



# A Structural Equation Model of Family-of-Origin Experiences, Relationship Beliefs, Communication Patterns, and Couple Satisfaction

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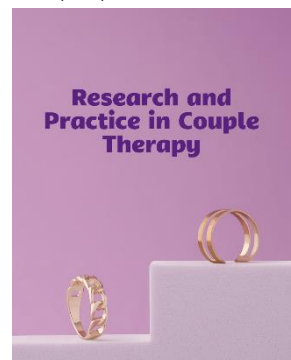
## ABSTRACT

The present study aimed to examine a structural equation model investigating the direct and indirect relationships among family-of-origin experiences, relationship beliefs, communication patterns, and couple satisfaction among adults in the United States. This cross-sectional correlational study was conducted among 618 adults (309 couples) residing in the United States who were involved in committed romantic relationships. Participants were recruited through community organizations, counseling centers, social media platforms, and online survey panels. Data were collected using the Family-of-Origin Scale (FOS), Relationship Belief Inventory (RBI), Communication Patterns Questionnaire–Short Form (CPQ-SF), and Couple Satisfaction Index (CSI-32). Descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation analyses, confirmatory factor analysis, and structural equation modeling were performed using SPSS 29 and AMOS 29. Model fit was evaluated using  $\chi^2/df$ , CFI, TLI, GFI, AGFI, RMSEA, and SRMR indices. Bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples was employed to assess indirect effects and mediation pathways. Correlation analyses revealed significant associations among all study variables. Family-of-origin experiences were negatively associated with dysfunctional relationship beliefs and positively associated with communication patterns and couple satisfaction ( $p < .001$ ). The measurement model demonstrated satisfactory psychometric properties, with all factor loadings, composite reliability coefficients, and average variance extracted values exceeding recommended thresholds. The structural model exhibited excellent fit to the data ( $\chi^2/df = 2.31$ , CFI = .962, TLI = .956, GFI = .932, AGFI = .914, RMSEA = .046, SRMR = .041). Family-of-origin experiences significantly predicted relationship beliefs ( $\beta = -.53$ ,  $p < .001$ ), communication patterns ( $\beta = .39$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and couple satisfaction ( $\beta = .28$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Relationship beliefs significantly predicted communication patterns ( $\beta = -.34$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and couple satisfaction ( $\beta = -.29$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Communication patterns emerged as the strongest direct predictor of couple satisfaction ( $\beta = .52$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Significant indirect effects confirmed that relationship beliefs and communication patterns partially mediated the relationship between family-of-origin experiences and couple satisfaction. The model explained 28% of the variance in relationship beliefs, 49% of the variance in communication patterns, and 67% of the variance in couple satisfaction. The findings support a developmental-relational model in which family-of-origin experiences influence adult couple satisfaction both directly and indirectly through relationship beliefs and communication patterns. Communication patterns emerged as the most influential determinant of couple satisfaction, highlighting their central role in relationship functioning. The results suggest that interventions targeting maladaptive relationship beliefs and communication processes may help mitigate the negative effects of adverse family experiences and enhance relationship quality among couples.

**Keywords:** family-of-origin experiences, relationship beliefs, communication patterns, couple satisfaction

## How to cite this article:

Bortolato, C., Allen, G., Termes-Rife, A., & Bremmer, M. (2026). A Structural Equation Model of Family-of-Origin Experiences, Relationship Beliefs, Communication Patterns, and Couple Satisfaction. *Research and Practice in Couple Therapy*, 4(2), 1-15. <https://doi.org/10.61838/rpct.4.2.6>



## Introduction

Relationship satisfaction is one of the most extensively studied indicators of individual and family well-being because it reflects the quality, stability, and adaptive functioning of intimate partnerships. Satisfying romantic relationships contribute to psychological health, emotional security, resilience, and overall life satisfaction, whereas distressed relationships are associated with mental health problems, interpersonal conflict, and family instability. Contemporary relationship science increasingly conceptualizes couple satisfaction as the outcome of multiple interacting developmental, cognitive, emotional, and behavioral processes that unfold across the life course. Rather than emerging solely from present relationship experiences, couple satisfaction is shaped by earlier family experiences, relationship-related belief systems, interpersonal communication patterns, and contextual influences that affect how partners interpret and respond to one another (Lağap & Güngör, 2025; Ogolsky & Stafford, 2022). Understanding the mechanisms through which these factors interact is therefore essential for developing comprehensive theoretical models of romantic functioning and informing evidence-based interventions designed to strengthen couple relationships.

Among the factors that have consistently attracted scholarly attention, family-of-origin experiences represent one of the most influential developmental foundations of adult romantic relationships. Family-of-origin experiences encompass the emotional climate, parenting practices, attachment experiences, communication styles, conflict management strategies, and relational models that individuals encounter during childhood and adolescence. Family systems theory and attachment theory suggest that early family environments provide individuals with internal working models regarding trust, intimacy, emotional regulation, conflict resolution, and interpersonal expectations that continue to influence adult romantic functioning. These early relational experiences become templates through which individuals interpret and engage in intimate relationships throughout adulthood (Kornaszewska-Polak, 2021; River et al., 2021).

