



Strengthening Lesbian Relationships: A Pilot Study of Relationship Education for Female Same-Sex Couples

Sarah Whitton, PhD

University of Cincinnati, Department of Psychology

BACKGROUND

- Stable romantic relationships promote mental and physical health of adults and their children
- Due to lack of legal recognition, low social support, and discrimination, female same-sex couples breakup more quickly and more often than heterosexual married couples.
 - May contribute to health disparities
- Relationship education programs, effective in promoting relationship health and stability in heterosexual couples, are infused with heterosexist bias and don't address unique challenges of same-sex couples.
- **We developed The Strengthening Same Sex Relationships (Triple-S) Program and evaluated its feasibility, acceptability, and efficacy in a small waitlist controlled randomized clinical trial.**

THE TRIPLE-S PROGRAM

A 10 hour program delivered to groups of 4-6 female couples. Eight units (see Table) involving lecture, video demonstration, and skill rehearsal by couples. All materials depict female same-sex couples.

Culturally Sensitive Adaptations of:	New Units:
Communication Skills Training	Coping with Discrimination and Stress
Conflict Resolution	Building a Social Support Network
Education about Common Relationship Pitfalls	Negotiating Expectations (outness; children)
Enhancing Positive Connections	Emotional Intimacy



METHOD

DESIGN: 40 female same-sex couples randomized to immediate treatment or waitlist condition

- Waitlist group receives program after 4 week waiting period
- At intake, post-waitlist, post-program, and 3 month follow-up, assessed:
 - Positive and negative couple communication (1-7 scale)
 - Demand-withdraw conflict patterns (1-45 scale)
 - Stress (1-4 scale)
 - Social Support (1-7 scale)
 - Relationship Quality (0-36 scale)

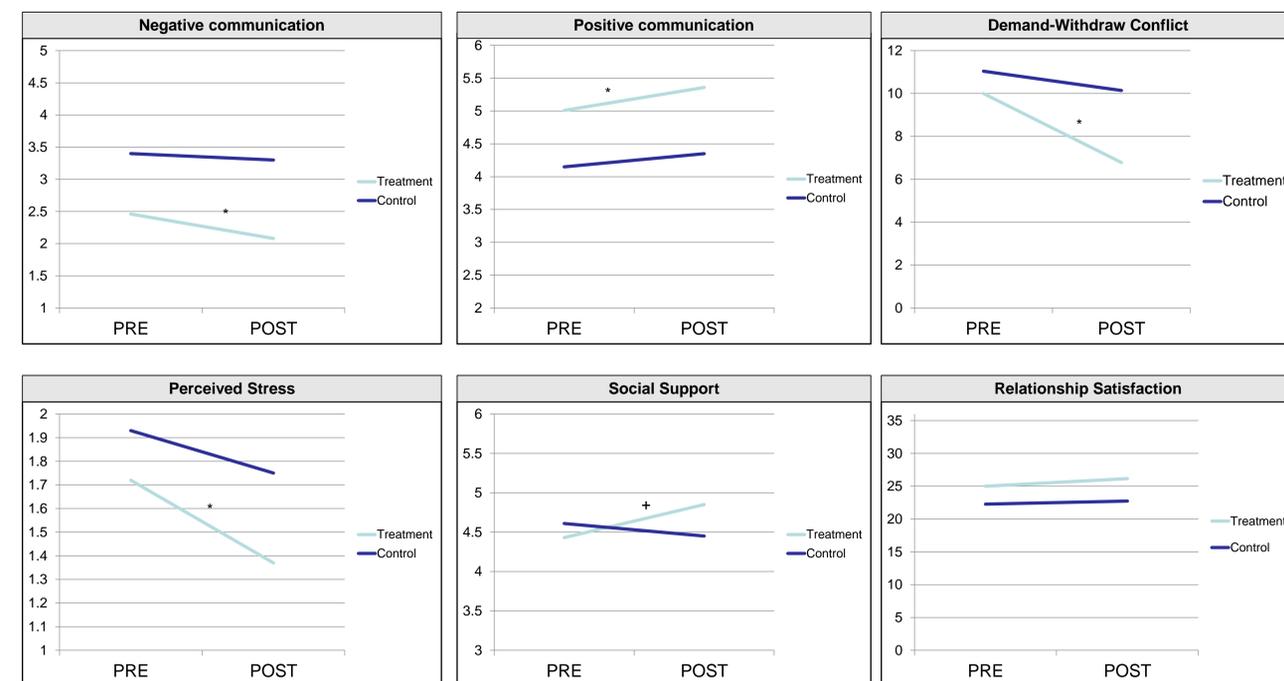
SAMPLE TO DATE: 20 couples

- Immediate treatment (n = 9), Waitlist (n = 11)
- Age: M = 40 (range: 23-75 years)
- 75% White, 10% Black, 12% Multiracial
- Relationship length: M = 7.2 years (range: 7 months- 22 years)
- 20% legally married; 12.5% social ceremony
- 65% had children (13% from current relationship; 52% from past)

RESULTS OF PILOT STUDY

PROGRAM EFFECTS COMPARED TO WAITLIST (see Figures 1-6):

- Dependent Samples t-test showed that participants in the immediate treatment group showed significant improvements in positive and negative communication, demand-withdraw conflict, and stress; marginal increases in social support, but no change in satisfaction.
- Repeated Measures ANOVAs (time = repeated measure, condition= between-subject factor) revealed that these improvements were significantly greater than those in the waitlist control for negative communication and demand-withdraw conflict (significant time*condition interactions).



FOLLOW-UP: Treatment gains in communication and conflict were maintained at 3-month follow-up

TREATMENT ACCEPTABILITY: Program Satisfaction Ratings were high (M = 6.94 on a 1-8 scale)

DISCUSSION AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

- Results suggest that the newly developed culturally sensitive relationship education program for female same-sex couples (SSSR) shows feasibility and acceptability. Couples were interested in participating, generally attended all sessions, and were highly satisfied with the program.
- Even in this small initial sample, there were significant program effects on key targets of intervention: couple communication and conflict patterns. There was also evidence (albeit less strong) of program efficacy in reducing stress and helping couples build social support, which is often low for LGBT persons.
- In October, we will analyze the data from the full sample (N = 40 couples), with greater power to detect program effects.

FUNDING

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