2014; Hamel & Salganicoff, 2020; Hess, et al., 2020; Jung & O'Brien, 2019).

Even prior to the pandemic, women overall reported lower marital happiness and global marital satisfaction than men (Boerner et al., 2014; Bulanda, 2011; Jackson et al., 2014; Lewin, 2017). In 2014, 20% of married women and 41% of cohabiting women considered leaving their partner, compared to 13% of married men and 26% of cohabiting men (The Austin Institute for the Study of Family and Culture, 2014). Marital happiness decreased 7% over two years for women, and only 57.4% of women and 62.8% of men reported that their marriages were very

happy (Smith et al., 2015). Relationship dissatisfaction among women contributes to negative relationship outcomes. It is estimated that 24% of marriages start with low levels of quality and satisfaction (Lavner et al., 2012). Marriages that start with low satisfaction are at high risk for negative marital outcomes and higher divorce rates (Lavner et al., 2012); and about 40-50% of married couples in the U.S. divorce (American Psychological Association, 2020). Women's relationship dissatisfaction has been linked to depression (Whitton & Whisman, 2010; Woods et al., 2019). Because dissatisfaction is a defining attribute of many romantic relationships and is related to depression, it is important to educate women about salient variables related to relationship dissatisfaction and depression and increase their efficacy in communicating about these factors.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Three theories form the foundation of this study including gender role theory, equity theory, and Bandura's Self-Efficacy Theory. Housework and emotion work (i.e., improving others emotional well-being and providing emotional support; Erickson, 1993) are both aspects of romantic relationships that have been disproportionately placed on women (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016). According to gender role theory, the behavior women and men demonstrate as well as the roles they occupy are a reflection of gender role beliefs; gender roles contribute to maintaining the division of labor through the socialization process and gender stereotypes (Eagly & Wood, 2016). Gender role beliefs stem from the idea that women and men have complementary abilities and belong in certain roles, which are culturally constructed, but which society incorrectly assumes to be inherent characteristics within women and men (Eagly & Wood, 2016). For example, the division between communal and agentic characteristics are descriptive of women's and men's sex-differentiated roles and behavior with communal

characteristics disproportionately given to women while agentic behaviors are assigned to men (Eagly et al., 2000).

Family work also may be disproportionately placed on women because it is associated with relational constructs that are typically associated with being feminine (Erickson, 2005), e.g., caring for children. While gender has historically been viewed as a fixed characteristic or property an individual possesses, gender is actually performed and something individuals “do” rather than have (West & Zimmerman, 1987). In this gender performance, women and men adjust to gender roles by acquiring the specific skills and resources needed as well as adjusting their social behavior to maintain their gender performance congruent with their gender role (Eagly et al., 2000; Eagly & Wood, 2016). Gender role theory informs the imbalance of family and emotion work between women and men by demonstrating the way in which gender role beliefs and stereotypes contribute to maintaining the unequal division of labor.

Equity theory also informed the study by explaining the distressing effect of inequity in relationships on the individual. This theory posits that an individual's experience of inequity either to one's benefit or detriment causes feelings of emotional distress (Adams, 1965). This is consistent in the domain of family work as individuals who feel that they either benefit or lose regarding the distribution of household labor feel more distressed than individuals who have an equal division of labor in their family (Lively et al., 2010). Research suggested that the most satisfying relationships are equitable ones in which neither partner has an advantage (Sells & Ganong, 2017). Emerging adults demonstrate this in their anticipation of being most satisfied in equal relationships where household work, paid work, power, and decision making are shared equally (Sells & Ganong, 2017).

The development of the intervention was informed by Bandura's Self-Efficacy Theory (1977). "Perceived self-efficacy is concerned with judgments of how well one can execute courses of action required to deal with prospective situations" (Bandura, 1982, p. 122). Bandura's theory incorporates four sources of self-efficacy including performance accomplishments (i.e. independent practice performing and succeeding in the desired behavior), vicarious experience (i.e. observing someone modeling success in the task of interest), verbal persuasion (i.e. suggesting that people can successfully overcome to accomplish the task of interest), and emotional states (i.e. positive affect related to engagement in the task of interest). What people believe about their capacities for a given task or situation can be predictive of their behavior, thoughts, and reactions in response to aversive situations (Bandura, 1982). One's self-efficacy related to a specific task or situation can be improved with educational practices that target the appropriate knowledge and skills needed to perform successfully (Artino, 2012; Bandura, 1982). According to Bandura's Self-Efficacy Theory, as confidence increases, active efforts increase to obtain the desired outcome even in the face of obstacles or aversive experiences (Bandura, 1977).

### **Predictors of Relationship Satisfaction**

This study focused on family work distribution and communication. First, family work distribution can be defined as the way in which household labor and child care is shared by a couple with regard to the specific tasks and time spent performing them. Family work is unpaid work that is done to maintain the family and home (Shelton & Josh, 1996). Women have historically and continue to do the majority of family work; 46% of women and 22% of men do housework including cleaning and laundry on an average day (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019). Women spend an average of 2.5 hours of housework a day whereas men an average of 1.9

hours (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019). On average, women spend twice as much time on food preparation and house cleaning and more than three times the amount of time doing laundry as men (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016). In households with children under age 6, women spend an average of 1.1 hours providing physical care compared to men who spend an average of 27 minutes (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019). Little progress has been made towards equality between men and women within the household domain.

Family work distribution is related to women's relationship satisfaction with satisfaction increasing as the division of family labor becomes more equal (Chong & Mickelson, 2016; Galovan et al., 2014; Helms et al., 2010; Ogolsky et al., 2014; Pedersen, 2017; Schober, 2012). Marital quality is associated with agreement on the way household tasks and responsibilities should be divided (Ogolsky et al., 2014). Women are less satisfied in their relationships when the division of family work is inequitable (Carlson et al., 2020; Lively et al., 2010; Ogolsky et al., 2014). As women perceive inequity in the division of household labor, they experience greater distress as well as increased negative interactions with their partner (Chong & Mickelson, 2016; Lively et al., 2010; Mikula et al., 2011). Women with less equitable standards for the division of labor experienced lower levels of marital quality (Ogolsky et al., 2014).

Women's ability to communicate within their relationship is another important predictor of relationship satisfaction (Bannon et al., 2020; Carroll et al., 2013). Negative communication was linked to negative relationship effects including disengagement, distress, and divorce (Barry et al., 2019; Hawkins et al., 2012; Markman et al., 2010). Women's ability to communicate about their needs affects household work distributions (Carlson et al., 2020). Direct communication strategies were associated with greater change toward the desired outcome (Miller & Carlson, 2016; Overall et al., 2009). However, indirect strategies produced little to no change (Overall et

al., 2009). Women's ability to engage in conflict constructively also increased their relationship satisfaction (Babcock et al., 2013)

Given that family work distribution and communication skills are related to relationship satisfaction, this study aims to increase knowledge about these salient constructs and confidence in communication with a partner about the importance of work distribution and communication skills.

### **Interventions that Improve Knowledge and Confidence**

Prior research has demonstrated that targeted interventions can increase knowledge and efficacy among college students. The STOP Dating Violence video intervention was designed to educate college students about dating violence and appropriate bystander interventions. The online intervention was effective in teaching undergraduate students about appropriate bystander interventions (Herman & O'Brien, 2020; O'Brien et al., 2019). Similarly, the CARES online intervention used three of Bandura's four major sources of self-efficacy and improved college students' knowledge and skills in supporting grieving peers, and increased confidence in communicating with bereaved peers (Hill & O'Brien, 2021). Another intervention, targeting college women, used Bandura's four major sources of efficacy information to increase women's confidence and active interests in what are considered "male domains/careers" (Betz & Schifano, 2000). The intervention was successful at increasing college women's "Realistic" confidence (confidence in their ability to perform several traditional male-typed tasks; Betz & Schifano, 2000).

### **Existing Relationship Interventions**

To date, no interventions have been developed that target improving women's knowledge and efficacy in discussing constructs related to relationship satisfaction including family work



distribution and communication. Relationship interventions have historically consisted of in-person programs that often required a fee, participation from both partners, and numerous hours of course work and material (Markman et al., 1993; Rhoades & Stanley, 2011; Wadsworth et al., 2011). The in-person group workshop or class setting relationship interventions focused mainly on couple-based approaches to improve communication and problem-solving skills (Markman et al., 1993; Rhoades & Stanley, 2011; Wadsworth et al., 2011). Relationship interventions have moved online more recently, reaching a wider population of people as they are more easily accessible and less time intensive (Braithwaite & Fincham, 2007; Doss et al., 2016). While several online and in-person relationship interventions have been developed for individuals (as opposed to couples), these programs either require participants to have prior relationship experience or assume they are in a current relationship (Braithwaite & Fincham, 2007; Doss et al., 2016). Overall, relationship interventions often require an extensive time commitment, fee, and couple participation, while focusing on reducing unhealthy behaviors in a relationship rather than preventing individuals from entering into an unhealthy relationship. Thus, an innovative online intervention was created that addressed these concerns regarding existing interventions. We hypothesized that young women who participated in our intervention would have greater knowledge about family work distribution, effective communication in romantic relationships, and a model of effective communication and more confidence in communicating effectively with their future partner than those in partial script or control groups.

## **Method**

### **Development of the Intervention**

A video intervention was created by an undergraduate Honors student in psychology (the first author and principal investigator) and a counseling psychology professor with expertise in

studying interpersonal relationships to educate college women about family work distribution, teach college women about effective communication in a romantic relationship, educate college women about a model of effective communication, and increase college women's confidence in communicating effectively with their future partner.

First, an in-depth review of the literature and existing relationship interventions was conducted to inform the content of the intervention. Second, the most salient communication skills and strategies from several empirically supported interventions were compiled into a list (The Conversation Project, 2020; Gottman, 2004; Gottman et al., 2014; Gottman & Silver, 2012; Harrington, 1999; Markman et al., 2010; PREPARE/ENRICH, 2019).

Third, the student and professor sorted the list of communication skills and strategies into themes. These themes then were used to create an 8-step model for how to communicate with a current or future partner (using the acronym "PARTNERS"). Following is a description of each step in the communication model and the research underlying the step.

**P – Prepare** – When needed, and especially when discussing conflicts or desired changes in a relationship, couples should thoughtfully prepare for the conversation. They should think about the most important things that they want to communicate and choose a good time and place for the conversation (Conversation Project, 2021).

**A – Attend** to how you will talk about your concerns – Couples should attend to how they address their concerns and avoid criticism and blame when communicating with their partner (Gottman et al., 2014; PREPARE/ENRICH, 2019). Also, expressing empathy towards one another is important in couple communication (Floyd & Markman, 1984; Gottman & Silver, 2012).

**R – Remember to point out positives –** Before discussing conflicts or desired changes in a relationship, couples should highlight positive aspects of their partner (Floyd & Markman 1984; PREPARE/ENRICH, 2019).

**T – Talk with your partner and use “I” statements –** When couples communicate about conflicts or desired changes, they should use “I” statements to demonstrate responsibility for their thoughts and feelings (Gottman et al., 2014; Harrington, 1999; Markman et al., 2010; PREPARE/ENRICH, 2019). This strategy allows couples to express their needs to one another in an explicit manner (Gottman et al., 2014). As couples discuss conflicts or desired changes they should focus on their present concerns, rather than dragging up the past, which can be unproductive (Gottman, 2004; Harrington, 1999).

**N – Now, really listen to each other –** It also is important that partners actively listen to each other, giving the other their full attention, taking turns as the speaker and listener, and listening to understand, rather than to express judgement (Gottman et al. 2014; Markman et al., 2010; PREPARE/ENRICH, 2019). Paraphrasing or reflecting back the partner’s thoughts and feelings, restating points to clear up any confusion, and postponing problem solving until each partner can restate the perspective of the other is a helpful strategy in couple communication, especially when discussing conflicts or desired changes (Floyd & Markman, 1984; Gottman et al., 2014; Gottman & Silver, 2012; Markman et al., 2010).

**E – Engage in action planning to improve the relationship –** Couples should express commitment to working on their relationship, explicitly name what needs to change, and work together to develop an action plan for positive change in the relationship (Gottman, 2004; PREPARE/ENRICH, 2019). The couple’s action planning also should consist of setting specific

and measurable goals, and they should return to their plan over time to determine if the goals for change have been met or need to be adjusted.

**R – Remember that women often do more –** Women typically perform more emotional and physical labor in relationships, which is important for couples to recognize to come to an agreement in which both partners contribute equitably.

**S – Speak up to ensure your needs are met –** Partners should continue to advocate for what they each need as the relationship progresses. The last two steps were informed by the literature, but developed by the researchers for the study’s purposes.

Fourth, the student and professor wrote the script for the three-part intervention together, based on research findings (see Appendix B). The first segment of the intervention educates participants about constructs that relate to relationship satisfaction. This segment highlights the ways in which family work distribution and communication contribute to shaping women’s satisfaction in their romantic relationships (Bannon et al., 2020; Carroll et al., 2013; Galovan et al., 2014; Helms et al., 2010; Ogolsky et al., 2014). The tendency for women to do more in their romantic relationships also is emphasized (Carlson et al., 2021; Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD], 2016; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019).

The authors also developed 12 questions informed by research that related to predictors of satisfaction in romantic relationships. These questions were posed at two points in the intervention so participants could consider whether a current or future partner fulfilled these predictors of relationship satisfaction. Participants were given this prompt: “When you think about your current or future relationship, it is helpful to ask yourself the following questions.” The questions were as follows: Is your partner someone who “You can trust and count on to be there for you?” “Is easy to talk to about your thoughts, feelings and concerns?” “Really listens to

you when you are speaking?” “Cares about your feelings?” “Can work through conflict and relationship problems constructively?” “Is strongly committed to healthy communication in your romantic relationship?” “Believes that sharing housework and childcare responsibilities is important?” “Is committed to dividing housework and childcare equally?” “Would take the initiative to do their share of the family work without being asked?” “Wants a true partnership where the woman is not expected to do more than her share of the family work?” “Is devoted to being an actively involved parent (if you decide to raise children)?” and “Is committed to doing their part to have a genuinely loving, equal and satisfying relationship?”

The second segment of the intervention describes each step of the PARTNERS Communication Model. The final step of the intervention was designed to increase college women’s confidence in communicating effectively with their future partner by demonstrating how they might use the PARTNERS Communication Model in a romantic relationship.

Participants were provided with two possible conflicts. The first conflict describes a time when the male partner is not doing their share with regard to cleaning the bathroom. The second conflict describes a scenario in which both partners need to search for a new apartment, but the male partner would rather play video games than contribute to the apartment search. Participants were asked to think about how they would apply the PARTNERS Communication Model if they were to discuss the conflict with their partner. After each scenario was posed, a description of how the PARTNERS Communication Model could be applied to the scenario was provided.

At the conclusion of the intervention, participants were given an infographic of the PARTNERS Communication Model and the 12 questions discussed as part of the intervention (see Appendix C). Throughout the intervention, important points were repeated and summarized. This intervention is accessible for those at a 9th grade reading level or beyond (Flesch-Kincaid

Grade Level test through Microsoft Word; Kincaid et al., 1975). Furthermore, we attended carefully to diversity when developing the intervention. For example, the depicted couples in the scenarios varied in terms of their racial/ethnic identity.

Two graduate students and one advanced undergraduate student involved in related research were asked to provide feedback regarding the intervention script. Revisions were made after receiving their feedback. Additional revisions were made after a counseling psychologist who works with the targeted demographic reviewed the script and provided feedback. Two faculty committee members also reviewed the intervention script and provided feedback prior to finalizing the script for the video intervention.

The final step for the creation of the video intervention involved hiring a professional narrator to provide the voiceover for the intervention. The voices of the couples in the application examples were taped by college students.