Evidence from systematic reviews indicates that positive parent-child relationships within the family of origin are associated with healthier romantic functioning later in life, whereas family dysfunction, emotional neglect, hostility, and inconsistent caregiving often predict relationship distress and instability. Individuals who experience supportive and cohesive family environments generally develop more secure attachment orientations and more adaptive expectations regarding intimacy and commitment. Conversely, adverse family experiences may contribute to maladaptive relational schemas that undermine relationship quality in adulthood (River et al., 2021; Zagefka et al., 2021). Research has further demonstrated that family processes continue to influence relational adaptation across diverse family structures and developmental contexts, emphasizing the enduring role of family experiences in shaping adult relationship outcomes (Ashraf et al., 2024; Brik & Wang, 2024, 2025).

Although family-of-origin experiences provide an important developmental foundation, their influence on adult relationships is rarely direct. Rather, early experiences often operate through cognitive structures that shape how individuals perceive and evaluate intimate relationships. Relationship beliefs represent one such mechanism. Relationship beliefs refer to assumptions, expectations, and cognitive schemas regarding romantic relationships, including beliefs about commitment, conflict, intimacy, communication, partner responsiveness, and relationship permanence. Cognitive theories of intimate relationships suggest that individuals interpret relational events through belief systems that influence emotional reactions and behavioral responses. Consequently, maladaptive relationship beliefs may distort perceptions of partner behavior and contribute to relational dissatisfaction even in objectively healthy relationships (Harel & Koslowsky, 2022; Zagefka et al., 2021).

Several studies have demonstrated that relationship beliefs are strongly associated with relationship functioning. Dysfunctional expectations regarding partner behavior, unrealistic standards for intimacy, and rigid assumptions concerning conflict often predict lower levels of relationship satisfaction and commitment. Dyadic investigations have shown that

expectations and beliefs influence interaction patterns between partners and shape the quality of relational experiences over time (Harel & Koslowsky, 2022). Similarly, research examining dysfunctional individuation and relational cognition has demonstrated that cognitive representations of the self and partner significantly affect relationship satisfaction and adjustment (Zhang & Chen, 2023). These findings suggest that relationship beliefs may serve as an important pathway through which family-of-origin experiences exert long-term effects on romantic relationships.

The importance of relational beliefs is further supported by research examining cultural, religious, and family-based value systems. Studies investigating filial piety beliefs among couples have shown that deeply held interpersonal values influence relationship satisfaction and attachment security (Chen et al., 2024). Likewise, religiosity has been associated with relationship quality through its effects on commitment, shared meaning systems, and relational expectations (Aragoni et al., 2023). Research involving diverse relational contexts, including intercultural relationships and relationships characterized by differing ideological perspectives, has also demonstrated that beliefs and value systems influence relationship functioning by shaping expectations and interpretations of partner behavior (Parsons et al., 2021; Su, 2023). Collectively, these findings underscore the importance of examining relationship beliefs as a central cognitive mechanism linking developmental experiences to adult relationship outcomes.

Communication patterns constitute another critical determinant of couple satisfaction. Communication is widely regarded as the primary process through which partners negotiate needs, express emotions, manage conflict, and maintain intimacy. Relationship scholars have consistently identified communication quality as one of the strongest predictors of relationship adjustment and satisfaction. Effective communication facilitates mutual understanding, emotional validation, and collaborative problem solving, whereas destructive communication contributes to misunderstanding, emotional disconnection, and escalating conflict (Fitriani & Arifah, 2022; Ogolsky & Stafford, 2022).

Research across various populations demonstrates that communication patterns play a central role in relationship maintenance and stability. Systematic reviews indicate that constructive communication behaviors such as active listening, emotional responsiveness, and supportive dialogue contribute to long-term relationship satisfaction, whereas demand-withdraw patterns, criticism, defensiveness, and avoidance are associated with relationship deterioration (Ogolsky & Stafford, 2022). Studies focusing on marital adjustment similarly reveal that communication skills significantly predict relational well-being among couples facing everyday challenges and life transitions (Fitriani & Arifah, 2022). These findings support the proposition that communication patterns serve as a crucial behavioral mechanism through which beliefs and expectations become translated into relational experiences.

Attachment-based perspectives further highlight the relationship between developmental experiences and communication processes. Adult attachment patterns influence how individuals express emotions, seek support, and respond to conflict. Dyadic investigations have shown that attachment orientations and interpersonal schemas significantly affect marital adjustment and communication quality (Uluyol & Özen-Çıplak, 2024). Likewise, studies examining supportive interactions in caregiving relationships indicate that attachment-related processes influence mutual responsiveness and relational functioning between partners (McPherson & Devereaux, 2023). These findings suggest that communication patterns may represent an important pathway linking earlier family experiences and cognitive schemas to relationship satisfaction.

Recent relationship research has increasingly emphasized the importance of dyadic processes in understanding romantic functioning. Rather than viewing relationship satisfaction as an individual outcome, contemporary perspectives conceptualize satisfaction as emerging from reciprocal interactions between partners. Dyadic coping, mutual support, shared meaning systems, and coordinated responses to stress have all been identified as significant predictors of relationship quality. During

periods of adversity, effective dyadic coping appears particularly important in maintaining relationship stability and satisfaction (Carrese-Chacra et al., 2023; Wawrziczny et al., 2021).

The significance of dyadic processes became especially apparent during the COVID-19 pandemic. Research demonstrated that cumulative stressors negatively affected relationship well-being; however, supportive couple interactions and adaptive coping strategies often buffered these effects (Brik et al., 2023; Carrese-Chacra et al., 2023). Similar findings have emerged from studies examining chronic relational stress and conflict, which indicate that communication and coping processes play crucial roles in determining whether couples adapt successfully or experience relational decline (Fiorenza et al., 2024). Such evidence highlights the necessity of examining communication as a central component of broader relational systems.

