

**Conceptualizing and Measuring “Healthy Marriages”
For Empirical Research and Evaluation Studies:
Recommendation Memos from Experts in the Field
(Task Two)**

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INTRODUCTION TO THIS REPORT

The recommendation memos compiled within this document were prepared to provide insight on the conceptualization and measurement of “Healthy Marriages”. The recommendation memos were commissioned from professionals representing a variety of disciplines and perspectives related to family formation and relationships. In soliciting these memos, we hoped to gain further conceptual clarification on the measurement of marital quality and recommendations of important measures, especially as relates to contemporary trends and issues for families. In particular, we solicited input on how to measure relationship quality for low-income populations, race-ethnicity sub-groups, persons in prison or jail, cohabiting and visiting couples, and couples co-parenting after relationship dissolution, as well as couples with and without children, as expertise permitted. An example of the cover letter and guidelines used to solicit the recommendation memos is included as **Appendix A**.

An **Executive Summary** synthesizes the authors’ recommendations. Summaries of each memo are provided in **Part One** of this report. The memos themselves are organized in alphabetical order in **Part Two** of this report.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This summary on the conceptualization and measurement of healthy couple relationships is based on the recommendations of scholars and professionals with expertise in this area, who prepared brief background memos for this project. The recommendations were solicited by Child Trends with funding and input from the Administration for Children and Families. The memos we commissioned are just one part of a larger project designed to further the measurement of healthy marriages, particularly among low-income families with children. In accordance with this goal, the writers were asked to elaborate on measurement for the following groups, as expertise permitted: low-income; racial/ethnic minorities; cohabiting and visiting couples; couples with and without children; couples co-parenting after relationship dissolution; and the incarcerated. The short papers produced a number of insights.

The measurement of a healthy relationship is not a straight-forward issue, as is demonstrated by the fact that the memos we received were diverse in their recommendations. Some authors concentrated their efforts on explicating a general model of healthy relationships among intact couples; other authors selected one dimension of a healthy couple relationship and explored that dimension in depth; still others concentrated on couples for whom measures may not be adequate, or may not even exist. In most, if not all cases, the authors conceptualized healthy couple relationships as a multi-dimensional construct: self-reported measures of global satisfaction with the relationship were not enough; conflict resolution skills were not enough; marital status, alone, was not enough, etc.

Focusing on the couple. At a minimum, most authors believe that a healthy couple relationship has a lot to do with couple communication, couple conflict and its resolution, the couple's satisfaction and/or happiness with the relationship, and other 'couple' targeted measures. For example, Olson and Knutson write that two cornerstones of a happy marriage include strong communication and conflict resolution skills; other dimensions of a healthy marriage include balance in lives, closeness, flexibility, and a pattern of shared leadership. These constructs are all captured in the ENRICH marital inventory. John Gottman suggests a measure of relationship quality that also emphasizes the presence of conflict (constructive vs. destructive) and communication processes, as well as quality of the sex, romance and passion, quality of the friendship, and quality of the shared meaning system.

Booth and colleagues did not write their contribution specifically for this project,* but their work in progress will also be illustrative. In measuring marital quality, the authors include couple-specific constructs such as marital conflict (ranging from disagreements to violence) and marital happiness, but also include other couple-level constructs, such as marital interaction, marital problems, and divorce proneness. The measures they use were developed specifically for use in large-scale surveys by Johnson, White, Booth, and Edwards (1986).

Two authors selected one dimension of a healthy couple relationship and explored that dimension in depth. Steven Nock focused on commitment highlighting two main reasons: a stable two-parent family structure is best for child-well-being, and commitment is a better predictor of divorce and relationship dissolution than other constructs such as perceived marital quality. Also, he notes that it might be a more suitable policy objective than other more emotional or affective aspects of a relationship. Not only is one's own commitment important to

measure, but also, Nock's past research suggests that the overwhelmingly most important predictor of commitment is the imagined commitment of one's partner. He suggests measures that he has used from the National Survey of Families and Households.