### **Participants**

To determine the number of participants necessary, an a priori statistical power analysis, using G\*POWER v3 software (Faul et al., 2007) was calculated. To achieve statistical power of 0.95, a medium effect size ( $f = 0.3$ ), with an overall  $\alpha = 0.05$ , the recommended sample size was 48 participants for one MANOVA. An estimated 150 participants were needed because we calculated multiple MANOVAS. Undergraduate women at the University of Maryland between the ages 18 and 22 who identified as heterosexual and were able to read and write in English were recruited. Initially, 651 students who were enrolled in the University of Maryland and recruited through personal contacts and emails to classes accessed the survey (see Figure 2). Two participants completed the survey twice and each of their second responses was deleted. Of the remaining 649 who accessed the survey, 23 did not meet the inclusion criteria. Six additional

participants were removed from the sample because five people indicated that they did not meet inclusion criteria in the demographics questionnaire and one participant had prior knowledge of the study. Of those that met inclusion criteria, 110 did not start the survey resulting in a total of 510 participants who provided consent and started the first question of the survey. Data from participants who did not complete at least 85% of the items on the survey were removed, resulting in a sample size of 337. Then, nine participants who failed to respond correctly to validity check items and 25 participants who completed the survey in under 20 minutes were removed from the sample. The final sample consisted of 303 women. The number of participants randomly assigned to each of the three conditions was as follows: intervention (n= 112), partial script (n= 96), and control (n= 95) conditions.

Participants ranged in age from 18 to 22 years old, with 21 years old being the most common (34.3%) and 22 years old being the least common (6.9%). The sample was racially diverse and similar to the University of Maryland undergraduate population with regard to race (University of Maryland Office of Institutional Research, Planning & Assessment, 2021). Black participants comprised 10.9% of the sample, with 10.6% Latinx participants, 21.8% Asian/Pacific Islander participants, and 60.4% White participants (see Table 1 for demographic information). Participants were enrolled in a variety of college majors with the most common being psychology (32.3%), biology-related (14.5%), and criminology and criminal justice (8.9%) majors. In terms of participants' relationship status, most participants were reported being single (51.8%) or in a relationship (46.9%). Most participants who were single had been in a romantic relationship (62.4%). Over half of participants reported having taken at least one class focused on communication (52.1%) and most participants had not taken any classes focused on romantic relationships (81.2%).

## Procedures

After receipt of Institutional Review Board approval, participants were recruited through the University of Maryland Psychology Department subject pool, social media, personal contacts, and student names obtained from the registrar. The invitation to participate in the study contained a link to an online Qualtrics survey. After the participants provided informed consent, they completed a pre-test survey consisting of measures assessing knowledge of family work distribution, knowledge of communication, knowledge of a model of effective communication, and relationship communication self-efficacy. The qualitative measures were presented first to prevent the quantitative measures from informing the qualitative responses. Participants then were randomly assigned to either the video intervention, partial script, or control conditions.

Students assigned to the intervention condition watched the online video intervention (about 12 minutes). We instructed participants to "Please watch the following video about predictors of relationship satisfaction and communicating with romantic partners. We ask that you watch very carefully for the entirety of the video, as you will be asked questions about what you saw."

The students in the partial script condition were asked to read a partial version of the intervention script. This version included the information presented in the first and second segments of the video intervention without the examples or application questions (see Appendix D). Participants were instructed to "Please read the information on the following pages about predictors of relationship satisfaction and communicating with romantic partners. We recommend that you read carefully, as you will be asked questions about what you read."

The control group watched a video relating to romantic relationships consisting of a couple's hiking trip.



Each participant also completed a post-test survey containing measures assessing knowledge of family work distribution, knowledge of communication, knowledge of a model of effective communication, relationship communication self-efficacy, and demographic information. Before proceeding to the posttest measures, participants read the following directions: “You now will be asked to respond to more questions about romantic relationships. You have seen these questions previously. We ask that you respond thoughtfully and completely to these questions a second time to receive compensation for your participation in this study. Thank you!” The measures contained four qualitative open-ended questions and three quantitative measures. Two validity checks were included in the survey within the quantitative items, to assess whether participants attended carefully to the items (see Appendix E). Participants received course credit or a \$10 gift card after completion of the study.

### **Coding Scheme**

A coding team consisting of two coders and the first author was created to complete the qualitative coding and scoring. The coders had no knowledge of whether the responses were pre- or post-test or the participants’ experimental condition. All coders were pursuing or had completed undergraduate degrees in counseling psychology and received training on psychology research methods. For the qualitative measures, “Family Work-Related Desired Partner Characteristics,” “Knowledge of Family Work – Qualitative Assessment,” and “Communication-Related Desired Partner Characteristics qualitative assessment,” a rating/coding scheme was initially developed based on expected response to the intervention by the author and her faculty mentor.

The coding scheme was revised and updated by the first author after an initial review of participants’ responses and as the author checked the codes to reflect additional themes and

provide clarifying examples for the coding categories. For the “Knowledge of PARTNERS Communication Model - Qualitative Assessment” the coding scheme reflected the 8-steps of the PARTNERS Communication Model. The two coders were trained by the author in a team or individual setting on each of the three coding schemes. First, coders coded 20 participant responses on the “Family Work-Related Desired Partner Characteristics” and “Communication-Related Desired Partner Characteristics qualitative assessment.” The author then checked the codes and provided a consensus code for responses that did not match, seeking feedback from her faculty mentor on 33 confusing responses through in-person communications and via email.

After consensus was reached on the first 20 participants, the two coders completed subsequent sets of 50 to 100 responses. The author would provide feedback, discuss discrepancies, and conduct further training after each set of codes had been completed and then give the coders the next set of responses to code. This process was repeated for responses to the “Knowledge of Family Work – Qualitative Assessment” and “Knowledge of PARTNERS Communication Model - Qualitative Assessment.

### **Coding of Qualitative Data**

To analyze the qualitative data, two coders independently coded each response and indicated whether themes from the coding scheme were present in participants’ responses (the specific theme was not coded for each response). For the Desired Partner Characteristics question, the coders indicated the degree to which a response was indicative of family work or communication. The Knowledge of Family Work – Qualitative Assessment was coded by indicating whether a response reported a correct fact about family work distribution or not, and for the Knowledge of PARTNERS Communication Model question, the coders indicated the

number of different PARTNERS steps included in the response. Cohen's  $\kappa$  was calculated to determine the level of agreement between the two raters on the four themes.

## Measures

**Knowledge of family work distribution.** Three measures were used to assess knowledge of family work including the Family Work Subscale on the Knowledge About Family Work and Communication Scale, the Family Work-Related Desired Partner Characteristics, and the Knowledge of Family Work - Qualitative Assessment.

The Family Work Subscale on the Knowledge About Family Work and Communication Scale is a 4-item subscale that assesses knowledge of family work in romantic relationships (see Appendix F). This measure was developed by the authors with the assistance of a research team. The Hill and O'Brien (2021) Knowledge About Grief Scale was used to inform the development of new items relevant to the intervention. The measure was piloted with six undergraduate students in psychology. Three doctoral students also provided feedback on the items. A counseling psychologist who works with the targeted demographic checked that items assessed the knowledge in the intervention.

After calculating the mean and standard deviation of the responses received from undergraduate psychology students and taking into account the feedback we received, we revised and deleted items. Participants rated the degree to which they agreed with four statements using a 6-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*; 6 = *strongly agree*). Items include: "Today, women and men do the same amount of family work," "Women who do the majority of the family work in their relationships are at risk for being very depressed," "Women are most satisfied in their relationship when they divide family work equally with their partner," and "Negative couple interactions increase when women do more family work than their male partners." An index of

knowledge regarding family work in the intervention was created by reverse-scoring one item and then adding scores on the items to create a total score. High scores indicated strong levels of knowledge on family work distribution in romantic relationships. The reliability estimates for this measure were .61 (pre-test) and .79 (post-test).

The Family Work-Related Desired Partner Characteristics is a qualitative assessment of participants' desired partner characteristics related to family work that was created by the authors (see Appendix G). The development of this item was informed by the Hill and O'Brien (2021) measure Qualitative Assessment of Knowledge of Grief, CARES Intervention Steps and Resources. Participants were asked to respond to the question: "What are your top desired characteristics for a romantic partner?" The directions also asked participants not to look up or ask anyone else for the answers. For each response, two coders independently indicated whether the response was related to family work distribution or communication with 0 being unrelated, 1 being related to communication, and 2 related to family work. The coding scheme developed for this question provided examples of correct responses (see Appendix N). Examples of correct responses related to family work included: "Expects an equal relationship," "Involved in housework," "Shares family work," and "A real partner." The number of responses receiving a score of 2 for each participant were counted with high scores indicating a desire for partner characteristics that were consistent with the information on family work discussed in the intervention. There were moderate levels of agreement between the raters for responses to this question with Cohen's  $\kappa$  values ranging from .76 to .94,  $p < .001$ .

The Knowledge of Family Work – Qualitative Assessment is an open-ended question created by the researchers that assesses knowledge about family work in romantic relationships (see Appendix H). The Hill and O'Brien (2021) measure of Qualitative Assessment of

Knowledge of Grief, CARES Intervention Steps and Resources was used to inform the development of this item. Participants were asked the following question: “What do you know about family work distribution in a romantic relationship?” Participants were limited to three responses to this question. Their responses were rated on a scale from 0 to 1, with 0 representing incorrect or irrelevant responses and 1 representing a correct fact. The coding scheme developed for this question provided examples of correct responses including: “Women do more,” “Family work is housework and childcare,” “Women are happier/more satisfied if it’s equal,” “Should be shared/equal,” and “Important for women’s relationships” (see Appendix N). The number of responses receiving a score of 1 for each participant were counted with high scores indicating strong levels of knowledge regarding family work distribution as it relates to relationships. Moderate levels of agreement were found for the raters’ responses to this question ranging from  $\kappa = .55$  to  $.75$ ,  $p < .001$ .

**Knowledge of communication.** Knowledge of effective communication was measured through the Communication Subscale on the Knowledge About Family Work and Communication Scale and the Communication-Related Desired Partner Characteristics assessment.

The Communication Subscale on the Knowledge About Family Work and Communication Scale consists of four items that assess knowledge on communication in romantic relationships (see Appendix F). The Hill and O’Brien (2021) Knowledge About Grief Scale was used to inform the development of new items relevant to the intervention that were generated by the authors with the assistance of a research team. Six undergraduate students in psychology piloted the measures and three doctoral students provided feedback.

After calculating the mean and standard deviation of the responses received from students, we revised the items. Based on the feedback we received from a counseling psychologist who checked that items assessed the knowledge in the intervention, we deleted and changed items. Participants rated the degree to which they agree with the four statements using a 6-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*; 6 = *strongly agree*). Items include: “Women who communicate directly are more successful in getting their needs met,” “A male partner’s ability to communicate well does not strongly predict women’s relationship satisfaction,” “Communication problems are not one of the top causes of divorce,” and “It is likely that a woman would be depressed because of poor communication in her relationship.” An index of knowledge regarding communication in the intervention was created by reverse-scoring two items and then adding scores on the items to create a total score. High scores mean participants had advanced knowledge on communication in romantic relationships. The reliability estimates for this measure with this sample were .43 (pre-test) and .60 (post-test).

Knowledge of communication also was measured using the Communication-Related Desired Partner Characteristics qualitative assessment (see Appendix I). This open-ended question assessed participants’ desired partner characteristics related to communication. The Hill and O’Brien (2021) measure of Qualitative Assessment of Knowledge of Grief, CARES Intervention Steps and Resources was used to inform the development of this item relevant to the intervention that was generated by the authors. Participants were asked to respond to the question: “What are your top desired characteristics for a romantic partner?” For each response two coders independently indicated whether or not the response was related to communication or family work with 0 being unrelated, 1 being related to communication, and 2 being related to family work. The coding scheme developed for this question provided examples of correct

responses related to communication including: “Good listener,” “Listens to me,” “Empathetic,” “Cares about my feelings,” and “Understanding,” “Someone who respects my needs,” “Willing to compromise” (see Appendix N). The number of responses receiving a score of 1 were counted with high scores meaning a desire for partner characteristics that were consistent with the information on communication in the intervention. Moderate levels of agreement were found for the raters’ responses to this question,  $\kappa = .76$  to  $.94$ ,  $p < .001$ .

**Knowledge of a model of effective communication.** The Knowledge of PARTNERS Communication Model - Quantitative Assessment and the Knowledge of PARTNERS Communication Model - Qualitative Assessment was used to measure knowledge of the PARTNERS Communication Model.

The Knowledge of PARTNERS Communication Model - Quantitative Assessment is a 17-item measure developed by the authors to assess knowledge about effective communication skills as described in the PARTNERS Communication Model (see Appendix J). Participants indicated the degree to which they agreed with the items on a 6-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree*; 6 = *strongly agree*). The O’Brien et al. (2019) measure, Knowledge Regarding Appropriate Bystander Interventions, was used to inform the development of this measure. Modified items from the O’Brien et al. (2019) measure included: “Telling my partner ‘I feel frustrated when you don’t listen to me is a helpful way to share a concern.’” Most of the items were not modified but rather used to inform the development of new items generated by the researchers and reviewed by experts in counseling psychology.

Members of a research team consisting of six undergraduate students and three graduate students in psychology provided feedback. Examples of items that were created include: “It is important to paraphrase my partner’s perspective before sharing my points,” “Direct

communication strategies are too assertive,” and “Setting specific relationship goals will help promote change.” An index of knowledge regarding effective partner communication was created after reverse-scoring eleven items and then adding scores on the items to calculate a total score. Participants with high scores have advanced knowledge regarding effective couple communication as taught in the intervention. The reliability estimates for this measure were .44 (pre-test) and .74 (post-test).

The Knowledge of PARTNERS Communication Model - Qualitative Assessment is an open-ended question designed to assess knowledge of effective communication as taught through the PARTNERS Communication Model (see Appendix K). The Hill and O’Brien (2021) Qualitative Assessment of Knowledge of Grief, CARES Intervention Steps and Resources measure was used to inform the development of the item relevant to the intervention that was generated by the authors. Participants were asked the following question: “Imagine that you are really upset with a future romantic partner because they did something that really hurt you. State specifically what you would do and/or say related to this very upsetting situation.” Responses to the question were rated on a scale from 0 to 8, with 0 representing zero points consistent with our intervention, 1 representing one consistent point, 2 representing two consistent points, 3 representing three consistent points, 4 representing four consistent points, 5 representing five consistent points, 6 representing six consistent points, 7 representing seven consistent points, and 8 representing eight consistent points (see Appendix N). The following is an example of a response that received a score of 8:

*P.A.R.T.N.E.R.S. I would prepare by understanding my feelings and pick the right place and time to bring the topic up. I would be sure to avoid being criticizing or blaming of my partner. I will point out the positive things he does in the conversation. I will be sure to use "I"*



*statements to share my thought and feelings. I will listen to all that he has to say in response to my expression, both being respectful to each other. I would be clear with in what needs to change for me. And remember that because women often do more, I have to be persistent in advocating my needs and speaking up so that they are met.*

Two members of the coding team completed the ratings for correspondence with the PARTNERS steps. A high score indicated strong knowledge of effective partner communication as taught in the PARTNERS Communication Model. Fair levels of agreement were found for the raters' responses to this question,  $\kappa = .45$  to  $.54$ ,  $p < .001$ .

**Relationship communication self-efficacy.** Relationship communication self-efficacy was measured through two assessments including the Effective Relationship Communication Self-Efficacy measure and the Confidence in Relationship Communication Item.

The Effective Relationship Communication Self-Efficacy scale is a 17-item measure assessing participant's confidence using effective communication strategies as described in the intervention (see Appendix L). This measure was adapted from a measure by O'Brien et al. (2019) about bystander self-efficacy in dating violence situations. Using a 6-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*; 6 = *strongly agree*), participants rated the degree to which they agree with each of the 17 items. The authors used the general design of the measure by O'Brien et al. (2019) to inform the development of the new measures. The authors removed, changed, and added items to fit the study's purposes. The generated items were revised after receiving feedback from experts in counseling psychology and members of a research team consisting of six undergraduate students and three graduate students in psychology. Examples of items that were created include: "I am confident that I can avoid criticizing my partner when they are frustrating me," "I am confident that I can explicitly tell my partner that they need to change for the

relationship to work,” and “I am confident that I can wait for a good time to talk to my partner if I am too hurt to communicate in a caring manner.” Scores on the items were summed to create an index of confidence in ability to communicate effectively with a romantic partner. Participants with high scores have strong confidence in their ability to communicate effectively with a romantic partner. The reliability estimates for this measure with this sample were .84 (pre-test) and .90 (post-test).

The Confidence in Relationship Communication Item assesses confidence communicating a concern in the relationship with a romantic partner (see Appendix M).