The growing diversity of contemporary relationships further underscores the need for comprehensive models of couple functioning. Relationship satisfaction has been investigated across a wide range of populations, including sexual minority couples, interracial couples, intercultural couples, stepfamilies, couples parenting children with special needs, and consensually non-monogamous relationships. Although these groups face distinct challenges, communication quality, relationship beliefs, attachment security, and family experiences consistently emerge as important predictors of relational outcomes (Adler-Baeder et al., 2022; Pentel & Baucom, 2022; Wood et al., 2021). Research involving autism in romantic relationships similarly highlights both the challenges and strengths associated with diverse relational experiences, while emphasizing the importance of communication and mutual understanding for relationship success (Neu & Bradford, 2025).

Studies examining attachment matching and coparenting interactions among same-sex and different-sex couples further demonstrate the importance of interpersonal processes in relationship functioning (Miscioscia et al., 2021). Likewise, investigations of authenticity, facilitativeness, and gender-related ideologies have revealed that individual characteristics influence dyadic functioning through their effects on communication and relational engagement (Chen et al., 2023). These findings collectively suggest that relationship satisfaction cannot be adequately understood without considering the interplay between developmental experiences, cognitive processes, and interpersonal behaviors.

Economic and contextual factors also contribute to relationship functioning. Financial management practices and financial stress have become increasingly recognized as important determinants of couple satisfaction. Systematic reviews indicate that financial beliefs, resource allocation strategies, and perceptions of economic fairness significantly influence relationship quality and conflict patterns (Kaur & Singh, 2025). Similarly, relational turbulence perspectives suggest that periods of transition and uncertainty often amplify the effects of cognitive and behavioral vulnerabilities within relationships (Lağap & Güngör, 2025). Such findings reinforce the importance of examining multiple relational processes simultaneously rather than focusing on isolated predictors.

Additional evidence suggests that family experiences may continue to shape relationship functioning through the development of resilience beliefs, adaptive coping resources, and relational competencies. Research grounded in family resilience frameworks has demonstrated that supportive family environments foster adaptive psychological resources that facilitate successful adjustment to later relational challenges (Brik & Wang, 2024, 2025). Furthermore, studies examining parenting experiences and family functioning indicate that marital adjustment often serves as a crucial mechanism through which family influences affect broader relational outcomes (Ashraf et al., 2024). These findings align with developmental models proposing that early relational experiences establish enduring patterns that influence cognition, communication, and relationship satisfaction throughout adulthood.

Despite substantial advances in relationship research, important gaps remain. Existing studies frequently focus on isolated relationships among family experiences, relationship beliefs, communication patterns, or satisfaction rather than examining these constructs simultaneously within a comprehensive structural framework. Moreover, although prior research has

documented associations among these variables, relatively few studies have explored the direct and indirect pathways through which family-of-origin experiences influence couple satisfaction through relationship beliefs and communication patterns. Understanding these pathways is particularly important because it can clarify the mechanisms underlying relationship development and identify potential intervention targets for couples experiencing relational difficulties. Structural equation modeling provides a powerful methodological approach for examining these complex interrelationships and testing theoretically informed pathways among developmental, cognitive, behavioral, and relational variables.

Therefore, the aim of the present study was to test a structural equation model examining the direct and indirect relationships among family-of-origin experiences, relationship beliefs, communication patterns, and couple satisfaction among adults in the United States.

## Methods and Materials

### Study Design and Participants

This study employed a cross-sectional correlational design using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to examine the direct and indirect relationships among family-of-origin experiences, relationship beliefs, communication patterns, and couple satisfaction among married adults in the United States. The study was conducted between January and June 2026 and targeted heterosexual and same-sex couples who had been in a committed marital or cohabiting relationship for at least one year. Participants were recruited through community organizations, social media advertisements, relationship counseling centers, and online survey platforms across multiple states, including California, Texas, Florida, New York, and Illinois. A total of 642 individuals participated in the study. After screening for incomplete responses, patterned answering, and missing data exceeding 10% of questionnaire items, 618 valid cases were retained for analysis. The sample consisted of 309 couples, allowing for the examination of relationship dynamics within a dyadic framework while maintaining adequate statistical power for SEM analyses.

Eligibility criteria included being at least 18 years of age, residing in the United States, possessing sufficient English-language proficiency to complete the questionnaires, and currently being involved in a committed romantic relationship. Individuals experiencing severe psychiatric disorders that could interfere with survey completion or those currently involved in legal separation proceedings were excluded from participation. Participants provided informed consent electronically before data collection.

### Measures

Family-of-origin experiences were assessed using the Family-of-Origin Scale (FOS), developed by Hovestadt and colleagues in 1985. The FOS is a widely used instrument designed to evaluate individuals' perceptions of their family functioning during childhood and adolescence. The scale contains 40 items rated on a five-point Likert continuum ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The instrument assesses dimensions such as autonomy, intimacy, emotional expression, conflict resolution, trust, and family cohesion. Higher scores indicate more positive and adaptive family-of-origin experiences. Previous studies have reported satisfactory psychometric properties for the FOS, with internal consistency coefficients generally exceeding .85 and strong evidence supporting its construct validity across diverse populations. Reliability and validity have been consistently confirmed in family and relationship research.