Relationship violence is the primary topic of an additional memo. In his work, Michael Johnson has found that most measures of violence lack an indicator of control exercised in violent situations. This is important, he notes, since most survey measures uncover *situational couple violence*, whereas *intimate terrorism* – violence embedded in a general pattern of control – is the most common type of intimate violence experienced in shelters, reported in emergency rooms and dealt with by law enforcement. Survey measures also do not tap into *violent resistance* which has been observed in women who are trying to cope with their partner's intimate terrorism. Johnson recommends that using the Conflict Tactics Scale alone is not enough, and suggests combining this scale with measures of the control present in a relationship to identify unhealthy relationship dynamics.

Constructs that extend beyond the couple and the couple relationship. Blaine Fowers critiques current relationship quality measures for their extensive emphasis on individualism and personal happiness. While he includes such constructs of 'individual benefits' in his multi-dimensional model of long-term romantic relationships and other couple-level constructs such as quality of communication, he also suggests measures of commitment to the relationship and personal relationship entity (a sense of "we"-ness). Fowers is able to suggest measures of each of these constructs, but not for two additional constructs that he considers important in identifying a healthy couple relationship: family functioning, the degree to which the relationship enables fulfillment of family roles; and relationship context, the social, legal, extended family and friendship networks which might offer support for the relationship.

Fowers is not alone in suggesting measures that extend beyond the couple and the couple relationship. Many suggested that relationships outside the couple dyad are indicators of a healthy marriage or relationship, such as multi-generational households and other peers and family that might support the couple relationship.^{EA,WJ,KK,CC,BF,DL,VM} Lichter, Batson and Mellot wrote that religion is a factor that contributes to a positive relationship in varied ways, such as reinforcing pro-marriage norms and providing a supportive network.^{DL} At the individual level, being free from mental illness was also repeated as an indicator of a healthy marriage/relationship.^{CC,EA,RH} Considerations specifically addressing disadvantaged populations were highlighted repeatedly, and will be summarized below.

Parental responsibilities add to the equation. Many scholars also emphasized that successful fulfillment of parenting roles is an important aspect of healthy relationships.^{BF,CC,RH,DO,SN,LG,WJ,KK,PF} Cowan and Cowan describe their view of the dimensions involved in marriages and relationships that are healthy and satisfying to the couple as one that includes the ability of parents to co-parent effectively, in addition to others mentioned earlier. They suggest two measures of co-parenting that they have developed that have adequate psychometric properties.

Positive co-parenting *after* divorce or relationship dissolution allows parents to meet their childrearing responsibilities without conflict and with support and communication.^{KK,LG,WJ,EA} Kitzmann recommends measures of healthy co-parenting as occurs after relationship dissolution. In particular, she suggests that measures should include the presence of positive behaviors (e.g., support and effective communication); a range of behaviors, including those occurring between a child and a parent in the absence of the other parent; the child's age

(optimal behaviors may differ depending on a child's developmental needs); and time since divorce and post-divorce events.

In addition, children from previous relationships are often a source of conflict in new relationships and couple communication around this topic should be measured.^{WJ, KK, LG, CC, EA}

One memo cautioned of a methodological problem when including measures of co-parenting as a definition of a healthy marriage. Since healthy couple relationships are often theorized to be associated with parenting outcomes, including aspects of co-parenting in measures of healthy marriage would inflate the association between relationship quality and parenting outcomes.^{LG}

Booth and colleagues also considered methodological issues in stating their preference for measuring marital quality. They preferred an approach that sees marital quality as a set of conceptually distinct but empirically correlated dimensions, as it keeps the elements of marital quality distinct for research studies based on theoretical assumptions. This approach contrasts with an adjustment perspective, for example, that discriminates between well and poorly adjusted couples with the use of a single scale comprising of multiple dimensions of marital adjustment.

Focusing on specific sub-populations. A predominant theme through many of the memos is that measures of healthy relationships have been inadequately tested for important subgroups, namely African-American and low-income couples.^{EA, LG, CC, WJ, VM, RH} The writers also warned that measures need to be psychometrically tested and validated before being used on targeted populations for whom they were not developed.