This item was modified from the O’Brien et al. (2019) measure, Knowledge Regarding Appropriate Bystander Interventions. Participants were asked the following: “On a scale from 1 to 10, how confident are you in your ability to communicate with a romantic partner about a concern in your relationship?” A high score indicated strong confidence communicating in a romantic relationship.

## **Results**

### **Quantitative Analyses**

First, we examined whether participants differed across conditions on the pre-test measures using a MANOVA. No differences emerged across conditions with regard to the participants’ demographic information or their scores on all pre-test measures.

Second, the means, standard deviations, ranges, reliabilities, and correlations among the variables were calculated (see Table 2). Then, four multivariate analyses of covariance were used to test the hypotheses. For each analysis, the experimental condition was the independent variable, Time 1 scores were the covariates, and Time 2 scores were the dependent measures. An alpha level of .05 was used to assess significance.

### **Assessment of Differences in Knowledge of Family Work Results**

The first analysis examined differences in scores on the post-tests of the (1) Family Work Subscale on the Knowledge About Family Work and Communication Scale, (2) Family Work-Related Desired Partner Characteristics, and (3) Knowledge of Family Work - Qualitative Assessment for the intervention, partial script, and control conditions while controlling for the pre-test scores (see Figure 3).

A difference emerged with regard to knowledge of family work ( $F(6, 592) = 21.42; p < .001$ ; Pillai's  $V = .36$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .18$ ). The least-significant difference (LSD) post-hoc test results are presented in Table 3. The effect size for this analysis ( $\eta_p^2 = .18$ ) exceeded Cohen's convention for a large effect ( $\eta_p^2 = .14$ ; Cohen, 1973; Norouzian & Plonsky, 2018). Pairwise comparisons for the four item Family Work Subscale on Knowledge About Family Work and Communication demonstrated that when compared to participants in the control condition, those exposed to the intervention or the partial script had more knowledge of family work ( $p < .001$ ). When compared to participants in the partial script, participants in the intervention condition did not differ in knowledge of family work ( $p = .22$ ).

On the Family Work-Related Desired Partner Characteristics, participants in the intervention listed more family work-related desired characteristics than those in the control ( $p = .01$ ), but not in the partial script group ( $p = .93$ ). Participants exposed to the partial script also listed more family work-related desired characteristics, when compared to participants in the control ( $p = .01$ ). The Knowledge of Family Work – Qualitative Assessment comparisons demonstrated that when compared to participants in the control, participants exposed to the intervention had more knowledge of family work ( $p < .001$ ), as did participants in the partial

script condition ( $p < .001$ ). No difference in knowledge of family work was found between participants in the intervention and partial script groups ( $p = .81$ ).

### **Assessment of Difference in Knowledge of Communication Results**

The second analysis assessed differences in the post-test scores on the (1) Communication Subscale on the Knowledge About Family Work and Communication scale and the (2) Communication-Related Desired Partner Characteristics for the intervention, partial script, and control conditions while controlling for the pre-test scores (see Figure 4).

There was a difference in knowledge of communication ( $F(4, 596) = 14.51$ ;  $p < .001$ ; Pillai's  $V = .18$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .09$ ). The effect size for this analysis ( $\eta_p^2 = .09$ ) exceeded Cohen's convention for a moderate effect ( $\eta_p^2 = .06$ ; Cohen, 1973; Norouzian & Plonsky, 2018).

Pairwise comparisons on the four item Communication Subscale on the Knowledge About Family Work and Communication Scale showed that participants in the intervention group had more knowledge of relationship communication than those in the control ( $p < .001$ ), but not participants in the partial script group ( $p = .44$ ). When compared to participants in the control, participants exposed to the partial script also had more knowledge of communication ( $p < .05$ ). Comparisons on the Communication-Related Desired Partner Characteristics qualitative assessment demonstrated that participants in the intervention group listed more communication-related characteristics compared to participants in the control ( $p < .001$ ) and partial script ( $p = .001$ ).

### **Assessment of Differences in Knowledge of PARTNERS Communication Model Results**

The third analysis examined differences in scores on the post-test measures including the (1) Knowledge of PARTNERS Communication Model - Quantitative Assessment and the (2) Knowledge of PARTNERS Communication Model - Qualitative Assessment for the

intervention, partial script, and control conditions while controlling for the pre-test scores (see Figure 5).

There was a difference in knowledge of our model of effective communication ( $F(4, 596) = 20.30$ ;  $p < .001$ ; Pillai's  $V = .24$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .12$ ). The effect size for this analysis ( $\eta_p^2 = .12$ ) exceeded Cohen's convention for a moderate effect ( $\eta_p^2 = .06$ ; Cohen, 1973; Norouzian & Plonsky, 2018). On the Knowledge of PARTNERS Communication Model - Quantitative Assessment, participants in the intervention ( $p < .001$ ) and the partial script ( $p < .001$ ) had more knowledge of the PARTNERS model, when compared to participants in the control group. No differences were found between the intervention and partial script groups ( $p = .19$ ). Pairwise comparisons on the Knowledge of PARTNERS Communication Model - Qualitative Assessment showed that participants in the intervention had the most knowledge of the PARTNERS model compared to participants in the control ( $p < .001$ ) and the partial script ( $p < .05$ ).

#### **Assessment of Differences in Relationship Communication Self-Efficacy Results**

The fourth analysis examined differences in the post-test scores on the (1) Effective Relationship Communication Self-Efficacy and the (2) Confidence in Relationship Communication Item for the intervention, partial script, and control conditions, while controlling for the pre-test scores on each measure (see Figure 6).

There was a difference in relationship communication self-efficacy ( $F(4, 596) = 14.03$ ;  $p < .001$ ; Pillai's  $V = .17$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .09$ ). The effect size for this analysis ( $\eta_p^2 = .09$ ) exceeded Cohen's convention for a moderate effect ( $\eta_p^2 = .06$ ; Cohen, 1973; Norouzian & Plonsky, 2018). Pairwise comparisons on the Effective Relationship Communication Self-Efficacy scale demonstrated that participants exposed to the intervention had the most relationship communication self-efficacy compared to participants in the control ( $p < .001$ ) and participants

in the partial script condition ( $p < .001$ ). On the Confidence in Relationship Communication Item, participants in the intervention reported more confidence compared to participants in the control ( $p < .05$ ). No differences were found between the intervention and partial script groups ( $p = .24$ ) or the partial script and the control groups ( $p = .20$ ).

### **Discussion**

Findings from this study suggested that the PARTNERS online intervention was effective in educating undergraduate women about family work distribution, couple communication, and a model of effective communication, and improving college women's confidence communicating with a romantic partner. Relative to participants receiving no intervention, participants who received the PARTNERS intervention or who read a partial version of the intervention script had more knowledge of family work, communication, and a model of effective communication. Compared to participants who received no intervention and participants who read a partial version of the script, participants who received the PARTNERS intervention demonstrated more confidence in communicating with a romantic partner using the PARTNERS Communication Model. In addition, participants who received the PARTNERS intervention, relative to participants receiving no intervention and who read a partial version of the intervention script, reported desired partner characteristics reflecting characteristics aligning with communication and family work distribution as taught in the PARTNERS intervention. Thus, our hypotheses were partially supported. Should these findings be replicated, the PARTNERS intervention may serve as a fiscally sustainable model for future, widespread service delivery to educate college women about family work distribution and effective communication and improve their confidence in communicating with a romantic partner.

It is important to note that both the PARTNERS intervention and partial script conditions were effective in educating college women about family work distribution, communication, and a model of effective communication, as measured by quantitative assessments developed by the authors. This finding indicates college women can learn important information about family work distribution, communication, and a model of effective communication through both reading information about these constructs or watching a video. This may be due to the similarities in content provided in the intervention and partial intervention script on family work distribution, communication, and a model of effective communication. Given that most of the effects were moderate, improving women's knowledge of family work, communication, a model of effective communication and their confidence communicating with a romantic partner could have larger implications for their ability to communicate their needs and establish equity in their relationship, which is tied to women's mental health and wellbeing.

Improvements to the intervention might include providing specific case examples that illustrate the information taught regarding the importance of family work, communication, and an effective model of communication. The intervention could go beyond stating how family work distribution and couple communication affect women's relationship satisfaction to depicting how this happens through examples of family work or communication conflict between a couple and how this negatively impacts the woman's relationship satisfaction. In addition, a case example of couples engaging in negative communication tactics versus examples in which they use a PARTNERS step might improve the knowledge of the PARTNERS Communication Model gained by the intervention.

It is interesting to note that across the conditions and at both pre-and post-test, very few responses to the desired partner characteristics question related to family-work distribution. It is

possible that even after watching the PARTNERS intervention video or reading a partial version of the intervention script participants did not connect the importance of family work distribution to partner characteristics. The typical association of family work with women's role rather than men's responsibilities as demonstrated by gender role theory (Eagly et al., 2000) may have contributed to the lack of emphasis on family work distribution in desired partner characteristics. Another potential contributor to the lack of emphasis on family work-related partner characteristics is women's developmental stage as the majority of participants were 21 years of age. Perhaps women in this stage of emerging adulthood are less likely to recognize the importance of family work in their choice of a romantic partner given that they are less likely to be in a committed relationship (Brown, 2020) and thus typically do not live in the same space as their partner or have children. Providing examples relevant to young women's relationships and connecting these to future scenarios affecting women's relationship satisfaction may help emphasize the importance of family work-related partner characteristics at an age in which family work may feel less relevant to their lives (e.g., partner support during exam time may be indicative of a partner's willingness to do their share with the children in the future).

Also, knowledge of family work distribution did not differ between the intervention and partial script groups, perhaps because participants in both the intervention and partial script conditions received the same information content on family work distribution as an important predictor of women's relationship satisfaction. Even after becoming educated on the importance of family work distribution for relationships, participants may not have connected this to a partner's intrinsic characteristics. To address this in future, the intervention might include examples depicting women identifying family work-related partner characteristics and personally discussing why they are important. Illustrating the connection of family work distribution with a



partner's characteristics could help participants identify similar connections for their desired partner characteristics. It also may be beneficial to emphasize the positives associated with equal relationships. This may help young women understand the importance of family work distribution and its connection to their partners characteristics by connecting partner choice with future happiness and wellbeing.

Participants in the intervention group did, however, report the most communication-related desired partner characteristics, suggesting that the intervention was successful in educating women about the importance of communication in their choice of a romantic partner. This indicates that the PARTNERS intervention has the power to change desired partner characteristics to better align with factors that improve women's relationship satisfaction. The intervention group might have reported more desired partner characteristics related to communication because the PARTNERS intervention provided opportunities to consider whether a partner fulfilled communication-related characteristics whereas the partial script group did not. The intervention also provided two examples of couples using the PARTNERS Communication Model to better communicate with each other potentially highlighting the importance of communication-related partner characteristics. The intervention might build on the significance of communication in relation to partner characteristics by providing additional examples illustrating women identifying communication-related characteristics in their choice of a partner.

Participants in the intervention were better able to apply the PARTNERS Communication Model to communicate with a romantic partner about an upsetting situation compared to those in the partial script and control. The open-ended question on participants' knowledge of the model may have provided a positive avenue for assessing the depth to which participants understood the

steps of the model and their application compared to the quantitative measure. The lack of depth to which the model was discussed and demonstrated in the partial script may indicate why the PARTNERS intervention was more successful, as it provides the steps of the model at multiple points throughout the intervention and includes example couple conversations implementing the model. This finding indicates that the PARTNERS intervention has the power to teach women a model of effective communication to use in their romantic relationships. The PARTNERS intervention could serve as a model for other interventions as it demonstrates that providing information and modeling examples is an effective way to improve knowledge.

The PARTNERS intervention also was successful in increasing women's relationship communication self-efficacy. Participants in each condition reported feeling confident when asked generally about their confidence communicating a concern with a romantic partner. However, when participants provided responses regarding their confidence communicating using the PARTNERS Communication model, women in the intervention group felt the most confident. This finding may indicate that asking participants to think about how they might respond in specific situations with a romantic partner in the intervention and then providing examples of couples using the model in the intervention, components that were missing from the partial script, are particularly effective in improving confidence. This aligns with Bandura's (1977; 1982) Self-Efficacy Theory. Vicarious experiences (i.e., observing someone modeling success at completing the task of interest) is one of Bandura's four main sources of self-efficacy and was incorporated in the PARTNERS intervention through examples of couples modeling the use of the PARTNERS communication model. Also, educational practices providing individuals with the knowledge and skills needed to perform successfully can improve self-efficacy related to a specific task or situation (Artino, 2012; Bandura, 1982). Thus, it follows that providing

college women with the knowledge to communicate effectively with one's partner and examples of how to do so might explain their improvement in confidence compared to women in the partial script who were not provided with that component of the intervention or with the control condition participants who did not learn about the model.

These findings are important because women are typically responsible for family work and the distressing effects of this powerful inequity could potentially be reduced if women communicated about family work expectations with a partner. Gender role theory demonstrates the relevance of family work to women's lives, as gender roles beliefs and gender roles contribute to maintaining the inequitable division of labor between women and men, characterizing housework and emotion work as women's role (Eagly & Wood, 2016; Erickson, 2005). An inequitable work distribution has deleterious effects. Equity Theory explains the importance of equity within the domain of household labor, as people who feel that they either under benefit or over benefit in the distribution of household labor feel more distressed than individuals with an equal division of labor (Lively et al., 2010). Gender role theory also demonstrates the way gender stereotypes have implications for communication, as women are typically thought of as friendly and concerned with others while men are typically thought to be assertive and dominant (Eagly & Wood, 2016). This may contribute to perpetuating the inequitable division of labor between women and men as being direct is not a socially acceptable characteristic for women, but research shows direct communication is an effective strategy for producing change within a romantic relationship (Overall et al., 2009).

It is salient to note that we do not believe that women should be responsible for ensuring family work equity in their romantic relationships, however we realistically purport that many men benefit from this inequity in their families and will not voluntarily relinquish their power

and privilege independently and without being asked. Thus, empowering women to articulate the need for equity in family work distribution is critical.

### **Limitations**

It is important to consider several limitations of this study. First, the measures were adapted from existing instruments or developed specifically for use in this study (as previously used measures assessing the constructs of interest were not available). As a result, the measures may not have accurately assessed the constructs of interest. Many more participants clicked on the survey link to access and learn about the study ( $N = 651$ ) than who provided consent to participate, completed at least 85% of the survey and answered the validity checks correctly ( $N = 303$ ). It is possible that students discontinued the study because of the estimated length of completion (45 minutes), or perhaps they lacked interest or anticipated discomfort related to the research topic. Differential attrition between conditions occurred with the control group having the lowest number of participants, followed by the partial script, with the highest number of participants in the intervention group. This disparity may have occurred because the content of the control video may not have felt relevant to women's lives and did not teach new skills. Participants in the partial script were encouraged to complete their assigned task, but there was no timer during their assigned task preventing them from continuing with the survey until they completed the task, thus potentially resulting in participants skipping the reading or skimming it quickly and completing the study in less than 20 minutes. Also, the low rater agreement on the codes for the qualitative assessment for the PARTNERS model, indicative of nuanced responses, may signal the need for improvements to the coding scheme for this question to better capture responses that align with the steps of the model versus those that do not. We were unable to

assess attention within each condition, differences in attention to the interventions could potentially have played a role in the results.

Other limitations to consider include that the intervention was designed specifically for straight women. The intervention is limited to straight women and is not applicable for men or LGBTQ+ individuals. Too, multicultural communication styles were not specifically addressed in the information provided on communication in romantic relationships or in the development of the PARTNERS Communication Model. Effective communication styles in one racial/ethnic group may be different for another, especially with interracial couples.

### **Future Research**

Future researchers may focus on improving the video intervention and then assessing the effectiveness of the video intervention when compared to reading a partial version of the intervention script, to determine the helpfulness of the video format with opportunities to role play communication scenarios. Specifically, improvements to the intervention could include a stronger connection and emphasis on the connection between family work and distribution-related partner characteristics and women's relationship satisfaction as well as improved measurement of this construct. The element of the intervention designed to address the connection between knowledge of family work, communication, and partner characteristics were the "12 Ways to Know Whether Your Partner Is Right for You" questions. Yet these questions are not consistent with the information we teach on family work and communication in the intervention. It would be helpful to educate participants on the importance of these questions in the context of the domain of family work and communication, and connect the questions to the information provided in the intervention. The improvements might help in determining the helpfulness of the video format with opportunities to role play communication scenarios.