Relationship beliefs were measured using the Relationship Belief Inventory (RBI), developed by Eidelson and Epstein in 1982. The RBI consists of 40 items rated on a six-point Likert scale and evaluates irrational and dysfunctional beliefs regarding

intimate relationships. The instrument measures several cognitive domains, including disagreement is destructive, mindreading expectations, sexual perfectionism, belief in partner change, and gender-role stereotypes. Higher scores reflect stronger endorsement of maladaptive relationship beliefs. Numerous studies have demonstrated adequate reliability coefficients ranging from .75 to .92 across subscales and have provided substantial evidence for convergent and discriminant validity. The RBI has been extensively utilized in marital and couple research and remains one of the most established measures of relationship cognitions.

Communication patterns were assessed using the Communication Patterns Questionnaire–Short Form (CPQ-SF), developed by Christensen and Heavey in 1990. The questionnaire contains 35 items designed to evaluate communication behaviors that occur during relationship interactions and conflicts. Respondents rate each item on a nine-point Likert scale indicating the frequency with which specific communication patterns occur within their relationship. The CPQ assesses constructive communication, mutual avoidance, demand-withdraw communication, and reciprocal negative communication. Higher scores on constructive communication indicate healthier interaction styles, whereas higher scores on negative communication dimensions reflect greater relational dysfunction. Previous investigations have demonstrated strong internal consistency, acceptable test–retest reliability, and robust construct validity for the CPQ across different cultural and relational contexts.

Couple satisfaction was measured using the Couple Satisfaction Index (CSI-32), developed by Funk and Rogge in 2007. The CSI-32 is a comprehensive self-report measure consisting of 32 items designed to assess global relationship satisfaction and adjustment. Participants respond to items using varying Likert-type response formats that are combined to generate an overall satisfaction score. Higher scores indicate greater satisfaction within the romantic relationship. The CSI was developed to improve sensitivity and precision in measuring relationship quality and has demonstrated excellent psychometric characteristics, including internal consistency coefficients above .95 and strong criterion-related validity. The measure has been validated across diverse demographic groups and is widely regarded as one of the most reliable instruments for assessing relationship satisfaction.

All questionnaires were administered electronically through a secure online survey platform. Participants completed the demographic questionnaire followed by the Family-of-Origin Scale, Relationship Belief Inventory, Communication Patterns Questionnaire, and Couple Satisfaction Index. The average completion time was approximately 30 to 40 minutes. To minimize response bias, participants were assured of anonymity and confidentiality, and no identifying information was linked to survey responses.

### Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics Version 29 and AMOS Version 29. Initially, descriptive statistics including means, standard deviations, skewness, and kurtosis values were calculated to evaluate the distributional characteristics of the variables. Pearson correlation coefficients were computed to examine bivariate associations among family-of-origin experiences, relationship beliefs, communication patterns, and couple satisfaction. Prior to model estimation, assumptions of multivariate analysis were assessed, including normality, linearity, homoscedasticity, multicollinearity, and the presence of outliers. Missing data were examined using Little’s MCAR test and were handled through full information maximum likelihood estimation.

A two-step SEM approach was employed. First, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted to evaluate the adequacy of the measurement model and to verify the latent structure of each construct. Factor loadings, composite reliability, average variance extracted, convergent validity, and discriminant validity indices were examined. After establishing satisfactory measurement properties, the structural model was tested to evaluate the hypothesized relationships among the latent variables.

Direct pathways from family-of-origin experiences to relationship beliefs, communication patterns, and couple satisfaction were estimated. Indirect effects through relationship beliefs and communication patterns were also examined to assess potential mediation mechanisms.

Model fit was evaluated using multiple goodness-of-fit indices, including the chi-square statistic ( $\chi^2$ ), comparative fit index (CFI), Tucker–Lewis index (TLI), goodness-of-fit index (GFI), adjusted goodness-of-fit index (AGFI), standardized root mean square residual (SRMR), and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA). Values of CFI and TLI greater than .90, RMSEA below .08, and SRMR below .08 were considered indicative of acceptable model fit. Statistical significance was evaluated at the .05 level. Bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples was employed to estimate confidence intervals for indirect effects and to determine the significance of mediating pathways. The final structural model was interpreted based on standardized path coefficients, explained variance estimates, and overall model fit indicators.

**Findings and Results**

A total of 618 participants (309 couples) were included in the final analyses. Participants ranged in age from 21 to 68 years, with a mean age of 39.84 years ( $SD = 9.72$ ). Among the participants, 51.6% were women and 48.4% were men. The majority identified as married (87.5%), while the remainder were in long-term cohabiting relationships (12.5%). The average relationship duration was 11.37 years ( $SD = 7.64$ ), ranging from 1 to 41 years. Regarding educational attainment, 14.9% had completed high school education, 28.5% held associate or bachelor's degrees, 42.1% possessed master's degrees, and 14.5% had doctoral or professional degrees. The ethnic composition of the sample reflected the diversity of the United States population, with participants identifying as White (58.4%), Hispanic/Latino (16.7%), African American (12.9%), Asian American (8.6%), and other ethnic backgrounds (3.4%). The average annual household income was approximately \$82,700. Preliminary screening indicated no significant violations of statistical assumptions, and all variables demonstrated acceptable levels of normality, with skewness and kurtosis values within recommended ranges.