A few exceptions are available. In her contribution, Velma McBride Murry tested the reliability and validity of measures of marital satisfaction, happiness, warmth and stability among a large sample of rural African-Americans. She finds these scales have adequate psychometric properties, and recommends them for use in other studies of African-Americans. In addition, Cowan and Cowan identify their measure "Who Does What", a measure of satisfaction with the division of family roles as one that is currently being used for couples of varying socio-economic status. While recommending that they be tested in low income and minority populations, many writers commended available measures, noting that they have proven reliable and valid in many studies over the years

Scholars repeatedly identified the following elements as holding particular relevance for couples most likely to be affected by current TANF policy – African Americans, cohabitators and/or low-income couples:

- Economic insecurity was identified as a stressor to couple communication and husband's provider role anxiety is commonly experienced in these subgroups^{PS, VM, WJ, LG, KK}
- Relationships outside the couple dyad - such as multi-generational households and other peers and family that might support the couple relationship- should be measured along with couple relationships^{EA, WJ, KK, CC, BF, DL, VM}
- Children from previous relationships are often a source of conflict in new relationships and couple communication around this topic should be measured^{WJ, KK, LG, CC, EA}
- Supportive co-parenting relationships with an ex-partner can affect the current relationship^{KK, WJ}
- Financial constraints affect whether and when cohabitators marry, as many cohabitators see economic security as a necessary pre-requisite to marriage; in addition, the cost of a wedding is a barrier^{PS}

- Distrust of one's partner is commonly expressed among cohabitators and is a source of tension^{PS,DL,WJ}, while actual infidelity is a "deal-breaker"^{PS}
- Racism is a significant source of family stress, and measuring the ability of couples to successfully negotiate such stress would be an indicator of a strong relationship^{VM,WJ}

Commonly available measures have not been used or are not appropriate for other groups of interest, either, such as stepfamilies,^{LG} incarcerated spouses and partners,RD or cohabiting and visiting couples^{SB}; the circumstances of these couples are unique. In the case of stepfamilies, Ganong and Coleman highlight that this relationship is different from all others, in that children are present from the start of the relationship, and therefore affect the development of that relationship. In fact, conflict over stepchildren and finances related to step-children are the biggest sources of conflict for stepfamilies. The authors suggest that agreement over child rearing and co-parenting dynamics should be considered when identifying healthy stepfamilies.

In the case of cohabiting families, few measures are available. Brown summarizes the state of research in this area, including her own research that uses relationship quality measures from the National Survey of Families and Households. She suggests that information is needed on how cohabitators make decisions and pool resources; that conceptualization at both the individual and the couple level is needed; and that the collection of relationship quality over time is needed. She also warns that "plans to marry" may indicate commitment, at a minimum, but the absence of plans does constitute poor quality relationships.

Qualitative interviews of cohabitating young adults conducted by Smock and Manning are also informative here. As highlighted above, financial constraints affect relationship quality and entry into marriage for young cohabitators; and infidelity is a deal-breaker that will end the relationship. These appear to be important issues for the consideration of the health of cohabiting relationships.

Finally, a memo on incarcerated partners also suggests that this is a population in need of unique measures.RD For example, contact while in prison (e.g. visits, letters, phone contact, conjugal visits) might hold a different meaning for couples when one partner is incarcerated, compared to other couples. While it is a seemingly simple measure, it requires commitment, loyalty and relationship stability.

In sum, communication, happiness and/or satisfaction, and a lack of conflict are commonly mentioned elements of a healthy couple relationship; however, a diversity of other constructs were also listed as important elements. These include indicators of commitment and contributions to the relationship, the successful fulfillment of child-rearing and family functions, and the presence of social support through external networks, to name a few. Further, these measures may differ depending upon the population being considered, such as low-income populations, cohabiting couples, or those in prison. We are grateful to the authors for contributing these important insights into the measurement and conceptualization of healthy couple relationships.

*Since their contribution comprises a book chapter in progress, the authors requested that the chapter itself be excluded from this report.