Furthermore, the intervention might be improved by including additional examples throughout the video illustrating the importance of family work distribution and communication for women's relationships. Perhaps including video depictions contrasting partners with and without family work-related and communication-related desired partner characteristics could improve the interventions' ability to educate women on the significance of these characteristics for their romantic partners. The importance of equitable family work distribution also could be improved through illustrations of couple interactions and outcomes for women's relationship satisfaction when the work distribution is inequitable compared to when it is fair. Couples modeling the concepts described in the intervention appeared to be effective in improving knowledge of the PARTNERS model and women's confidence communicating with a romantic partner, thus it follows that integrating modeling examples might improve the intervention's effectiveness with regard to educating women about family work distribution and communication. Additional couple case examples could be paired with opportunities for participant engagement such as a short quiz or brief set of reflection questions provided in intervals throughout the intervention video. Increasing the number of opportunities for active participation and breaking up the lengthy video intervention into short, digestible segments may further solidify learning.

Moreover, additional analyses of the specific responses to the qualitative questions are needed to provide deeper insight on the type of partner characteristics most desired, which facts about family work distribution were learned, and which PARTNERS communication steps were most used by college women. Future research also could compare responses from participants in a relationship with those who reported being single to further understand the efficacy of the intervention for subpopulations of college women and inform specific improvements for these

groups. It is most important to assess whether improvement in knowledge and confidence translates into actual behaviors for college women when communicating with (or addressing conflicts with) a romantic partner. A series of follow-up assessments post-intervention could be implemented over a period of weeks asking women to report on their experiences and behaviors communicating with their romantic partner to determine whether they implemented the knowledge and confidence gained from the intervention in their partner interactions. Future research could assess whether the PARTNERS intervention improves relationship satisfaction for college women in committed relationships or for an older population of women with long-term partners through a longitudinal study following the implementation of the PARTNERS intervention and assessing women's mental health and relationship satisfaction over time.

Further research also is needed to address multicultural differences in relationship communication for interracial couples or specific predictors of relationship satisfaction for LGBTQ+ couples and implement these factors within the current intervention framework. The PARTNERS intervention also could provide a useful framework for a similar intervention for college men. The intervention could be adapted for young men to improve their knowledge and confidence using the PARTNERS Communication Model with the goal of helping men become more equitable partners. A similar study could be conducted with couples who receive the PARTNERS intervention and engage in role plays together to improve their confidence using the PARTNERS communication model, and to examine whether this improves their relationship satisfaction or confidence communicating with each other about a concern.

### **Counseling and Educational Implications**

With regard to educational implications, the PARTNERS intervention could be disseminated through university-community partnerships. College women are an especially

important population to educate regarding family work distribution and couple communication as they typically have not made long-term relationship commitments (Brown, 2020); thus, this intervention may be especially beneficial for the choices that college women make regarding their life partners. Partnerships could include resident assistants in the Department of Resident Life as these students are well-positioned to provide resources and disseminate information through monthly programming and regular resident communications. Similarly, a partnership could be developed with the Department of Sorority and Fraternity life to share the PARTNERS intervention to college students engaged in Greek organizations on-campus. A potential counseling implication of the PARTNERS intervention is to use the intervention in therapy or other clinical settings with clients presenting challenges or concerns related to family work distribution or partner communication. The intervention also could be implemented in couples or pre-marital counseling. This could lead to another potential partnership with the University of Maryland Counseling Center which could provide the PARTNERS intervention in relationship wellness workshops or for clients presenting relationship concerns within the domain of the intervention. The PARTNERS intervention might also be applicable for use with younger populations of women as a resource provided in high schools or as part of early prevention programming to educate about the importance of relationship issues related to family work distribution and couple communication.

### **Conclusion**

To conclude, inequitable family work distribution and couple communication have deleterious impacts on women's relationship satisfaction. The PARTNERS intervention effectively educated college women about family work distribution and effective communication in women's romantic relationships, and improved their confidence communicating with a



romantic partner. This study also may serve as an effective model for the development and dissemination of online interventions addressing interpersonal relationship concerns. It is our hope that this research will contribute to efforts to improve college women's ability to communicate effectively with a romantic partner, reduce relationship dissatisfaction and increase equity in heterosexual relationships.

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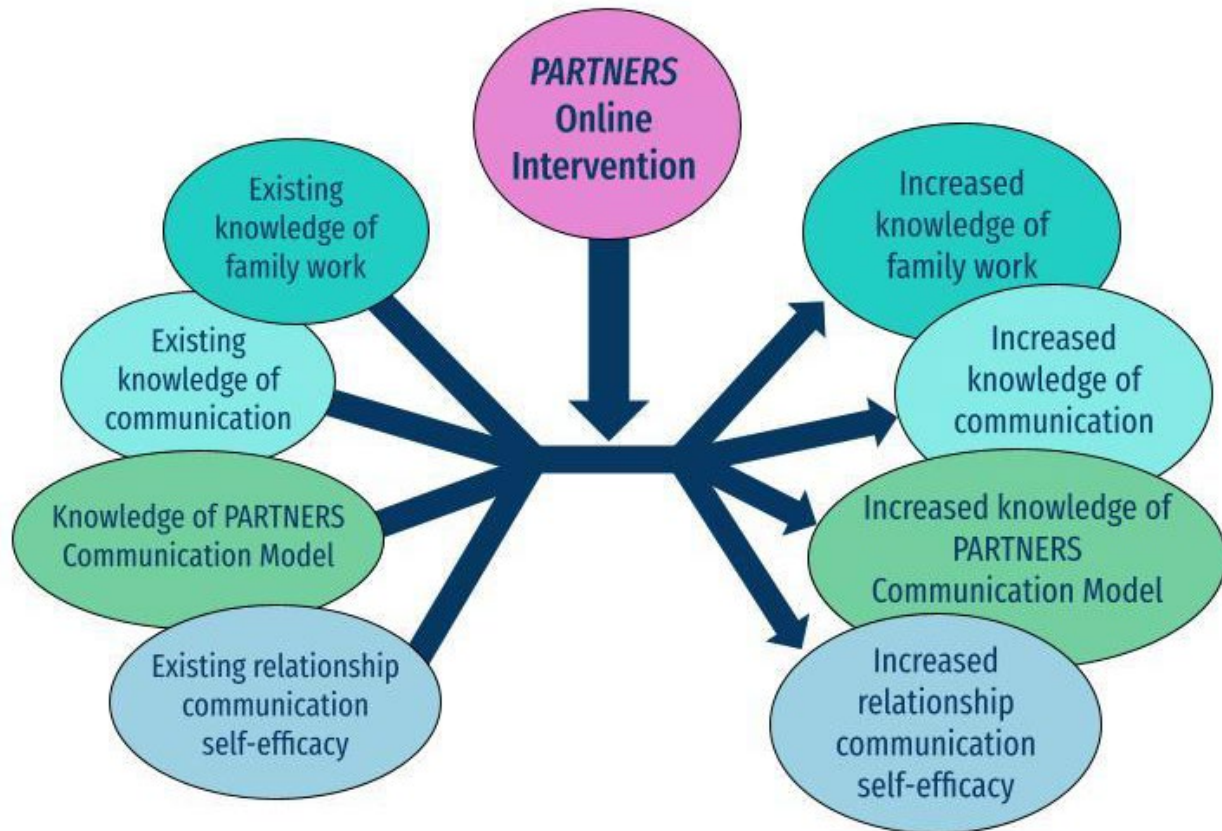
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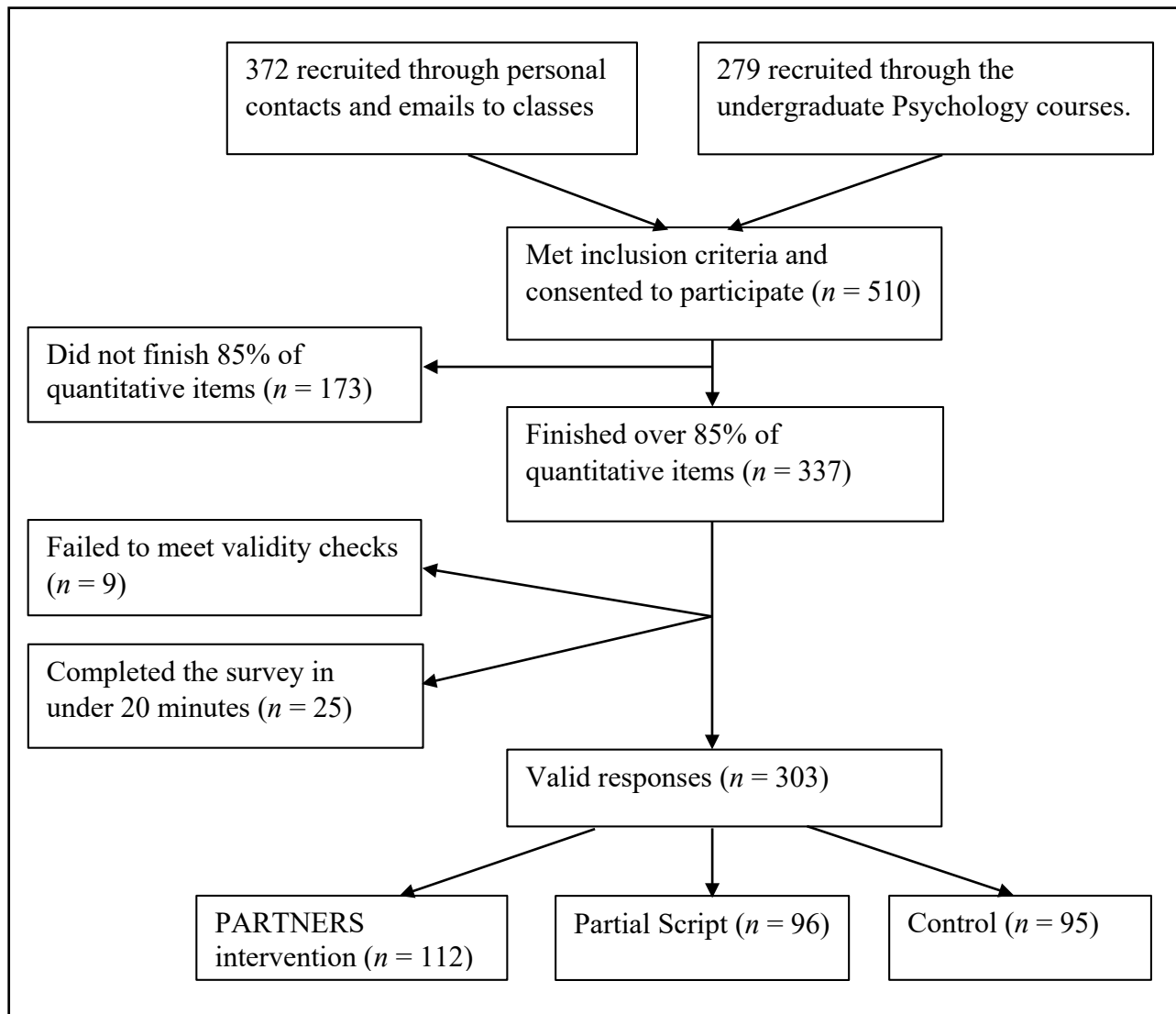
**Figure 1***Research Model*

*Note.* Hypothesized model for increased knowledge and confidence in the intervention group as a result of the PARTNERS Intervention



**Figure 2**

## Distribution of Participants



**Figure 3**

*MANCOVA for Knowledge of Family Work*

**MANCOVA 1: FAMILY WORK**

Independent variable

**Experimental conditional:** Intervention, partial script, or control

Covariates

**Time 1:** Family Work Subscale on the Knowledge About Family Work and Communication Scale

**Time 1:** Family Work-Related Desired Partner Characteristics

**Time 1:** Knowledge of Family work - Qualitative Assessment

Dependent variables

**Time 2:** Family Work Subscale on the Knowledge About Family Work and Communication Scale

**Time 2:** Knowledge of Family work - Qualitative Assessment

**Time 2:** Family Work-Related Desired Partner Characteristics

*Note.* This figure outlines the components of the first MANOVA analyses to assess differences in knowledge of family work among the three experimental conditions at the post-test.

**Figure 4**

*MANCOVA for Knowledge of Communication*

**MANCOVA 2: COMMUNICATION****Independent variable**

**Experimental conditional:** Intervention, partial script, or control

**Covariates**

**Time 1:** Communication Subscale on the Knowledge About Family Work and Communication Scale

**Time 1:** Communication-Related Desired Partner Characteristics

**Dependent variables**

**Time 2:** Communication Subscale on the Knowledge About Family Work and Communication Scale

**Time 2:** Communication-Related Desired Partner Characteristics

*Note.* This figure outlines the components of the second MANOVA analyses to assess differences in communication among the three experimental conditions at the post-test.

**Figure 5**

*MANCOVA for Knowledge of the PARTNERS Communication Model*

**MANCOVA 3: PARTNERS Communication Model****Independent variable**

**Experimental conditional:** Intervention, partial script, or control

**Covariates**

**Time 1:** Knowledge of PARTNERS Communication Model - Quantitative Assessment

**Time 1:** Knowledge of PARTNERS Communication Model - Qualitative Assessment

**Dependent variables**

**Time 2:** Knowledge of PARTNERS Communication Model - Quantitative Assessment

**Time 2:** Knowledge of PARTNERS Communication Model - Qualitative Assessment

*Note.* This figure outlines the components of the third MANOVA analyses to assess differences in knowledge of the PARTNERS Communication Model among the three experimental conditions at the post-test.

**Figure 6**

*MANCOVA for Relationship Communication Self-Efficacy*

**MANCOVA 4: CONFIDENCE****Independent variable**

**Experimental conditional:** Intervention, partial script, or control

**Covariates**

**Time 1:** Effective Relationship Communication Self-Efficacy

**Time 1:** Confidence in Relationship Communication Item

**Dependent variables**

**Time 2:** Effective Relationship Communication Self-Efficacy

**Time 2:** Confidence in Relationship Communication Item

*Note.* This figure outlines the components of the fourth MANOVA analyses to assess differences in relationship communication self-efficacy among the three experimental conditions at the post-test.