**Table 1. Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations among Study Variables**

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4
1. Family-of-Origin Experiences	141.63	18.47	—			
2. Relationship Beliefs	98.24	15.89	-.51**	—		
3. Communication Patterns	112.76	17.53	.58**	-.55**	—	
4. Couple Satisfaction	118.92	21.36	.62**	-.60**	.71**	—

As shown in Table 1, family-of-origin experiences were significantly and negatively associated with dysfunctional relationship beliefs ( $r = -.51, p < .001$ ), indicating that individuals who reported healthier family environments during childhood were less likely to endorse maladaptive relationship assumptions in adulthood. Family-of-origin experiences were positively associated with constructive communication patterns ( $r = .58, p < .001$ ) and couple satisfaction ( $r = .62, p < .001$ ). Relationship beliefs demonstrated significant negative associations with communication patterns ( $r = -.55, p < .001$ ) and couple satisfaction ( $r = -.60, p < .001$ ), suggesting that irrational beliefs about intimate relationships may undermine both interaction quality and relationship outcomes. Communication patterns exhibited the strongest correlation with couple satisfaction ( $r = .71, p < .001$ ), highlighting the central role of communication processes in determining relationship quality. Collectively, these findings provide preliminary support for the hypothesized structural model and justify further examination through structural equation modeling.

**Table 2. Confirmatory Factor Analysis Results for the Measurement Model**

Construct	Indicator Loading Range	Composite Reliability (CR)	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Family-of-Origin Experiences	.68 – .87	.92	.61

Relationship Beliefs	.65 – .84	.90	.58
Communication Patterns	.70 – .89	.93	.65
Couple Satisfaction	.74 – .91	.95	.71

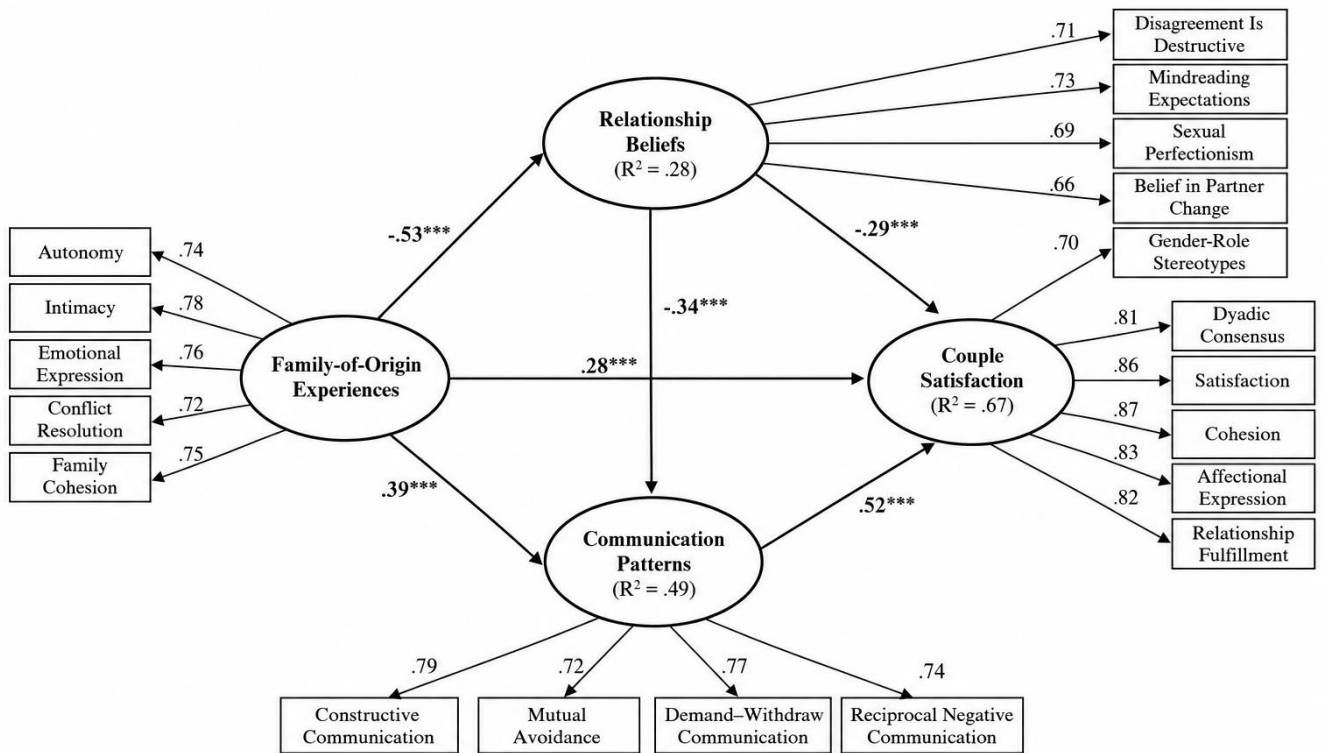
The confirmatory factor analysis demonstrated that all latent constructs were adequately represented by their observed indicators. Standardized factor loadings ranged from .65 to .91, exceeding the minimum recommended threshold of .50 and indicating strong relationships between indicators and their corresponding latent variables. Composite reliability values ranged from .90 to .95, demonstrating excellent internal consistency across all constructs. Similarly, average variance extracted values ranged from .58 to .71, exceeding the recommended criterion of .50 and supporting convergent validity. Examination of discriminant validity indicated that the square roots of the AVE values were greater than the interconstruct correlations, confirming that each construct measured a distinct conceptual domain. Overall, the measurement model exhibited satisfactory psychometric characteristics and provided a solid foundation for subsequent structural model testing.