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- ^{DO} David H. Olson, Ph.D. President of Life Innovations, and Luke Knutson, M.A. Research Associate, Life Innovations.
- ^{PS} Pamela J. Smock, Ph.D. Department of Sociology & Population Studies Center, Institute for Social Research, The University of Michigan and Wendy D. Manning, Ph.D. Department of Sociology & Center for Family and Demographic Research, Bowling Green State University.

Part One
Summaries of Recommendation Memos

Elaine A. Anderson, Ph.D
University of Maryland

Topic: Low income families and families of color, homeless women and their children

- Marital status is not an adequate enough indicator of the health of the families in her research:
 - Social support- as enacted, as embedded networks, and as perceived - is important to measure since many of the sub-populations she studies live with a constellation of extended family members
 - The “Nurturant Father Scale” is a measure of men’s involvement with their children that has been tested with ethnically diverse samples; The “Father Involvement Scale” was tested with samples diverse in ethnicity, gender, and family form
 - The CES-D has widespread reliability in diverse samples, and is recommended for assessment due to higher levels of depressive symptoms among low-income samples compared to average samples

- The author suggests that the Dyadic Adjustment Scale and The Conflict Tactics Scale-Revised have potential to be appropriate measure of relationship quality and conflict for low-income populations

- Positive measures, and not just indicators should be considered before making programmatic or policy recommendations (such as the Family Strengths Index)

Alan Booth, Ph.D.
Paul Amato, Ph.D.
Stacey J. Rogers, Ph.D.
Dave Johnson, Ph.D.
Pennsylvania State University

- Booth et al. describe three major approaches to studying marriage:
 - Observational research on marital interactions
 - Qualitative, informal face-to-face interviews, which are organized into themes and insights
 - Quantitative surveys conducted with large, representative samples, either in person or by phone with pre-coded response categories

- They identify three perspectives on how to measure marital quality with this quantitative approach:
 - A marital adjustment perspective, with items selected because they discriminate between marriages found to be well-adjusted versus poorly-adjusted, e.g., comparing recently divorced couples with currently married couples. Examples are the Locke-Wallace Marital Adjustment Test and the Dyadic Adjustment Scale, both of which capture multiple dimensions of marital adjustment in a single score.
 - A subjective evaluative perspective, which assesses a global evaluation of the individual's marriage, such as overall happiness or satisfaction. This point of view would exclude items that measure communication, conflict and commitment, because they are viewed as predictors of marital quality, rather than components of the definition. An example is the Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale
 - A perspective that sees marital quality as a set of conceptually distinct but empirically correlated dimensions. This is the authors' preferred approach, as it keeps the elements of marital quality distinct, both conceptually and empirically

- Using the third marital quality perspective, the authors measure marital quality with 5 scales developed by Johnson, White, Booth, and Edwards (1986). These scales tap into:
 - **Marital happiness**, including both global and specific aspects of happiness
 - **Marital interaction**, including day-to-day activities and social activities
 - **Marital conflict**, ranging from disagreements to violence
 - **Marital problems**, including interpersonal problems such as being jealous, domineering or being easily angered; and antisocial characteristics such as drinking, drugs, and infidelity; and items on irritating habits and not spending sufficient time at home; and
 - **Divorce proneness**, including both cognitive items that assess thoughts of divorce as well as actions such as discussing divorce or seeing an attorney.

- Their analyses suggest the following about the measurement of marital quality with these five scales:
 - Marital quality is due mainly to dyadic properties of the couple, and not to individual traits, with the exception of marital problems -- “especially problems reflecting antisocial forms of behaviors (such as drug use or heavy drinking)”
 - These scales have adequate reliability
 - These scales are correlated with theoretically expected constructs, such as divorce and children’s self-reports of psychological well-being
 - The associations between the scales are moderate (as opposed to high), suggesting they are related but distinct constructs