**Table 1.***Demographics (n = 303)*

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Total %</b>	<b>n</b>
<b>Age (years)</b>		
18	21.5	65
19	19.5	59
20	17.8	54
21	34.3	104
22	6.9	21
<b>Race/ethnicity</b>		
Black, Afro-Caribbean, African-American	10.9	33
Latinx, Hispanic-American	10.6	32
White Non-Hispanic, European-American	60.4	183
Asian, Asian-American, Pacific Islander	21.8	66
Native American	0.7	2
Biracial/multiracial	4.6	14
Other	2.0	6
<b>Major</b>		
Psychology	32.3	98
Biology-related	14.5	44
Criminal Justice and Criminology	8.9	27
Public health-related	7.9	24
Environmental Science-related	6.3	19
Neuroscience	4.3	13
Business-related	4.0	12
Engineering-related	4.0	12
Government and Politics	4.0	12
Information Science	3.0	9
Communication	3.0	9
Education-related	3.0	9
Language Studies-related	2.3	7
Economics	2.0	6
Hearing and Speech Sciences	2.0	6
Animal Sciences	1.3	4
Journalism	1.3	4
Mathematics-related	1.3	4
Public Policy	1.3	4
Undecided	6.6	20
Other	8.5	26

<b>Relationship Status</b>		
Single	51.8	157
In a relationship	46.9	142
Engaged	1.0	3
Married	0.3	1
<b>Generational Status</b>		
1.5 generation (I was born in another country and moved to the U.S. as a young child)	9.9	30
First generation (I was born in another county and moved to the U.S. as an adult)	2.6	8
2nd generation (I was born in the U.S., but my parent was born in another county)	36.0	109
3rd generation (I was born in the U.S. and my parent was born in the U.S., but grandparent was born in another county)	14.5	44
4th generation or more (I was born in the U.S. and my parents and grandparents were also born in the U.S.)	37.0	112
<b>Communication Focused Classes Taken</b>		
None	23.8	72
One	52.1	158
Two	14.5	44
Three	3.3	10
More than three	6.3	19
<b>Relationship Focused Classes Taken</b>		
None	81.2	246
One	12.9	39
Two	3.6	11
Three	1.3	4
More than three	1.0	3

**Table 2.**

*Means, Standard Deviations, Ranges, Alphas, and Correlations Among the Measures.*

CONSTRUCTS	MEASURES	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
KNOWLEDGE	1. Family work knowledge subscale	1																	
	2. Family work knowledge subscale POST	.60**	1																
	3. Family work related desired partner characteristics	.03	.00	1															
	4. Family work related desired partner characteristics POST	-.02	.16**	.18**	1														
	5. Family work knowledge qualitative	.19**	.15*	.05	-.02	1													
	6. Family work knowledge qualitative POST	.14*	.43**	-.01	.16**	.13*	1												
	7. Communication knowledge subscale	.33**	.33**	.02	-.01	-.01	.06	1											
	8. Communication knowledge subscale POST	.31**	.55**	-.03	.05	.12*	.21**	.49**	1										
	9. Communication related partner characteristics	.09	.10	.17**	.05	.08	-.05	.05	.03	1									
	10. Communication related partner characteristics POST	.04	.29**	.08	.20**	.11	.19**	.02	.19**	.36**	1								
	11. Knowledge of PARTNERS model quantitative	.15*	.12*	-.01	-.14*	.08	.04	.26**	.20**	.11	.07	1							
	12. Knowledge of PARTNERS model quantitative POST	.22**	.43**	-.06	.05	.07	.29**	.27**	.46**	.03	.23**	.59**	1						
	13. Knowledge of PARTNERS model qualitative	.08	.09	-.02	.05	.05	.02	.17**	.12*	.08	.08	.26**	.19**	1					
	14. Knowledge of PARTNERS model qualitative POST	.15**	.36**	-.04	.19**	.08	.26**	.23**	.38**	-.02	.35**	.20**	.42**	.30**	1				
SELF-EFFICACY	15. Couple communication self-efficacy	.12*	.06	.03	-.07	.08	-.03	.09	.07	-.01	-.10	.20**	.02	.23**	.01	1			
	16. Couple communication self-efficacy POST	.16**	.29**	.01	.11	-.01	.18**	.19**	.29**	.04	.15**	.24**	.32**	.13*	.25**	.63**	1		
	17. Confidence in relationship communication item	.06	.05	-.02	-.09	-.06	-.08	.15**	.10	.02	-.02	.15**	-.01	.19**	.06	.47**	.38**	1	
	18. Confidence in relationship communication item POST	.08	.14*	-.02	.01	-.03	-.01	.20**	.15**	.05	.06	.20**	.12*	.12*	.16**	.53**	.53**	.76**	1
	Mean	17.64	20.20	.00	.09	1.14	2.17	20.07	20.72	.33	.86	66.15	70.36	1.26	2.11	75.13	82.23	7.68	8.37
	Standard Deviation	3.06	3.31	.06	.29	.93	.95	2.41	3.07	.56	.85	5.85	8.71	.94	1.54	10.00	10.29	1.61	1.39
	Actual Range	5-24	6-24	0-1	0-2	0-3	0-3	12-24	13-24	0-2	0-4	50-87	50-95	0-5	0-8	45-102	46-102	2-10	2-10
	Possible Range	4-24	4-24	0-5	0-5	0-3	0-3	4-24	4-24	0-5	0-5	17-102	17-102	0-8	0-8	17-102	17-102	1-10	1-10
Alpha	.61	.79						.43	.60			.44	.74			.84	.90		

\*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed). \*\*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).



**Table 3.***Mean Differences*

Dependent Variable	Intervention	Partial	Control
	<i>M</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>M</i>
KNOWLEDGE OF FAMILY WORK			
Family Work Knowledge Subscale	21.28 <sub>a</sub>	20.88 <sub>a</sub>	18.24 <sub>b</sub>
Family Work-Related Desired Partner Characteristics	.12 <sub>a</sub>	.12 <sub>a</sub>	.01 <sub>b</sub>
Family Work Knowledge - Qualitative	2.51 <sub>a</sub>	2.48 <sub>a</sub>	1.48 <sub>b</sub>
KNOWLEDGE OF COMMUNICATION			
Communication Knowledge Subscale	21.26 <sub>a</sub>	20.98 <sub>a</sub>	19.81 <sub>b</sub>
Communication-Related Desired Partner - Characteristics	1.20 <sub>a</sub>	.87 <sub>b</sub>	.45 <sub>c</sub>
KNOWLEDGE OF PARTNERS COMMUNICATION MODEL			
Knowledge of PARTNERS Model – Quantitative	72.90 <sub>a</sub>	71.73 <sub>a</sub>	65.98 <sub>b</sub>
Knowledge of PARTNERS Model – Qualitative	2.68 <sub>a</sub>	2.20 <sub>b</sub>	1.35 <sub>c</sub>
RELATIONSHIP COMMUNICATION SELF-EFFICACY			
Couple Communication Self-Efficacy	85.89 <sub>a</sub>	82.24 <sub>b</sub>	77.90 <sub>c</sub>
Confidence in Relationship Communication Item	8.51 <sub>a</sub>	8.37 <sub>ab</sub>	8.21 <sub>b</sub>

*Note.* Estimated marginalized means that do not share subscripts within the same row differ,  $p < .05$ .

## **Appendix A**

### **Review of Literature**

This literature review is divided into five subsections. The first section addresses relationship dissatisfaction and its link to depression and other relationship outcomes. The second section discusses gender role theory, equity theory, and Bandura's Self-Efficacy Theory, all of which provide the theoretical foundation for this study. The third section reviews the literature on the associations among family work, effective communication and relationship satisfaction. The fourth section discusses existing interventions that improve college students' knowledge and confidence in a variety of domains. The fifth section describes the literature on existing relationship interventions. The literature review concludes with the hypotheses for this study.

#### **Relationship Dissatisfaction and Outcomes**

Women provide the vast majority of unpaid care work (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD], 2016). The increasing care needs due to the pandemic have been disproportionately assumed by women. Women with children who already did more than fathers, have increased their time performing housework and childcare to accommodate for homeschooling needs and the lack of childcare during the pandemic (Carlson et al., 2020). Women are more likely to permanently lose their jobs compared to men as a result of COVID-19 (Dang & Nguyen, 2020). In fact, 100% of the jobs lost in December 2020 belonged to women (Ewing-Nelson, 2021). As women have assumed the majority of unpaid care work during the COVID-19 pandemic, they have suffered devastating outcomes. Specifically, women experienced more severe stress and stress-inducing events than men (Hamel & Salganicoff, 2020), as well as greater negative mental health from worry and stress caused by the pandemic

(Frederiksen et al., 2020). The expectations placed on women to fulfill increasing care needs contribute to women's disproportionate poverty (Eisler & Otis, 2014), especially as women with children reduced their work hours substantially more than fathers (Collins et al., 2020), and were more likely to stop working altogether (Alon et al., 2020).

Women also are less satisfied in their relationships, reporting lower marital happiness and global marital satisfaction than men (Boerner et al., 2014; Bulanda, 2011; Jackson et al., 2014; Lewin, 2017). In 2014, 57.4% of women and 62.8% of men said their marriages were very happy, which was a 7% decrease in women's marital happiness from only two years earlier (Smith et al., 2015). 20% of married women and 41% of cohabiting women considered leaving their partner in 2014 compared to 13% of married men and 26% of cohabiting men (The Austin Institute for the Study of Family and Culture, 2014). Women are less likely than men to be very happy in their relationship (Lewin, 2017), and more likely than men to report more "aversive partner relations" (Windsor & Butterworth, 2010). While the gender difference in marital satisfaction was minimal, there was a gender difference with married women reporting lower relationship satisfaction compared to married men (Jackson et al., 2014).

Young women are a key demographic as many are entering into serious relationships, but have not made long-term relationship commitments. It is estimated that 61% of women between the ages of 18 and 29 are interested in dating and 36% of women are seeking a committed relationship. Also, the average age at which women are first married is 27.9 years (Population Reference Bureau, 2021). Heterosexual and cisgender identifying women are the focus of the current study because heterosexual relationships are more likely to correspond with gender disparities. A study examining differences in the division of housework between straight, lesbian, and gay couples found that lesbian and gay couples reported more equal divisions of

housework than heterosexual couples (Gotta et al., 2011). This demonstrates the way in which heterosexual couples are affected by traditional gender role beliefs and stereotypes that maintain the unequal division of labor (Eagly & Wood, 2016). Also, lesbian and gay couples reported greater equality in communication than straight couples (Gotta et al., 2011).

The focus of this intervention is on women rather than men because women cannot rely on men to voluntarily engage in doing more to equalize their relationships. In fact, men are more likely than women to report equality in the distribution of housework (Gotta et al., 2011). Male partners typically do not judge the division of family work accurately leaving women to be placed in the position to remind their partners about housework and childcare duties. Thus, educating young women about research on romantic relationships could enable them to make thoughtful choices regarding the desired characteristics of future partners and increase the likelihood of their having equal relationships.

About one quarter of marriages start with low levels of quality and satisfaction (Lavner et al., 2012). Marriages that start with low satisfaction are at the highest risk for negative marital outcomes and higher divorce rates (Lavner et al., 2012). About 40 to 50% of married couples in the U.S. divorce (American Psychological Association, 2020). A study examining relationship satisfaction demonstrated that women whose relationship satisfaction was more highly variable had higher levels of depressive symptoms (Whitton & Whisman, 2010). A reciprocal relationship between relationship dissatisfaction and depressive symptoms has been found in women demonstrating that relationship dissatisfaction may be a contributing factor to depressive symptomatology (Woods et al., 2019).

### **Theoretical Framework**

Three theories inform the current study. The relational construct (family work distribution) included in this study was informed by gender role theory and equity theory. First, gender role theory explains the connection between gender roles that maintain the disproportionate workload for women in their families. Women and men's behavior or roles they occupy become stereotypic and part of their gender role (Eagly & Wood, 2016). Gender role beliefs stem from the idea that men and women fit complementary abilities represented in culturally constructed gender roles (Eagly & Wood, 2016). The perceived differences between men and women in society are incorrectly assumed to support inherent differences between them, even though the division of labor is dependent on the cultural and environmental conditions (Eagly & Wood, 2016). The division between communal and agentic characteristics is descriptive of women's and men's sex-differentiated roles and behavior with communal characteristics disproportionately given to women while agentic behaviors are assigned to men (Eagly et al., 2000).

Family work and emotion work fall into the "communal" characteristics that are disproportionately assigned to women (Eagly et al., 2000). The division of labor between women and men also is a reflection of gender role beliefs and gender roles that contribute to maintaining the division through the socialization process (Eagly & Wood, 2016). The family work distribution with a traditional gender ideology assumes women are responsible for performing the house and family work typically associated with being feminine (Erickson, 2005). Because women have typically performed the majority of housework and emotion work due to cultural conditions, these responsibilities have become characteristic of women's gender roles (Eagly & Wood, 2016).

It has been suggested, however, that gender is actually performed by women and men such that gender is not a fixed characteristic or property, but rather something that individuals “do” (West & Zimmerman, 1987). Women and men adjust to gender roles by acquiring the specific skills and resources needed as well as adjusting their social behavior to maintain their gender performance congruent with their gender role (Eagly et al., 2000). One’s gender identity becomes a standard by which women and men regulate their behavior, thus consistent behavior according to the standard yields positive emotions and higher self-esteem whereas conflict between the two causes negative emotions and lower self-esteem (Eagly & Wood, 2016). Family work may be disproportionately placed on women because they often are relational constructs that are characterized as female-typed tasks. Women and their partners might make the assumption that these constructs fall into a woman’s role within the relationship and thus maintain the inequitable division of labor.

Equity theory also informs the study by explaining the distressing effect that inequity within relationships has on the individual. Equity theory is about understanding the effect of equity and inequity within relationships (Hatfield & Traupmann, 1981). Equity theory assumes that an experience of inequity either to one’s benefit or detriment causes feelings of emotional distress (Adams, 1965). This is consistent in the domain of household labor as individuals feeling that they do or do not benefit with regard to amount of housework experienced more negative emotions, specifically these individuals feel more distressed than individuals who felt the division of housework was equitable (Lively et al., 2010). An equitable relationship is where a member or observer of the relationship concludes that every participant in the relationship receives equal “relative gains” (Hatfield & Traupmann, 1981). The most satisfying relationships are equitable ones in which neither partner has the advantage (Sells & Ganong, 2017). Men and

women between the ages of 18 and 29 anticipated they would be most satisfied in an equal gender role relationship when compared to one where either the male or female partner has the lead (Sells & Ganong, 2017). A majority of participants also noted their desire to be in an equal relationship where household work, paid work, power, and decision making were equal (Sells & Ganong, 2017).

Bandura's Self-Efficacy Theory informed the development of the intervention. Bandura emphasized the value of self-efficacy, defined as the confidence in performing behaviors required to achieve one's goals. What people believe about their capacities for a given task or situation can be predictive of their behavior, thoughts, and reactions. As self-efficacy increases, performance is enhanced and then leads to eventual success despite obstacles or aversive experiences (Bandura, 1977; Bandura, 1982). Educational practices that provide individuals with the knowledge and skills needed to perform successfully can improve self-efficacy related to a specific task or situation (Artino, 2012). According to Bandura's theory, mastery experiences, vicarious experiences/social modeling, verbal persuasion, and emotional states contribute to self-efficacy development. These four main sources of efficacy create a framework for targeting the appropriate knowledge and skills in arranged actions steps needed to develop self-efficacy beliefs (Bandura, 1982).

### **Predictors of Women's Relationship Satisfaction**

**Family Work Distribution.** Family work distribution, defined as the way in which household labor and child care is shared among a couple with regard to the specific tasks and time spent performing them, is an important contributor to women's relationship satisfaction. Family work is unpaid labor performed to maintain family members and the home (Shelton & John, 1996). Consistent with the historical trends of the division of labor, women currently

perform the majority of family work (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016). Specifically, 70% of women participated in food preparation and cleanup activities compared to 43% of men; and 50% of women reported cleaning and doing laundry compared to 22% of men (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016). While women often perform a majority of the food prep, cleaning, and laundry, men spent more than twice the amount of time doing tasks related to the lawn, garden, houseplants, and home maintenance and repairs (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016).

In 2019, this divide remained largely the same as women spend at an average of 2.5 hours of housework a day whereas men spent an average of 1.9 hours; and 46% of women and 22% of men did housework including cleaning and laundry on an average day (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019). Similarly, in households with children under age 6, women spend an average of 1.1 hours providing physical care compared to men who spend an average of 27 minutes (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019). One positive trend from 2003 to 2019 is the increasing percentage of men participating in food preparation and cleanup daily from 35% to 48% (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019). However, women's share of this work also grew from 66% to 70% (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019), demonstrating the consistent disproportionate load of family work women are still expected to perform.

Interestingly, women's relationship satisfaction increases as the family work distribution becomes more equivalent (Galovan et al., 2014). As women reported greater engagement from their husbands in routine family work the relationship quality of both partners increased (Galovan et al., 2014). This is demonstrated in that father's share of the childcare predicted the mother's relationship satisfaction, but this relationship was not present for fathers (Schober, 2012). Similarly, the quantity of housework and emotion work performed by male partners predicted marital well-being for women (Pedersen, 2017). Not only does male partners' share of



childcare contribute to women's relationship satisfaction, but the quality of engagement in child care is predictive as well. Both women's and men's marital quality is predicted by women's perception of father - child relationship quality (Galovan et al., 2014). When women's partners were skilled at child care, women reported higher marital satisfaction (Pedersen, 2017). Also, new mothers reported greater relationship satisfaction and fewer negative interactions with their partner when they perceived the division of labor to be fair (Chong & Mickelson, 2016). Consistent with these findings, coprovider couples, who equally share breadwinning responsibility, reported the most equitable division of household labor and the greatest marital satisfaction, demonstrating a link between the two (Helms et al., 2010).

On the other hand, perceived inequity in the division of labor and couple responsibility contributes to relationship dissatisfaction (Chong & Mickelson, 2016; Mikula et al., 2011; Ogolsky et al., 2014). When women perceive inequity in the division of household labor, they also experience increased negative emotions (Lively et al., 2010). This is consistent with equity theory demonstrating that those who under benefit from the relationship experience adverse emotions (Lively et al., 2010). Perceptions of the unequal division of labor can increase negative interactions with one's partner and decrease relationship satisfaction (Mikula et al., 2011; Chong & Mickelson, 2016). One study demonstrated that women who perform the majority of housework experience less relationship satisfaction than women with an equal family work distribution with their partners (Ogolsky et al., 2014). Women also experience less marital quality when they believed in an equal division of household labor, but perceived inequity in the actual division, thus supporting the idea that as women perceive inconsistency between the belief and behavior of family work distributions their relationship satisfaction decreases (Ogolsky et al., 2014).