**Table 3. Structural Model Fit Indices**

Fit Index	Obtained Value	Recommended Value
$\chi^2/df$	2.31	< 3.00
CFI	.962	> .90
TLI	.956	> .90
GFI	.932	> .90
AGFI	.914	> .90
RMSEA	.046	< .08
SRMR	.041	< .08

The overall structural model demonstrated an excellent fit to the observed data. The chi-square to degrees-of-freedom ratio was 2.31, which fell well below the recommended threshold of 3.00. Incremental fit indices were also highly satisfactory, with CFI (.962) and TLI (.956) substantially exceeding recommended standards. Absolute fit measures, including GFI (.932) and AGFI (.914), similarly indicated adequate model performance. Furthermore, the RMSEA value of .046 and SRMR value of .041 suggested minimal residual error and strong correspondence between the hypothesized model and observed covariance matrix. Taken together, these fit statistics indicate that the proposed structural model adequately represented the relationships among family-of-origin experiences, relationship beliefs, communication patterns, and couple satisfaction.

The final structural model revealed several statistically significant pathways among the study variables. Family-of-origin experiences exerted a direct negative effect on dysfunctional relationship beliefs ( $\beta = -.53, p < .001$ ), indicating that healthier childhood family environments were associated with fewer maladaptive assumptions regarding intimate relationships. Family-of-origin experiences also demonstrated a significant positive effect on communication patterns ( $\beta = .39, p < .001$ ) and couple satisfaction ( $\beta = .28, p < .001$ ). Relationship beliefs negatively predicted communication patterns ( $\beta = -.34, p < .001$ ) and couple satisfaction ( $\beta = -.29, p < .001$ ), suggesting that dysfunctional cognitions contribute to poorer communication and lower relationship quality. Communication patterns emerged as the strongest predictor of couple satisfaction ( $\beta = .52, p < .001$ ). The model explained 28% of the variance in relationship beliefs, 49% of the variance in communication patterns, and 67% of the variance in couple satisfaction. Bootstrap analyses based on 5,000 resamples confirmed significant indirect effects of family-of-origin experiences on couple satisfaction through both relationship beliefs and communication patterns (95% CI [.14, .28],  $p < .001$ ), indicating partial mediation. These findings suggest that family experiences shape adult relationship outcomes both directly and indirectly through cognitive and communicative mechanisms.



Note. Standardized path coefficients are reported. All paths are statistically significant.  
 \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

**Figure 1. Final Structural Equation Model of Family-of-Origin Experiences, Relationship Beliefs, Communication Patterns, and Couple Satisfaction**

**Table 4. Direct, Indirect, and Total Effects among Latent Variables**

Pathway	Direct Effect ( $\beta$ )	Indirect Effect ( $\beta$ )	Total Effect ( $\beta$ )	p
Family-of-Origin → Relationship Beliefs	-.53	—	-.53	< .001
Family-of-Origin → Communication Patterns	.39	.18	.57	< .001
Family-of-Origin → Couple Satisfaction	.28	.37	.65	< .001
Relationship Beliefs → Communication Patterns	-.34	—	-.34	< .001
Relationship Beliefs → Couple Satisfaction	-.29	-.18	-.47	< .001
Communication Patterns → Couple Satisfaction	.52	—	.52	< .001

The decomposition of effects presented in Table 4 provides further insight into the mechanisms underlying couple satisfaction. Family-of-origin experiences had a substantial total effect on couple satisfaction ( $\beta = .65$ ), with more than half of this influence operating indirectly through relationship beliefs and communication patterns. Similarly, relationship beliefs exerted both direct and indirect effects on couple satisfaction, indicating that maladaptive cognitive schemas negatively affect relationship quality not only independently but also by disrupting constructive communication processes. Communication patterns maintained the strongest direct influence on couple satisfaction ( $\beta = .52$ ), reinforcing their central role within the model. The pattern of findings supports a developmental-relational framework in which early family experiences contribute to the formation of relationship beliefs, which subsequently influence communication behaviors and ultimately determine the quality and satisfaction of adult romantic relationships. Overall, the final model accounted for a substantial proportion of variance in couple satisfaction and demonstrated strong empirical support for the hypothesized pathways linking family-of-origin experiences to adult relationship functioning.

## Discussion and Conclusion

The present study sought to examine a structural model linking family-of-origin experiences, relationship beliefs, communication patterns, and couple satisfaction among adults in the United States. The findings demonstrated that the proposed model exhibited excellent fit to the observed data and accounted for a substantial proportion of variance in couple satisfaction. Specifically, family-of-origin experiences significantly predicted relationship beliefs, communication patterns, and couple satisfaction. Relationship beliefs significantly predicted communication patterns and couple satisfaction, while communication patterns emerged as the strongest direct predictor of couple satisfaction. Furthermore, the results revealed significant indirect pathways, indicating that relationship beliefs and communication patterns partially mediated the association between family-of-origin experiences and couple satisfaction. Collectively, these findings support a developmental-relational framework in which early family experiences shape adult romantic outcomes through cognitive and behavioral mechanisms.

One of the most important findings of the study was the significant direct effect of family-of-origin experiences on couple satisfaction. Participants who reported healthier and more supportive family environments during childhood demonstrated greater satisfaction in their current romantic relationships. This finding is consistent with developmental and attachment-based theories suggesting that early relational experiences form internal working models that guide expectations, emotional regulation, intimacy, and interpersonal functioning throughout adulthood. Individuals raised in families characterized by warmth, trust, emotional responsiveness, and constructive conflict resolution are likely to develop secure relational orientations that facilitate satisfying adult partnerships. Conversely, exposure to family dysfunction, hostility, emotional neglect, or inconsistent caregiving may contribute to vulnerabilities that undermine relationship quality later in life.