Susan L. Brown, Ph.D.
Bowling Green State University

Topic: Relationship quality in cohabiting unions

- There are currently “no benchmarks for positive cohabiting relationships”
- Measures of relationship quality in cohabiting unions should consider the following:
 - Both positive and negative elements
 - Information on how cohabitators make decisions and pool resources
 - Conceptualization at both the individual and the couple level
 - Collection of relationship quality over time
- Measures of “plans to marry” may indicate commitment, at a minimum, but the absence of plans does constitute a poor quality relationship
- Brown finds no significant race differences in cohabiting and married relationship quality (based on NSFH data); Brown does find race differences in duration/stability
- The male partner’s plans to marry are more determinant of cohabitations resulting in marriage than the female partner’s plans
- Brown provides an extensive review of relationship quality and union transitions among cohabiting couples

Carolyn Pape Cowan, Ph.D.
Philip A. Cowan, Ph.D.
University of California, Berkeley

Topic: Healthy relationships among couples with children

- Well functioning or optimal couple relationships are complex, and there are few simple measurement or intervention strategies that capture this complexity
- There is a lack of theory and research on what contributes to healthy marriage in different types of relationships (e.g. married vs. cohabiting, yours/mine/our children)
- The mere measurement of marital status ignores relationship quality
- A focus on communication, conflict, and emotion regulation is also too narrow
- A healthy relationship allows partners to honor both their own and their partner's needs, goals and values, and also supports some joint goals and intimacy
- Observations of self-reports will not be correlated perfectly
- Based on their own research, the authors propose that relationship quality is affected by the following 5 domains:
 - The **individual adjustment** of each partner is such that they are both free of mental illness and exhibit signs of positive psychological adjustment (measures suggested)
 - The **quality of interaction**, such that couples are intimate partners who can confront problems, express and regulate feelings, use the partner as a "secure base," have satisfying sex, are satisfied with the division of family roles and power, and are committed to the relationship, and are generally satisfied (measures suggested for each construct)
 - The **Intergenerational connections** within their families of origin: couples can sustain relationships with parents or in-laws and use them as sources of support (measures suggested)
 - The strength of the **partners' connections outside the family**: couples are able to sustain the relationship/family through work and support for and from others
 - The ability of couples to **co-parent** effectively: this includes both partners being involved in decision-making, being satisfied with the division of labor, and supporting one another's parenting

Randal D. Day, Ph.D.
Brigham Young University

Topic: Relationships when one partner is in prison

- There is minimal research on this topic, but existing studies suggest strong relationships exist and are important for inmates
- The types of constructs and measures used for prison populations include
 - **Contact** while in prison (e.g. visits, letters, phone contact, conjugal visits); this measure, while simple, may have a different meaning for inmates than it does for a general population, since it requires commitment, loyalty and relationship stability
 - **Relationship Simplicity** while in prison (one as opposed to multiple romantic relationships)
 - **Intentionality** for re-connecting with one's spouse, partner or family after prison
 - **Change of Life Patterns and Goals** after prison (e.g., decreased drug/alcohol use)
 - **Expectation Fulfillment** upon reconnecting with community and family, such as whether inmate is able to give up crime, drugs or alcohol after prison
 - **Relational Commitment** , or in other words, a motivation to preserve the relationship (Stafford and Canary 1991)

Patrick F. Fagan, M.A.
The Heritage Foundation

Topic: Healthy marriage conceptualization

- A healthy marriage involves unconditional commitment to one's partner and children
- Understanding the demands of a marriage and what constitutes a good marriage will help couples maintain a healthy marriage. Some key aspects include:
 - Giving rather than taking in a relationship
 - Having the attitude that solving problems leads to a productive life
 - Being willing to "learn about learning in the area of relationships"
 - Sensitivity to the intergenerational implications of how the couple approaches and lives out their marriage
 - Understanding each partner's pre-dispositions and attitudes about marriage
- Some aspects of a marriage are dynamic (changeable), and others are static. Dynamic aspects include:
 - Communication skills
 - Conflict resolution skills
- Static aspects cannot be changed, but they can be worked with, accepted, and understood in their implications for the relationship. Static aspects include:
 - Prior sexual relationships
 - Family of origin experiences

Blaine J. Fowers, Ph.D.
University of Miami

Topic: Long-term romantic relationships

- Fowers critiques current relationship quality measures for extensive emphasis on individualism and personal happiness
- Fowers proposes a six-dimension model to capture the multidimensional nature of long-term romantic relationships:
 - **Individual Benefits**, such as satisfaction, and experiences of emotional and physical intimacy
 - **Individual Contributions**, such as commitment and personal investment into a relationship
 - **Couple Interaction**, as indicated by specific communicative behaviors
 - **Relationship Entity**, such as a sense of the relationship as a team, or a sense of “we”
 - **Family Functioning**, the degree to which the relationship enables fulfillment of family roles
 - **Relationship Context**, such as social, legal, extended family and friendship networks which might offer support for the relationship.