**Communication.** Research suggests that effective communication also contributes to relationship satisfaction. Constructive communication is associated positively with marital satisfaction (Carroll et al, 2013). In dating couples, collaborative communication efficiency and self-reported problem-solving skills were independently and together associated with relationship satisfaction (Bannon et al., 2020). A longitudinal study on relationship satisfaction found that women's positive communication was positively correlated with their relationship satisfaction at the beginning of their marriage and 10 years later (Ruffieux et al., 2014).

However, negative communication contributes to negative relationship effects. A study on premarital couples found that negative communication between the couple was correlated with later divorce and distress (Markman et al., 2010). In married couples, negative communication from husbands was associated with wives disengaging from their husbands (Barry et al., 2019). Disengaged communication mediated the relationship between individuals' depressive symptoms and lower relationship satisfaction as well as lower relationship satisfaction and higher depressive symptoms (Barry et al., 2019). Communication problems have been one of the most common reported reasons for divorce by both women and men (Hawkins et al., 2010).

Women's ability to communicate about their needs affects their household work distribution and relationship satisfaction (Carlson et al., 2020). In a study examining the division of housework, communication, and relationship satisfaction, partner communication linked the division of housework to relationship satisfaction. The partner's gender affected this relationship (Carlson et al., 2020). While women's communication quality was not associated with their relationship satisfaction, their partner's communication quality was related to satisfaction (Carlson et al., 2020). Women's communication quality shaped their household work

distribution, while their partner's communication quality determined whether women perceived equity and felt satisfied within their relationship (Carlson et al., 2020). This study demonstrated the importance of women's ability to communicate in determining the division of labor.

Partner communication further affects family work distribution in that conflict mediated the relationship between partner support and relationship satisfaction (Cramer, 2006), suggesting that relationship satisfaction may depend upon partners being supportive and dealing with conflict constructively (Cramer, 2006). Women's satisfaction increased when they improved their ability to engage in conflict constructively (Babcock et al, 2013). When women were taught a combination of friendship enhancement and conflict management with their partners, their relationship satisfaction improved greatly. For male partners, however, friendship enhancement alone demonstrated sufficient improvements in their relationship satisfaction (Babcock et al., 2013). This finding is consistent with the results of another study examining partner communication and related to the perception that women want to talk about relationship issues while men typically withdraw (Afifi et al., 2012). After observing couples engage in conflict-inducing conversations the researchers found that when women perceived their partner's avoidance during these interactions, they felt dissatisfied in their relationship after the conversation and one week later (Afifi et al., 2012). This demonstrated women's high standards for open communication in their relationship; when their standards were not met by their partners, women experienced relationship dissatisfaction.

Communication strategies also affect women's relationships. A study on effective communication strategies for couples found that direct communication strategies compared with positive-indirect strategies were perceived as unsuccessful in promoting change for women and their partners (Overall et al., 2009). However, in regards to actual change, direct communication

strategies were associated with greater change as reported by male partners and perceived by women (Overall et al., 2009). Indirect strategies produced little to no change (Overall et al., 2009). Women who were more direct in their communication about housework and limits were more successful in achieving the desired outcome and greater satisfaction with the arrangement (Miller & Carlson, 2016). A similar study found that active voice, defined as “constructive active behaviors such as attempting to improve conditions by discussing problems, suggesting solution, and altering problematic behavior” was received more positively by the opposite partner and improved relationship functioning (Overall et al., 2010). Extensive research on couple relationships supported this finding and encouraged couples in conflict to clearly express their specific and explicit positive needs (Gottman, 2004). Women who practice direct and assertive forms of communication may be more satisfied in their relationship in the long-term than women who communicate indirectly about their needs.

### **Interventions that Improve Knowledge and Confidence**

Past research on interventions that improve college student’s knowledge and confidence was used to guide this study and proposed intervention. The STOP Dating Violence video intervention was designed to educate college students about effective dating violence bystander interventions. (Herman & O’Brien, 2020; O’Brien et al., 2019). Two studies investigated whether an online intervention teaching students to identify situations that involve dating and containing concise steps for how to safely intervene would lead to an improvement in knowledge about bystander interventions. Results supported this hypothesis; participants in the online intervention exhibited greater knowledge about bystander interventions when compared to the other conditions (Herman & O’Brien, 2020; O’Brien et al., 2019).

Similarly, another intervention (CARES) used three of Bandura's four major sources of self-efficacy to educate college students about grief and how to support grieving peers (Hill & O'Brien, 2021). The intervention improved college students' knowledge, skills, and confidence in communicating with bereaved peers (Hill & O'Brien, 2021). Another intervention, targeting college women, used Bandura's four major sources of efficacy information to increase women's confidence and interests in what are considered "male domains/careers" (Betz & Schifano, 2000). The intervention was successful at increasing college women's "Realistic" confidence (confidence in their ability to perform traditionally male-typed tasks; Betz & Schifano, 2000).

### **Existing Relationship Interventions**

Numerous online and in-person relationship interventions have been developed to improve relationship functioning, however only 27.6% of recently married couples participate in some kind of marriage or relationship intervention before or after getting married (Duncan, 2018).

**In-person.** Many in-person interventions have been created to educate and train couples and individuals dealing with relationship issues on practices to improve relationship functioning and satisfaction. Gottman, a well-known researcher and clinician in psychology, has done extensive work on marital relationships (Babcock et al., 2013; Gottman et al., 2014; Gottman, 2004; Gottman, 1994; Gottman & Krokoff, 1989). Gottman developed a therapeutic framework for couples counseling called the Gottman Method (Gottman et al., 2014). The Gottman Method has informed the development of couple's workshops to improve relationships (Gottman et al., 2014). One workshop is The Art and Science of Love (ASL) and is divided into two parts (Gottman et al., 2014; The Gottman Institute, 2021). Each part is a two-day workshop for couples to learn how to build friendship and intimacy as well as regulate conflict (Gottman et al., 2014). Couples learned about the Sound Relationship House theory and how to build healthy,

secure relationships (Babcock et al., 2013; Gottman et al., 2014). Workshop leaders educated couples on sharing admiration for one another, turning toward rather than away to build emotional connection, and tools for effective couple communication (Gottman et al., 2014). Couples practiced these skills through interactive exercises, role-plays, and presentations guided by workshop leaders (Gottman et al., 2014). This workshop demonstrated positive effects on marital satisfaction, friendship quality, and conflict for a sample of distressed couples (Babcock et al., 2013).

While Gottman's workshop was a significant addition to existing empirically based relationship interventions, the research and subsequent workshop focused solely on couples. Single individuals also may benefit from learning knowledge and skills related to how to build healthy, secure relationships before they start dating or make long-term commitments in a relationship. Workshop participation initially required in-person participation from couples, yet has evolved into more accessible formats such as an online training course and a virtual event (due to the Covid-19 pandemic). The workshop also requires couples to commit to two days of sessions as well as an expensive fee of up to \$599 (The Gottman Institute, 2021). These requirements limit the workshop's accessibility to those with limited access to resources needed to attend and pay for such a course, especially those who would need to pay for childcare or have to take off from work to attend the workshop.

The Fatherhood Relationship and Marriage Education (FRAME) is another intervention specifically designed for mothers and fathers in low-income families that included relationship education, training on managing stress, as well as training on child-centered parenting (Wadsworth et al., 2011). Participants in the FRAME program demonstrated lower financial stress, decreases in negative coping behaviors and responses, and improvements in problem

solving (Wadsworth et al., 2011). Importantly, meals and child care stipends were provided to reduce the burden on participants (Wadsworth, et al., 2011). However, the 14-hour long program over a series of weeks in a workshop setting makes it less accessible as participants would have to account for transportation and make a large time commitment. FRAME also is a couples-based program, which does not target individuals or people who have not made long-term relationship commitments.

To intervene with couples before they married, the Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program (PREP) was developed. PREP was designed for couples planning for marriage to target communication and problem solving skills to improve marital functioning and prevent problems from arising (Markman et al., 1993). The intervention consisted of 5 hours of material that was completed over a number of sessions in small groups of 3 to 5 couples (Markman et al., 1993). Participants were taught practical skills like active listening and expressive speaking techniques and given homework between sessions to practice the material (Markman et al., 1993). Four years later, participants in the intervention demonstrated use of the communication and problem solving skills that correlated with less conflict, negative affect, withdrawal, and negative communication (Markman et al., 1993). While PREP demonstrated some positive outcomes for participating couples, it was designed for couples specifically, which does not reach individuals before they are in a committed relationship. It also may be difficult to have both partners commit to participating in the intervention given the intensive time commitment.

One study researched divorced individuals who had participated in PREP to further evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention. Some of the recommendations from the participants included earlier intervention before making a marital commitment as it would be

easier to break up and support for implementing skills outside of educational setting (Scott et al., 2013). Many participants also felt that even though they discussed their expectations for marriage in the intervention, they lacked important knowledge about the typical course of events in marriage (Scott et al., 2013). Participants responded that communication and conflict management skills were not taught in real-life situations as another limitation of the intervention (Scott et al., 2013). Interestingly, a majority of the participants expressed a desire for having known more about their partner before marrying them and reported feeling that they had married too young (Scott et al. 2013). A prevention strategy that participants voiced, related to these concerns, was to reach people before they make a commitment to marry, which makes it hard to reconsider one's plans (Scott et al., 2013).

PREPARE/ENRICH is another couple program designed to prevent relationship dissolution by teaching couples relationship skills to effectively deal with current or future problems (Olson-Sigg & Olson, 2011). While the program was initially designed for premarital couples, newer versions are designed for cohabitating, engaged, or married couples (Olson-Sigg & Olson, 2011). The first component of the program was the couple inventory which is an extensive assessment of the couple's personality, interpersonal dynamics, family system, relationship strengths, and salient stressors (Olson-Sigg & Olson, 2011). The second component involved a trained counselor that guided the couple through a series of exercises where the couple learned and practiced relationship skills (Knutson & Olson, 2003). Couples who participated in the PREPARE/ENRICH program demonstrated improved relationship satisfaction and skills (Knutson & Olson, 2003). While PREPARE/ENRICH successfully improved couples' relationship skills and satisfaction, this program is time intensive and solely couples based. The program takes about 16 hours to complete. PREPARE/ENRICH is also designed specifically for



couples, leaving out individuals who could benefit from learning relationship skills before entering into a committed relationship.

Getting the Love You Want (GTLYW) is a couples workshop designed to improve couple communication skills, empathy, and increase positive and decrease negative behaviors (Schmidt et al., 2016). The workshop used the Couples Dialogue to teach listening intently, mirroring the partner's words, validating the partner's message, and empathizing. Unique to the GTLYW Workshop is the emphasis on how childhood development affects current relationships. Over the course of the workshop, relationship satisfaction increased, use of negative communication patterns decreased, and use of communication patterns involving positive interactions increased (Schmidt et al., 2016). However, the improvements from participation in the GTLYW Workshop were time limited. While the program demonstrated positive effects during and immediately following the workshop, these benefits were not maintained three months later (Schmidt et al., 2016). In addition to the unsuccessful long-term effects, the workshop is time intensive requiring couples to attend three days of in-person group meetings, with a total of 15 to 20 hours of in-person participation (Schmidt et al., 2016). Last, the program is not accessible to young and single college undergraduates.

While most of the in-person relationship interventions are designed for couples, Within My Reach is a program that worked to address the gap in research on effective interventions that targeted individuals. The individual-oriented relationship education program taught participants how to cultivate healthy relationships, leave damaging relationships, and choose partners wisely (Rhoades & Stanley, 2011). Participants demonstrated increases in relationship skills and knowledge including better communication and conflict management (Rhoades & Stanley, 2011). The program requires 15 hours of coursework including time for group interaction,

practicing skills, and personal reflection (Rhoades & Stanley, 2011). However, the class setting, in-person attendance requirement, and lengthy process make the intervention less accessible for many and especially to a large population like college undergraduates.

**Online.** Online relationship interventions have become increasingly available for couples and individuals to deal with current issues in their relationship and improve relationship functioning and satisfaction. A computer-based intervention based on the PREP program (i.e., ePREP) was created for college students (Braithwaite & Fincham, 2007). The one hour intervention seeks to reduce symptoms of depression and anxiety, and improve relationship functioning (Braithwaite & Fincham, 2007). The ePREP curriculum targets risk factors within relationships by teaching participants communication and problem-solving skills (Braithwaite & Fincham, 2007). Participants reported a reduction in symptoms of depression and anxiety as well as improved relationship functioning (Braithwaite & Fincham, 2007). Those who participated in the ePREP intervention however, demonstrated no different results than who participated in the depression and anxiety focused computer-based preventive intervention (Braithwaite & Fincham, 2007). The presenting material of ePREP was limited (including only written text and picture without any audio or videos; Braithwaite & Fincham, 2007). Participants also had to have been or be in a relationship for at least four months to participate (Braithwaite & Fincham, 2007), which prevented the program from reaching single people, specifically college students.

Another program was designed to improve couple's satisfaction called OurRelationship couple program (OR-C). This eight-hour online program required couples to complete activities throughout the course and participate in four 15-minute calls with a staff member to check in on their progress (Doss et al., 2016). Participants who completed the program reported greater relationship satisfaction than other types of primary prevention interventions including in-person

and virtual programs (Doss et al., 2016). Limitations of the program include the fee participants were required to pay prior to completing the program as well as the lengthy process that requires both couple members to participate. OR-C, while taking a couple-based approach, fails to reach individuals who have not made serious relationship commitments.

To account for this limitation, OurRelationship individual program (OR-I) was created. OR-I is a 4-to-6-hour online program designed for individuals developed from the couple program and included three online calls with a staff member about the program specifically (Doss et al., 2016). The individual program addresses issues including communication problems, emotional distance, a lack of trust or infidelity, fights about money or parenting, and difficulty in recovering from painful past events (Our Relationship, 2020). Participants reported higher quality of life and reduced relationship negatives during treatment (Nowlan, 2016). OR-I is not easily accessible due to a \$50 fee for the self-guided course and \$150 for the coach instructed course (Our Relationship, 2020). Also, while the OR-I is designed for individuals, it assumes participants are in a relationship. OR-I does not target young individuals before they are in a relationship to learn how to work on relationship issues before they arise. The focus of OR-I is less on preventing individuals from being in an unhealthy relationship, but more about how to work on unhealthy behaviors in a relationship.

In summary, current relationship interventions involve a lengthy process, often require a fee, and mainly target couples with a focus on decreasing unhealthy behaviors in a relationship rather than preventing individuals from being in an unhealthy relationship. This study addresses these limitations by creating an intervention that educates college women about family work distribution, teaches college women about effective communication in a romantic relationship,

educates college women about a model of effective communication, and increases college women's confidence in communicating effectively with their future partner.

### **Study Hypotheses**

The hypotheses were as follows:

H1: Participants who completed the intervention, compared to participants who read a partial intervention script (partial script condition) and those in a no-intervention control condition, would have the most knowledge about family work distribution.

H2: Participants who completed the intervention, compared to participants who read a partial intervention script (partial script condition) and those in a no-intervention control condition, would have the most knowledge about effective communication with a partner.

H3: Participants who completed the intervention, compared to participants who read a partial intervention script (partial script condition) and those in a no-intervention control condition, would have the most knowledge about the PARTNERS Communication Model.

H4: Participants who completed the intervention, compared to participants who read a partial intervention script (partial script condition) and those in a no-intervention control condition, would have the most confidence in their ability to communicate with their future partner.

## Appendix B

### Script for the PARTNERS Intervention

Hello! We are researchers at the University of Maryland. We want to educate young women about factors related to satisfaction in heterosexual relationships and how to communicate effectively with a current or future partner. By the end of this video, you will learn about the PARTNERS model and specific skills for how to communicate in romantic relationships.

Why is women's relationship satisfaction important?

- Women typically report lower relationship satisfaction than men.
- One study found that only around half of women were "very happy" in their marriages.
- More women consider leaving their romantic relationships than men.
- Most importantly, being dissatisfied in romantic relationships is strongly linked to depressive symptoms in women.