The present findings align closely with previous research demonstrating the long-term influence of family-of-origin experiences on romantic functioning. River et al. found that parent-child relationship quality within the family of origin significantly predicted later romantic relationship functioning across multiple domains, including satisfaction, intimacy, and commitment (River et al., 2021). Similarly, Zagefka et al. reported that family dysfunction negatively influenced relationship satisfaction through its effects on relational beliefs and interpersonal expectations (Zagefka et al., 2021). The current results extend these findings by demonstrating that family-of-origin experiences influence couple satisfaction both directly and indirectly through multiple relational mechanisms. The findings also complement family resilience research showing that supportive family environments foster adaptive resources that facilitate positive adjustment across developmental stages (Brik & Wang, 2024, 2025). Together, these studies support the proposition that the roots of adult relationship quality can often be traced to developmental experiences occurring long before romantic relationships begin.

Another important finding was the significant negative association between family-of-origin experiences and dysfunctional relationship beliefs. Individuals who reported healthier childhood family environments endorsed fewer maladaptive beliefs regarding romantic relationships. This result is theoretically meaningful because relationship beliefs are largely formed through observational learning, family interactions, and early attachment experiences. Children exposed to constructive communication, emotional support, and healthy conflict resolution develop realistic expectations about intimacy and partnership. In contrast, exposure to dysfunctional family interactions may contribute to unrealistic assumptions, mistrust, fear of conflict, or exaggerated expectations regarding romantic relationships.

This finding is highly consistent with prior research emphasizing the role of family experiences in shaping relational cognitions. Zagefka et al. demonstrated that lay beliefs about romantic relationships mediated the relationship between family dysfunction and adult relationship satisfaction (Zagefka et al., 2021). Similarly, Harel and Koslowsky found that relationship expectations significantly influenced commitment and behavioral interactions within dual-earner couples (Harel & Koslowsky,

2022). Research examining cultural belief systems has further shown that interpersonal values and relationship expectations are strongly associated with relationship quality and attachment security (Chen et al., 2024). The present findings therefore reinforce the argument that cognitive representations of relationships constitute an important mechanism through which developmental experiences influence adult romantic functioning.

The study also revealed that dysfunctional relationship beliefs negatively predicted communication patterns. Individuals who held maladaptive assumptions regarding intimacy, conflict, and partner behavior reported poorer communication within their relationships. This finding can be understood through cognitive-interpersonal frameworks suggesting that beliefs influence how individuals interpret, respond to, and communicate with their partners. Individuals who believe that disagreement is destructive, that partners should automatically know each other's needs, or that conflicts indicate relationship failure may avoid communication or engage in defensive interaction patterns. Such beliefs can interfere with open dialogue, emotional expression, and collaborative problem-solving.

These findings are consistent with previous empirical evidence. Harel and Koslowsky reported that expectations regarding relationships significantly influenced interaction behaviors between partners (Harel & Koslowsky, 2022). Likewise, Zhang and Chen found that dysfunctional individuation processes negatively affected relationship satisfaction through their influence on interpersonal functioning (Zhang & Chen, 2023). Research examining attachment and interpersonal schemas has similarly shown that maladaptive cognitive representations contribute to poorer communication and reduced marital adjustment (Uluyol & Özen-Çıplak, 2024). Collectively, these studies support the conclusion that communication difficulties often originate not only from behavioral deficits but also from underlying cognitive assumptions regarding relationships and intimacy.

A particularly noteworthy finding was the significant positive effect of family-of-origin experiences on communication patterns. Participants who reported more positive family experiences exhibited healthier communication within their romantic relationships. This result is understandable because communication skills are largely acquired through family socialization processes. Families serve as the primary context in which children observe emotional expression, conflict resolution, active listening, empathy, and negotiation. Individuals raised in environments characterized by constructive communication are more likely to replicate these patterns in adulthood, whereas those exposed to avoidance, criticism, hostility, or emotional withdrawal may struggle to establish effective communication habits.

This finding aligns with attachment-based and family systems perspectives emphasizing the intergenerational transmission of relational processes. Research examining attachment orientations and interpersonal schemas has demonstrated that developmental experiences significantly influence communication quality and marital adjustment (Uluyol & Özen-Çıplak, 2024). Similarly, studies of attachment matching and coparenting interactions have highlighted the importance of developmental relational experiences in shaping adult interpersonal functioning (Miscioscia et al., 2021). The current results therefore provide additional support for the view that communication patterns are partially rooted in earlier family experiences and may represent a behavioral expression of developmental relational learning.

The strongest direct effect observed in the model was the relationship between communication patterns and couple satisfaction. Constructive communication was associated with higher levels of satisfaction, whereas negative communication patterns corresponded with lower relationship quality. This finding is consistent with decades of relationship research identifying communication as one of the most powerful determinants of relational outcomes. Effective communication enables partners to express needs, resolve conflicts, validate emotions, and maintain intimacy. Conversely, destructive communication patterns often contribute to misunderstanding, resentment, and emotional distance.