Larry Ganong, Ph.D.
Marilyn Coleman, Ed.D.
University of Missouri-Columbia

Topic: Couples in stepfamilies

- Stepfamilies are unique from other relationships in that children from prior relationships exist at the start of the couple relationship
- The authors support the use of measures that include:
 - Conflict over stepchildren and finances related to step-children
 - Agreement over child rearing
 - Co-parenting dynamics
- The authors also provide suggestions for measurement development:
 - Measures that tap into reasons for remarriage are needed
 - Stepfamily-specific psychometric properties of child-rearing are needed
 - Inclusion of parent-stepparent agreement on child-rearing would be useful
 - Studies of couple relationships in cohabiting and gay/lesbian stepfamilies are virtually non-existent
 - Studies designed to measure remarried couple relationships in either low-income population or race/ethnicity groups are needed. In particular, the authors suspect that African-American couple relationships will be less affected by the stepparent/stepchild relationship than is true for white middle class families.

John M. Gottman, Ph.D.
University of Washington
Relationship Research Institute

Topic: The “Sound Relationship House” Questionnaires

- The “Sound Relationship House” scale has four dimensions
 - Quality of the friendship
 - Quality of the sex, romance, passion
 - Conflict: Constructive vs. destructive
 - Quality of the shared meaning system

- Three processes can be identified with this questionnaire
 - Flooding
 - Negative sentiment override
 - Repair effectiveness

Richard E. Heyman, Ph.D.
State University of New York at Stony Brook

Topic: Healthy Relationships from a Health Perspective

- The author conceptualizes a healthy relationship as one that:
 - **Safeguards partners’ physical integrity** (e.g., no violence; measures suggested)
 - **Minimizes partners’ risk of preventable physical and mental disorders** (e.g., low conflict, effective conflict resolution, and an absence of blaming the partner; measures suggested)
 - **Promotes partners’ physical and mental well-being** (e.g., self-reported marital satisfaction and supportive behaviors observed during tasks)
 - **Safeguards children’s physical integrity** (measure of parent-child aggression suggested)
 - **Minimizes children’s risk of preventable physical and mental disorders** (e.g., child exposure to parental conflict; measure suggested)
 - **Promotes children’s physical and mental well-being** (no measures suggested)

- The specification of a healthy relationship requires an overarching conceptual model

Thomas B. Holman, Ph.D.
Brigham Young University

Topic: Relationship Evaluation Questionnaire (RELATE)

- The author emphasizes the need for research to address theory
- This memo shares the RELATE instrument, which addresses the contexts and subsystems within which the relationship is developed and maintained, such as the individual, couple, familial and cultural contexts
- The questions for the RELATE instrument are directed towards individuals, but both members of a couple can complete the questionnaire
- The RELATE instrument comprises a large number of concepts with short scales of 3-5 items
- The RELATE instrument is available on-line

Michael P. Johnson, Ph.D.
Pennsylvania State University

Topic: Intimate violence and relationship health

- Johnson critiques typical measures of violence such as the Conflict Tactics Scale:
 - The behavioral focus is too narrowly placed on the identification of specific violent acts
 - There is typically a lack of attention to the broader interpersonal context of the violence
- Johnson suggests that measures of violence comprise the following constructs:
 - **Intimate terrorism**, which is “violence embedded in a general pattern of coercive control” -- usually men are the perpetrators
 - **Situational couple violence**, which is not about general control, but emerges from escalation of specific conflicts
 - **Violent resistance**, which occurs “among women trying to cope with their partner’s intimate terrorism”
 - These measures require information about violence and control for *both* partners
- Johnson suggests a coercive control scale under development by Dutton and Goodman
- Johnson also suggests that a violent relationship is by definition not a healthy relationship