What relates to relationship satisfaction?

- Research suggests that communication and family work distribution are two key factors related to women's satisfaction in romantic relationships.

First, let's talk about COMMUNICATION.

- Many researchers consider healthy communication (defined as sharing thoughts and feelings in a positive way) as essential to a successful romantic relationship.
- Women often put more emphasis on open communication in their relationships than men.
- Negative communication in couples is related to women feeling depressed and dissatisfied - in fact, communication problems are a leading reason for divorce.
- On the other hand, positive couple communication and being able to deal with conflict in constructive ways improves relationship satisfaction for women.
  
- It's important to note that women who communicate directly are more successful in getting their needs met and feel more satisfied.
- Also, women who have male partners who communicate well have more equitable relationships and greater relationship satisfaction.
  
- When you think about your current or future relationship, it is helpful to ask yourself the following questions: Is your partner someone who...
  - You can trust and count on to be there for you?
  - Is easy to talk to about your thoughts, feelings and concerns?
  - Really listens to you when you are speaking?
  - Cares about your feelings?
  - Can work through conflict and relationship problems constructively? and
  - Is strongly committed to healthy communication in your romantic relationship?

Second, equally important to women's satisfaction in their relationships is FAMILY WORK DISTRIBUTION.

- Family work distribution is defined as the way in which couples share housework and childcare.
- You may think that it is too early to be thinking about family work distribution, but the skills that you learn today may be really useful in a current or future relationship.
- We know from research that women typically do the majority of family work in their relationships.
  - On an average day, women do more housework, more childcare, more food preparation, and more cleanup than their male partners.
  - Also, coordinating who will complete the household tasks often falls to the woman.
- This unequal work distribution often leaves women feeling dissatisfied.
  - When the work distribution with their partners is not fair, women typically experience distress, negative interactions with their partners, and low marital quality.
- On the other hand, women feel greater relationship satisfaction when their work distribution is equal to that of their partner.
  - As men do housework and are involved in raising their children - and do these well, women's relationship satisfaction increases.
- To summarize, one key to a satisfying romantic relationship is sharing the housework and childcare so that no one is responsible for doing more or directing what needs to be done; when both partners contribute equally, women are more satisfied.
- When you think about your current or future relationship, it is helpful to ask yourself the following questions: Is your partner someone who...
  - Believes that sharing housework and childcare responsibilities is important?
  - Is committed to dividing housework and childcare equally?
  - Would take the initiative to do their share of the family work without being asked?
  - Wants a true partnership where the woman is not expected to do more than her share of the family work?
  - Is devoted to being an actively involved parent (if you decide to raise children)? and
  - Is committed to doing their part to have a genuinely loving, equal and satisfying relationship?

To summarize, healthy communication and equal family work distribution are strongly related to being happy and satisfied in a romantic relationship. This is especially important if the couple decides to raise children. Women who have more equal family work distributions and a relationship where partners communicate well about their thoughts, feelings and concerns are much more likely to be satisfied in their relationship and less likely to be depressed.

Now, we are going to share the PARTNERS Communication Model to help you learn skills for healthy communication in romantic relationships. These skills are important for a satisfying and rewarding relationship. This model was developed based on research conducted by scholars who study relationship functioning. The following skills will help you discuss areas of concern in a productive and healthy way. Conflict in relationships is natural and learning how to directly communicate about important issues could increase your relationship satisfaction.

- First, P - PREPARE
  - Get ready - Think about the most important things you want to communicate.
  - Choose a good time and place for the conversation.
- Second, A - ATTEND TO HOW YOU WILL TALK ABOUT YOUR CONCERNS
  - Avoid criticizing or blaming your partner.
  - Be empathic - understanding both perspectives is important in couple communication.
- Third, R - REMEMBER TO POINT OUT POSITIVES
  - Stating what you appreciate and love about your partner can be really helpful when you begin an important conversation.
  - You might say, “I really appreciate how you are always willing to talk with me about my concerns.”
- Fourth, T - TALK WITH YOUR PARTNER AND USE “I” STATEMENTS
  - Begin with “I” and share a feeling, then say what contributes to your feeling that way.
  - For example, you could say:
    - I feel frustrated when you don’t do your share around our apartment ....
    - I feel sad when you don’t support me... or
    - I feel hurt when you won’t talk to me when I’m upset...
  - It’s helpful to use "I" statements whenever communicating your thoughts, feelings or needs to your partner.
  - When discussing your desired changes, be sure to directly state what **you** need and focus on the current issue.
    - Bringing up unrelated past concerns can be unproductive.
  - Also, having these talks throughout the relationship as issues emerge is important - bringing a long list of complaints at one time can make it difficult to address the most pressing concern.
- Fifth, N - NOW, REALLY LISTEN TO EACH OTHER
  - Both partners should give each other their full attention - no distractions or phones.
  - Take turns speaking and really listening to what each person has to say.
  - Remember to listen to understand, avoiding judgment or defensiveness.
  - It’s often helpful to paraphrase or reflect back your partner's thoughts and feelings.

- For example, after listening to you, your partner might say, “I hear that it’s frustrating when I leave my dishes in the sink all day” or “I hear that it’s irritating when I check my phone during important conversations”.
- If needed, you and your partner can restate your points to clear up any confusion.
- It is best to postpone problem solving until both partners can restate the most important points.
- Sixth, E - ENGAGE IN ACTION PLANNING TO IMPROVE THE RELATIONSHIP
  - Ideally, both partners will express a commitment to work on improving the relationship.
  - Then, you can work together to develop an action plan for positive change.
    - First, explicitly name what needs to change
    - Second, try to agree on what will be changed and how to make these changes
    - Third, set specific and measurable goals (for example, “we will take turns making dinner each night” or... “at the end of each day, we will spend at least 30 minutes together”)
    - Fourth, take action to meet your goals
  - Remember to return to the action plan over time and check to make sure that the goals have been met.
- Seventh, R - REMEMBER THAT WOMEN OFTEN DO MORE
  - As you negotiate in your romantic relationship, it is important to remember that women in heterosexual relationships often do more work and initiate more conversations related to the relationship.
  - It’s important that both partners contribute equitably as women are more happy and satisfied in equal relationships.
- Eighth, S - SPEAK UP TO ENSURE YOUR NEEDS ARE MET
  - It is essential that you continue to advocate for what you need in your relationship.
  - Pay careful attention if your partner is not listening, unwilling to change their behaviors, or not committed to improving the relationship.
  - Most of us fall in love with several people throughout our lives, who you select for your forever partner is a really important choice.
  - Current behaviors likely continue over time so if a partner is not meeting your hopes or expectations - and is unwilling to work to improve the relationship, it is possible that they might not be right for you.



- It is important to note that demeaning, controlling, monitoring, threatening, aggressive, or really jealous or possessive behaviors are signs of an unhealthy or abusive relationship. If you notice these behaviors, this website might be helpful: [loveisrespect.org](http://loveisrespect.org).

Now, we will provide the opportunity for you to think about how you might use the PARTNERS Communication Model.

First, think about how you might use the PARTNERS Communication Model if you feel like your partner is not doing their share with regard to cleaning the bathroom?

- How might you initiate a conversation about this concern?
- What specifically would you say to your partner?
- What specific plans for changes might emerge from this conversation?

Now, we will show you how we might apply the PARTNERS Communication Model to this example.

First, the acronym PARTNERS may help you remember the steps in the model.

- After choosing the most important thing you want to communicate as well as a good time and place to talk, start the conversation. Do not criticize or blame your partner - start with something positive.

YOU: Do you have a few minutes to talk? I've been thinking more about how regularly we clean our bathroom and wanted to talk to you about it.

PARTNER: Okay, sure

YOU: Thanks - I know we both do not like to talk about chores. I really appreciate how you are always willing to talk about my concerns.

YOU: I feel frustrated because the bathroom is really dirty and I was the last to clean it. I know that we have different expectations when it comes to how often we clean the bathroom. I prefer for the bathroom to be cleaned once a week and we alternate who cleans it. What do you think?

PARTNER: I really don't see why we would need to clean it each week, it doesn't get that dirty. One of us can just clean it whenever it really needs it.

YOU: I hear you saying that the bathroom seems clean enough and that we don't need a plan. That seems pretty vague to me. I feel like the bathroom gets pretty dirty over one week. I like to keep it clean, but because we don't agree on when it needs to be cleaned and when it doesn't, I end up having to clean it every week.

PARTNER: It's not like you *have* to clean it every week. Regular bathroom cleaning just doesn't seem necessary and there is always so much going on, it's just not a priority. But I know you're saying that a clean bathroom is one of your priorities and it's frustrating when I don't share this chore with you.

YOU: Yeah that's exactly right. So let's come up with a plan for how to work on this together.

PARTNER: Okay I can give it a try since it is so important to you.

YOU: I really need for us to share this responsibility. Could you start cleaning the bathroom every other week?

YOUR PARTNER: I can start rotating in, beginning this week.

As you negotiate how to make changes in your relationship remember that couples are more satisfied in *equal* relationships and that women typically do more.

Also, remember that it is important to continue to advocate for what you need in your relationship as one conversation often does not result in the desired change. Know that giving in and doing everything yourself, although it might seem easier in the moment, can lead to relationship dissatisfaction and even depression.

Now, let's try another example. How might you apply the PARTNERS Communication Model when you and your partner need to search for a new apartment, but he would rather play video games than contribute to the apartment search?

- How might you initiate the conversation?
- What specifically would you say about this concern?
- What specific plans for changes might you hope would emerge from this conversation?

After choosing the most important thing you want to communicate, as well as a good time and place to talk, initiate the conversation. Do not criticize or blame your partner - start with something positive.

YOU: Do you have some time to talk today? I'd like to talk about how we might spend some time together searching for a new apartment.

PARTNER: Okay yeah, I can talk now

YOU: I really love your input - you have such a good eye for design.

YOU: I feel upset when you choose to play video games instead of contributing to our apartment search. I feel like you're not appreciating all the time I'm putting into this.

PARTNER: I didn't know you felt that way...You know that playing video games is my way of relaxing.

YOU: I know that playing video games is relaxing and fun for you. I like that we have things we each enjoy doing on our own. Last night, I felt that when I wanted to spend time searching for apartments with you, you chose to play video games. I don't want to force you to search for a new place, but I feel hurt thinking you'd rather let me do all the work while you play video games.

PARTNER: I think I know what you mean about last night and I can see how it would feel bad if I'm playing video games instead of contributing to the apartment search.

YOU: Yes, I want to spend time looking for a new place with you, and not feel like I have to compete with video games.

PARTNER: I don't want you to feel that way. I like playing video games, and I do want to look for a new place with you.

YOU: I would like to make a plan for how we can set aside regular time for us to spend looking for a new apartment together.

PARTNER: I'm not sure that I want to be that scheduled and I also don't want to stop playing. I'm not sure about the plan idea - what are you suggesting?

YOU: How about we take an hour searching for places online after dinner together each night, and spend all of Saturday afternoon touring the places we find?

PARTNER: How about a half hour? I really think we could get a lot done in 30 minutes.

YOU: Yeah, that would probably work - let's try this plan and see how it goes.

YOU: I would really appreciate you remembering this plan and sometimes initiating apartment searching so I don't have to remind you and tell you to spend time with me looking for a new place, ok?

PARTNER: Of course - seems fair.

YOU: Okay great, let's start with this plan tonight. I'm excited for us to find a new apartment together!

As you negotiate how to make changes in your relationship remember that couples are more satisfied in *equal* relationships and that women typically do more.

It is important to continue to advocate for what you need in your relationship as one conversation often does not result in the desired change. Expressing your needs in a relationship is essential and can lead to satisfaction for both you and your partner. Also, remember that giving in and doing everything yourself or being put in the position of having to remind your partner about what they need to do can feel really bad and may lead to relationship dissatisfaction and even depression. If a partner is not meeting your needs, hopes or expectations - and is unwilling to work to improve the relationship - they might not be right for you.

To summarize, **communication and family work distribution** are really important with regard to being happy and satisfied in a romantic relationship. Remember that heterosexual women who have more equal family work distribution and a relationship where partners communicate effectively about their thoughts, feelings and concerns are more likely to be satisfied in their relationship and less likely to be depressed.

Before we end, we would like to share a link for the PARTNERS Communication Model infographic and 12 questions that you might want to ask a future partner to see if they are right for you.

**We wish you the best in your future relationships!**

Appendix C

INFO GRAPHIC ON THE PARTNERS INTERVENTION

**PARTNERS Communication Model**  
Trovato & O'Brien, 2021

- PREPARE (P)**  
 Get ready - Think about the most important things you want to communicate  
 Choose a good time and place for the conversation
- ATTEND TO HOW YOU WILL TALK ABOUT YOUR CONCERNS (A)**  
 Avoid criticizing or blaming your partner  
 Be empathic - understanding both perspectives is important
- REMEMBER TO POINT OUT POSITIVES (R)**  
 State what you appreciate and love about your partner  
 You might say, "I really appreciate how you are always willing to talk with me about my concerns"
- TALK TOGETHER & USE "I" STATEMENTS (T)**  
 Use "I" statements to share your thoughts, feelings, or needs  
 Directly state what you need  
 Focus on the current issue, don't bring up a long list of complaints  
 Have these talks throughout the relationship as issues emerge
- NOW, REALLY LISTEN TO EACH OTHER (N)**  
 Give each other your full attention  
 Take turns speaking and listening  
 Avoid judgment or defensiveness  
 Postpone problem solving until partners can restate main points
- ENGAGE IN ACTION PLANNING (E)**  
 Explicitly name what needs to change  
 Try to agree on what to change and how to make these changes  
 Set specific and measurable goals and take action to meet goals
- REMEMBER THAT WOMEN OFTEN DO MORE (R)**  
 Women often do more family work  
 Both partners need to do their share  
 Women are more happy and satisfied in equal relationships
- SPEAK UP (S)**  
 Continue to advocate for your needs in your relationship  
 Choose your forever partner carefully  
 If a partner is hurtful, unwilling to do their share or work to improve the relationship, they might not be right for you  
 You deserve a happy and satisfying relationship!

## 12 Ways to Know Whether Your Partner Is Right for You

When you think about your current or future relationship, ask yourself

**Is your partner someone who...**

- 1 You can trust and count on to be there for you?
- 2 Is easy to talk to about your thoughts, feelings and concerns?
- 3 Really listens to you when you are speaking?
- 4 Cares about your feelings?
- 5 Can work through conflict and relationship problems constructively?
- 6 Is strongly committed to healthy communication in your romantic relationship?
- 7 Believes that sharing housework and childcare responsibilities is important?
- 8 Is committed to dividing housework and childcare equally?
- 9 Would take the initiative to do their share of the family work without being asked?
- 10 Wants a true partnership where the woman is not expected to do more than her share of the family work?
- 11 Is devoted to being an actively involved parent (if you decide to raise children)?
- 12 Is committed to doing their part to have a genuinely loving, equal and satisfying relationship?

## Appendix D

### Partial Intervention Script

Hello! We are researchers at the University of Maryland. We want to educate young women about factors related to satisfaction in heterosexual relationships and how to communicate effectively with a current or future partner. By the end of this video, you will learn about the PARTNERS Model and specific skills for how to communicate in romantic relationships.

- Women typically report lower relationship satisfaction than men.
- One study found that only around half of women were “very happy” in their marriages.
- More women consider leaving their romantic relationships than men.
- Most importantly, being dissatisfied in romantic relationships is strongly linked to depressive symptoms in women.

Research suggests that communication and family work distribution are two key factors related to women’s satisfaction in romantic relationships.

First, let’s talk about communication.

- Many researchers consider healthy communication (defined as sharing thoughts and feelings in a positive way) as essential to a successful romantic relationship.
- Women often put more emphasis on open communication in their relationships than men.
- Negative communication in couples is related to women feeling depressed and dissatisfied - in fact, communication problems are a leading reason for divorce.
- On the other hand, positive couple communication and being able to deal with conflict in constructive ways improves relationship satisfaction for women.
  
- It’s important to note that women who communicate directly are more successful in getting their needs met and feel more satisfied.
- Also, women who have male partners who communicate well have more equitable relationships and greater relationship satisfaction.

Second, equally important to women’s satisfaction in their relationships is family work distribution.

- Family work distribution is defined as the way in which couples share housework and childcare.
- You may think that it is too early to be thinking about family work distribution, but the skills that you learn today may be really useful in a current or future relationship.
  