The present findings strongly support previous studies highlighting the importance of communication in relationship maintenance and satisfaction. Ogolsky and Stafford concluded that communication processes constitute a central component

of relationship maintenance across diverse relational contexts (Ogolsky & Stafford, 2022). Fitriani and Arifah found that communication skills significantly contributed to marital adjustment among working women (Fitriani & Arifah, 2022). Research examining dyadic coping also demonstrated that supportive communication processes promote relationship satisfaction and buffer couples against stressors (Carrese-Chacra et al., 2023; Wawrziczny et al., 2021). The current findings extend this literature by demonstrating that communication not only directly influences satisfaction but also functions as a mediator linking developmental experiences and relationship beliefs to relationship outcomes.

The mediating role of communication patterns represents one of the most theoretically important contributions of the present study. Family-of-origin experiences influenced couple satisfaction indirectly through communication patterns, suggesting that individuals carry communication habits learned in childhood into their adult relationships. Similarly, relationship beliefs affected satisfaction indirectly through communication. These findings indicate that communication serves as a bridge between internal cognitive processes and observable relational outcomes. Even when individuals possess maladaptive beliefs or difficult developmental histories, improving communication may reduce the negative impact of these factors on relationship satisfaction.

The findings also support contemporary dyadic perspectives emphasizing interaction processes rather than isolated individual characteristics. Relationship satisfaction emerged as the product of interconnected developmental, cognitive, and behavioral influences. This conclusion is consistent with studies demonstrating that relationship quality depends on mutual adaptation, supportive interactions, and effective dyadic coping processes (Brik et al., 2023; Carrese-Chacra et al., 2023). Research examining chronic conflict has likewise highlighted the central role of interaction processes in determining relationship outcomes (Fiorenza et al., 2024). The current study contributes to this body of literature by integrating developmental antecedents, relational beliefs, communication behaviors, and satisfaction within a single structural framework.

The results additionally have implications for understanding relationship functioning across diverse populations. Previous research has demonstrated the importance of communication, beliefs, and developmental experiences among interracial couples, intercultural couples, sexual minority couples, stepfamilies, and couples facing unique relational challenges (Adler-Baeder et al., 2022; Parsons et al., 2021; Pentel & Baucom, 2022; Su, 2023). Similar patterns have been observed among couples affected by autism, caregiving responsibilities, and various social stressors (McPherson & Devereaux, 2023; Neu & Bradford, 2025). The consistency of these findings across diverse contexts suggests that the mechanisms identified in the present study may represent broadly applicable relational processes. Although specific cultural and contextual factors may influence how these mechanisms operate, family experiences, relationship beliefs, and communication patterns appear to constitute universal foundations of couple satisfaction.

Furthermore, the substantial proportion of explained variance in couple satisfaction indicates that the proposed model captures important determinants of relationship quality. The findings support multidimensional approaches to relationship functioning that integrate developmental experiences, cognitive schemas, and interpersonal behaviors. Such approaches may provide a more comprehensive understanding of relationship satisfaction than models focusing exclusively on personality traits, demographic characteristics, or situational stressors. Consistent with relational turbulence theory, attachment perspectives, and family systems approaches, the present findings suggest that relationship satisfaction emerges through complex interactions among developmental, cognitive, and behavioral factors operating across time (Lağap & Güngör, 2025; River et al., 2021; Uluyol & Özen-Çıplak, 2024).

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings of this study. First, the cross-sectional design limits the ability to draw causal conclusions regarding the relationships among family-of-origin experiences, relationship beliefs, communication patterns, and couple satisfaction. Second, all variables were assessed using self-report instruments, which may have introduced response bias, social desirability effects, and common method variance. Third, although the sample was

geographically diverse, participants were recruited voluntarily and may not fully represent all couples in the United States. Fourth, retrospective assessments of family-of-origin experiences may have been influenced by memory biases and current relationship experiences. Finally, the study focused primarily on broad relationship processes and did not examine other potentially important variables such as personality traits, mental health status, socioeconomic stressors, or cultural differences.

Future studies should employ longitudinal designs to examine how family-of-origin experiences influence relationship beliefs, communication patterns, and satisfaction over time. Researchers may also investigate reciprocal relationships among these variables using cross-lagged and dyadic analytical approaches. Additional studies should explore potential moderators such as gender, ethnicity, relationship duration, socioeconomic status, and cultural background. Future research could incorporate observational measures of communication and partner-reported assessments to reduce the limitations associated with self-report data. It would also be valuable to examine whether intervention programs targeting relationship beliefs and communication skills can weaken the negative influence of adverse family-of-origin experiences on adult relationship functioning.

The findings suggest that couple therapists, counselors, and relationship educators should assess family-of-origin experiences as part of routine relationship evaluations. Interventions may be enhanced by helping individuals identify and modify maladaptive relationship beliefs that originated from earlier family experiences. Communication skills training should remain a central component of relationship education and therapy because communication emerged as the strongest predictor of couple satisfaction. Prevention programs for couples may benefit from incorporating modules addressing family-of-origin influences, cognitive restructuring of dysfunctional beliefs, emotional awareness, and constructive conflict management. Practitioners should also adopt a systemic perspective that recognizes how developmental histories, cognitive processes, and communication behaviors interact to influence relationship satisfaction and long-term relational well-being.

### **Declaration of Interest**

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

### **Ethical Considerations**

All ethical principles were adhered in conducting and writing this article.

### **Acknowledgments**

We would like to express our gratitude to all those who helped us carrying out this study.

### **Authors' Contributions**

All authors equally contributed to this study.

### **Transparency of Data**

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

## Funding

This research was carried out independently with personal funding and without the financial support of any governmental or private institution or organization.

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