- We know from research that women typically do the majority of family work in their relationships.
  - On an average day, women do more housework, more childcare, more food preparation, and more cleanup than their male partners.
  - Also, coordinating who will complete the household tasks often falls to the woman.

- This unequal work distribution often leaves women feeling dissatisfied.
  - When the work distribution with their partners is not fair, women typically experience distress, negative interactions with their partners, and low marital quality.
- On the other hand, women feel greater relationship satisfaction when their work distribution is equal to that of their partner.
  - As men do housework and are involved in raising their children - and do these well, women's relationship satisfaction increases.
- To summarize, one key to a satisfying romantic relationship is sharing the housework and childcare so that no one is responsible for doing more or directing what needs to be done; when both partners contribute equally, women are more satisfied.

To summarize, healthy communication and equal family work distribution are strongly related to being happy and satisfied in a romantic relationship. This is especially important if the couple decides to raise children. Women who have more equal family work distributions and a relationship where partners communicate well about their thoughts, feelings and concerns are much more likely to be satisfied in their relationship and less likely to be depressed.

Now, we are going to share the PARTNERS Communication Model to help you learn skills for healthy communication in romantic relationships. These skills are important for a satisfying and rewarding relationship. This model was developed based on research conducted by scholars who study relationship functioning. The following skills will help you discuss areas of concern in a productive and healthy way. Conflict in relationships is natural and learning how to directly communicate about important issues could increase your relationship satisfaction.

#### **First, P - PREPARE**

- Get ready - Think about the most important things you want to communicate.
- Choose a good time and place for the conversation.

#### **Second, A - ATTEND TO HOW YOU WILL TALK ABOUT YOUR CONCERNS**

- Avoid criticizing or blaming your partner.
- Be empathic - understanding both perspectives is important in couple communication.

#### **Third, R - REMEMBER TO POINT OUT POSITIVES**

- Stating what you appreciate and love about your partner can be really helpful when you begin an important conversation.

#### **Fourth, T - TALK WITH YOUR PARTNER AND USE "I" STATEMENTS**

- Begin with "I" and share a feeling, then say what contributes to your feeling that way.
- It's helpful to use "I" statements whenever communicating your thoughts, feelings or needs to your partner.

- When discussing your desired changes, be sure to directly state what **you** need and focus on the current issue.
  - Bringing up unrelated past concerns can be unproductive.
- Also, having these talks throughout the relationship as issues emerge is important - bringing a long list of complaints at one time can make it difficult to address the most pressing concern.

#### **Fifth, N - NOW, REALLY LISTEN TO EACH OTHER**

- Both partners should give each other their full attention - no distractions or phones.
- Take turns speaking and really listening to what each person has to say.
- Remember to listen to understand, avoiding judgment or defensiveness.
- It's often helpful to paraphrase or reflect back your partner's thoughts and feelings.
- If needed, you and your partner can restate your points to clear up any confusion.
- It is best to postpone problem solving until both partners can restate the most important points.

#### **Sixth, E - ENGAGE IN ACTION PLANNING TO IMPROVE THE RELATIONSHIP**

- Ideally, both partners will express a commitment to work on improving the relationship.
- Then, you can work together to develop an action plan for positive change.
  - First, explicitly name what needs to change
  - Second, try to agree on what will be changed and how to make these changes
  - Third, set specific and measurable goals
  - Fourth, take action to meet your goals
- Remember to return to the action plan over time and check to make sure that the goals have been met.

#### **Seventh, R - REMEMBER THAT WOMEN OFTEN DO MORE**

- As you negotiate in your romantic relationship, it is important to remember that women in heterosexual relationships often do more work and initiate more conversations related to the relationship.
- It's important that both partners contribute equitably as women are more happy and satisfied in equal relationships.

#### **Eighth, S - SPEAK UP TO ENSURE YOUR NEEDS ARE MET**

- It is essential that you continue to advocate for what you need in your relationship.



- Pay careful attention if your partner is not listening, unwilling to change their behaviors, or not committed to improving the relationship.
- Most of us fall in love with several people throughout our lives, who you select for your forever partner is a really important choice.
- Current behaviors likely continue over time so if a partner is not meeting your hopes or expectations - and is unwilling to work to improve the relationship, it is possible that they might not be right for you.
- It is important to note that demeaning, controlling, monitoring, threatening, aggressive, or really jealous or possessive behaviors are signs of an unhealthy or abusive relationship. If you notice these behaviors, this website might be helpful: [loveisrespect.org](http://loveisrespect.org).

To summarize, communication and family work distribution are really important with regard to being happy and satisfied in a romantic relationship. Remember that heterosexual women who have more equal family work distribution and a relationship where partners communicate effectively about their thoughts, feelings and concerns are more likely to be satisfied in their relationship and less likely to be depressed.

We wish you the best in your future relationships!

## Appendix E

## Validity Checks and Inclusion Criteria

## Validity Questions

1. Please select “agree” for this item.
  - a. Knowledge about Partner Communication Measure
2. Please select “strongly disagree” for this item
  - a. Self-Efficacy Measure

## Inclusion Questions

1. Are you a woman between the ages of 18 and 22?
  - Yes
  - No
  
2. Are you an undergraduate student at the University of Maryland, College Park?
  - Yes
  - No
  
3. Do you identify as heterosexual (straight)?
  - Yes
  - No





equally with their  
partner.

Family Work Subscale: 8, 9, 11, 14

Communication Subscale: 2, 4, 7, 12

*Note. Items 1, 3, 5, 6, 10, and 13 are filler items taken with permission from Ganginis Del Pino et al. (2013) "The Planning for Career and Family Scale."*

*Note. (\*) Indicates item should be reverse scored.*

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## Appendix G

## FAMILY WORK-RELATED DESIRED PARTNER CHARACTERISTICS

*Please do not look up or ask anyone else for the answer to this item.*

1. What are your top desired characteristics for a romantic partner (list no more than five)?
  - 1.
  - 2.
  - 3.
  - 4.
  - 5.

Rating scale for each characteristic listed
(0) <i>No response</i>
(1) <i>Related to family work</i>
(2) <i>Unrelated response</i>

## Appendix H

## KNOWLEDGE OF FAMILY WORK – QUALITATIVE ASSESSMENT

1. What do you know about family work distribution in a romantic relationship? List three facts.
  - 1.
  - 2.
  - 3.

Rating Scale
(0) <i>Incorrect or irrelevant response</i>
(1) <i>1 correct fact reported</i>
(2) <i>2 correct facts reported</i>
(3) <i>3 correct facts reported</i>
(4) <i>More than 3 correct facts reported</i>

## Appendix I

## COMMUNICATION-RELATED DESIRED PARTNER CHARACTERISTICS

1. What are your top desired characteristics for a romantic partner (list no more than five)?
  - 1.
  - 2.
  - 3.
  - 4.
  - 5.

Rating scale for each characteristic
(0) <i>No response</i>
(1) <i>Related to communication</i>
(2) <i>Unrelated response</i>





- partner’s perspective before sharing my points.
7. The wishes of my partner will not figure into my career plans.
  8. Telling my partner “I feel frustrated when you don’t listen to me” is a helpful way to share a concern. (M)
  9. Pointing out positive characteristics of my partner might seem manipulative if I am asking for changes. (\*)
  10. Direct communication strategies are too assertive. (\*)
  11. I will never change my career plans for a relationship.
  12. In relationships, it is best to just do my part to improve it and not worry about what the other person is doing. (\*)
  13. It is best to express my needs very directly to my partner, even if this is annoying to them.
  14. When my partner is not doing their share of the housework, it is best to gently hint for them to do it. (\*)



24. Women do much more family work in their relationships.



*Note. (M) Next to item indicates item has been modified from O'Brien et al., 2019. Modified with permission. (\*) Indicates items that should be reverse scored.*

*Note. Items 3, 7, 11, 15, 17, and 21 are filler items taken with permission from Ganginis Del Pino et al. (2013) "The Planning for Career and Family Scale." Item 19 is a validity check.*

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## Appendix K

## KNOWLEDGE OF PARTNERS COMMUNICATION MODEL – QUALITATIVE ASSESSMENT

1. Imagine that you are really upset with a future romantic partner because they did something that really hurt you. State specifically what you would do and/or say related to this very upsetting situation.

Rating Scale
(0) <i>Missing or incorrect responses</i>
(1) <i>Reported 0 points consistent with our intervention</i>
(2) <i>Reported 1 points consistent with our intervention</i>
(3) <i>Reported 2 points consistent with our intervention</i>
(4) <i>Reported 3 points consistent with our intervention</i>
(5) <i>Reported 4 points consistent with our intervention</i>
(6) <i>Reported 5 points consistent with our intervention</i>
(7) <i>Reported 6 points consistent with our intervention</i>
(8) <i>Reported 7 points consistent with our intervention</i>
(9) <i>Reported 8 points consistent with our intervention</i>





- |   |                       |                       |                       |                       |                       |                       |
|---|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| 16. Use “I” statements when arguing with my partner.                                | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 17. Express what I appreciate about my partner when I am really mad at them.        | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 18. Use the specific steps in the PARTNERS model when I am arguing with my partner. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

*Note. Item 8 is a validity check.*

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Appendix N

Coding Rubric for QUALITATIVE ASSESSMENT OF PARTNERS INTERVENTION

<p>1. What are your top desired characteristics for a romantic partner (list no more than five)?</p>	
Question	Coding Categories
<p>(0)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● N/A or Blank</li> <li>● Kind</li> <li>● Attractive</li> <li>● Considerate</li> <li>● Smart</li> <li>● Caring</li> <li>● Compassionate</li> <li>● Considerate</li> <li>● Open-minded</li> <li>● Patient</li> <li>● Supportive</li> <li>● Trust/Trustworthiness</li> <li>● Thoughtful/Thoughtfulness</li> <li>● Emotional intelligence</li> <li>● Caring for me and my family</li> <li>● Easy to talk to</li> </ul> <p>(1)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Good listener</li> <li>● Listens to me</li> <li>● Empathetic</li> <li>● Cares about my feelings</li> <li>● Understanding</li> <li>● Someone who respects my needs</li> <li>● Willing to compromise</li> </ul> <p>(2)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Expects an equal relationship</li> <li>● Involved in family work</li> <li>● Involved in housework</li> <li>● Shares family work</li> </ul>	<p>(0) Unrelated Response</p> <p>(1) Related to Communication</p> <p>(2) Related to Family Work</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A real partner</li> </ul>	
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2. What do you know about family work distribution in a romantic relationship?

Question	Coding Categories
<p>(0)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Based on work load / whoever works less</li> <li>○ Men typically earn more</li> <li>○ Women typically earn less than men</li> <li>○ Men have grown in family work in recent years</li> <li>○ Many women choose to be a stay-at-home mom</li> <li>○ Women typically stay-at-home-moms</li> <li>○ Men feel insecure when women out earn them</li> <li>○ Men out earn women</li> <li>○ Men usually work outside the home, typically the providers</li> <li>○ Who makes money in the relationship</li> <li>○ Depends on the couple / Based on the couple's situation</li> <li>○ Based on individual's strengths and weaknesses</li> <li>○ Depending on the amount of work outside the home / career</li> <li>○ Difficult to balance</li> <li>○ Shouldn't feel like a chore</li> </ul> <p>(1)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Women do more</li> <li>○ Family work and housework</li> <li>○ Important for women's relationships</li> <li>○ Women are unhappy if it's unequal/unfair                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ experience distress or lower marital quality</li> <li>○ feel dissatisfied</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p>(0) Incorrect or irrelevant response</p> <p>(1) Correct fact</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Women direct/organize/coordinate chores</li> <li>○ Family work is housework and childcare</li> <li>○ Women are happier/more satisfied if it's equal</li> <li>○ Women are happier when partners are involved in raising children</li> <li>○ Should be shared/equal</li> <li>○ Partners should communicate about this with each other</li> <li>○ Equal</li> </ul>	
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3. Imagine that you are really upset with a future romantic partner because they did something that really hurt you. State specifically what you would do and/or say related to this very upsetting situation.

Question	Coding Categories
<p>Points consistent with our intervention - Steps to use when communicating with a romantic partner</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <b>Prepare -</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Get ready - Think about the most important things you want to communicate</li> <li>○ Choose a good time and place for the conversation</li> <li>○ Asking to have a conversation                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Do you have a minute to talk?</li> </ul> </li> <li>○ This step is not...                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ confronting partner</li> </ul> </li> </ul> </li> <li>○ <b>Attend to How You Will Talk About Your Concerns</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Avoid criticizing or blaming your partner.</li> <li>○ Be empathic - understanding both perspectives is important in couple communication.</li> </ul> </li> <li>○ <b>Remember to Point out Positives</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ State what you appreciate and love about your partner</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(0) 0 points consistent with model</li> <li>(1) 1 point consistent with model</li> <li>(2) 2 points consistent with model</li> <li>(3) 3 points consistent with model</li> <li>(4) 4 points consistent with model</li> <li>(5) 5 points consistent with model</li> <li>(6) 6 points consistent with model</li> <li>(7) 7 points consistent with model</li> <li>(8) 8 points consistent with model</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ You might say, “I really appreciate how you are always willing to talk with me about my concerns”</li><li>○ <b>Talk with Your Partner and Use “I” Statements</b><ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Use “I” statements to share your thoughts, feelings, or needs</li><li>○ Directly state what you need</li><li>○ Focus on the current issue, don’t bring up a long list of complaints</li><li>○ Have these talks throughout the relationship as issues emerge</li></ul></li><li>○ <b>Now, Really Listen to Each Other</b><ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Give each other your full attention</li><li>○ Take turns speaking and listening</li><li>○ Avoid judgment or defensiveness</li><li>○ Postpone problem solving until partners can restate main points</li></ul></li><li>○ <b>Engage in Action Planning to Improve the Relationship</b><ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Explicitly name what needs to change</li><li>○ Try to agree on what to change and how to make these changes</li><li>○ Set specific and measurable goals and take action to meet goals</li></ul></li><li>○ <b>Remember that Women Often Do More</b><ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Women often do more family work</li><li>○ Both partners need to do their share</li><li>○ Women are more happy and satisfied in equal relationships</li></ul></li><li>○ <b>Speak Up to Ensure Your Needs are Met</b></li></ul>	
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Continue to advocate for your needs in your relationship</li><li>○ Choose your forever partner carefully</li><li>○ If a partner is hurtful, unwilling to do their share or work to improve the relationship, they might not be right for you</li><li>○ You deserve a happy and satisfying relationship!</li></ul>	
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## Appendix O

## Demographic Questionnaire

1. What is your age?

\_\_\_\_\_

2. What is your current gender identity?

- Female
- Trans female/trans woman
- Male
- Trans male/trans man
- Genderqueer/Gender non-conforming
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

3. Which of the following best represents your racial and/or ethnic heritage? Select all that apply.

- Black, Afro-Caribbean, African-American
- Latinx, Hispanic-American
- White Non-Hispanic, European-American
- Asian, Asian-American, Pacific Islander
- Native American
- Biracial/multiracial \_\_\_\_\_
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

4. Which of the following best represents your sexual orientation?

- Straight
- Bisexual
- Lesbian, gay
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

5. Have you chosen a major?

- Yes
- No

If YES, what major have you chosen?

\_\_\_\_\_

If NO, what majors are you considering? Indicate 2 potential options.

\_\_\_\_\_

6. Relationship Status:

- Single
- In a relationship
- Engaged
- Married

7. If in a relationship, how long have you been romantically involved with your current partner?

\_\_\_\_\_ Years \_\_\_\_\_ Months

8. What is your generational status?

- 1.5 generation (I was born in another country and moved to the U.S. as a young child)
- First generation (I was born in another country and moved to the U.S. as an adult)
- 2nd generation (I was born in the U.S., but my parent was born in another country)
- 3rd generation (I was born in the U.S and my parent was born in the U.S., but grandparent was born in another country)
- 4th generation or more (I was born in the U.S. and my parents and grandparents were also born in the U.S)

9. How many classes have you taken that focus on romantic relationships

- None
- One
- Two
- Three
- More than three

10. How many classes have you taken that focus on romantic relationships

- None
- One
- Two
- Three
- More than three

11. Would you like to share anything else with the researchers? (Optional)

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12. Would you be willing to be contacted by the researchers for future studies related to romantic relationships?

- Yes
- No