Waldo E. Johnson, Jr., Ph.D.
University of Chicago

Topic: Positive couple relationships among low income populations

- The Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study and the Time, Love, Cash, Care and Children Study (TLC3) are the two main sources of data for studying relationships among unwed parents
- A key consideration for low-income populations is children from other relationships
 - Helping parents to develop healthy co-parenting relationships with former partners is important for both child well-being
 - It is also important in developing a positive couple relationship with the new partner, in part because involvement with one's children from other relationships might require interaction with a past romantic partner
- Constructs that should be measured for cohabiting couples include:
 - Likelihood that the relationship will evolve into marriage
 - A clear sense of self and of personal and couple expectations for the relationship
 - Individual and collective human capital skills for building and sustaining positive relationships
 - Couple communication skills (a chief problem plaguing parenting and couple relationships among unwed couples in the TLC3 study)
 - Disclosure, recognition and support of parental involvement with children from other relationships (especially important given high levels of multiple partner fertility)
- Co-parenting should also be measured for non-cohabiting couples
- The support of families of origin and peer networks may be especially important among young, unwed couples who have seldom achieved full economic independence

Katherine Kitzmann, Ph.D.
Leslie Nicholson, M.S.
Lisa Schum, M.S.
University of Memphis

Topic: Measurement of co-parenting after divorce

- The co-parental relationship is one that allows parents “to meet their childrearing responsibilities after divorce”
- Dimensions of positive co-parenting should include not only the absence of conflict, but:
 - The presence of positive behaviors (e.g. support, effective communication)
 - A range of behaviors, including those occurring between a child and a parent in the absence of the other parent.
 - Child’s age (optimal behaviors may differ depending on child’s developmental needs)
 - Time since divorce and post divorce events
- Co-parenting that is high in cooperation and low conflict predicts children’s post divorce adjustment
- The following measures show evidence of reliability and validity
 - Ahrons (1981) Quality of Coparental Communication is the most commonly used scale
 - Stolberg’s (1997) Co-parenting Behaviors Questionnaire is the only child-reported measure
 - McHale’s (1995) Coparenting and Family Rating System might be used even though it was developed for married families

Daniel T. Lichter, Ph.D.
Christie D. Batson
Leana M. Mellot
Ohio State University

Topic: Religion and healthy marriages

- Religion is “a contributing factor in maintaining a healthy and positive relationship” because it:
 - Helps couples acquire knowledge about each other
 - Reinforces pro-marriage norms
 - Is a venue for general pro-social behavior
 - Embeds couples in socially supportive networks
 - Provides counseling and other assistance through clergy members
 - Promotes spiritual intimacy (shared views of God, faith), which can spill over into emotional intimacy
- National datasets that include both measures of religion and relationship quality
 - National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1979 (wave 2000)
 - National Survey of Families and Household (wave 2003)

Velma McBride Murry, Ph.D.
University of Georgia

Topic: Positive marital and marital-analogous relationships among African-American couples

- Many stresses, including racism, undermine relationships among African-American couples
 - African American couples who develop skills to manage racism, bigotry, workplace and social stressors experience relatively high levels of marital satisfaction
- The adherence to customs of a couple's African-American heritage can be a strength
- Understanding, honesty, warmth, open communication, sharing, respectability, independence, listening skills, support and maturity have been found to be important for the relationships of African Americans
- Sensitivity to husbands' feelings of threat to their power and position in the family (especially as related to economic anxiety) is an important consideration in the relationships African-Americans
- Measures of relationship satisfaction, warmth, happiness, and stability from the Family and Community Health Study show good reliability and validity, although missing data is a problem among husbands

Steve Nock, Ph.D.
University of Virginia

Topic: Commitment

- Nock's primary concern in measuring healthy relationships is for the well-being of children
- Nock states "While there are many emotional and/or affective dimensions of a relationship that are desirable, most are probably beyond the reach of policy", and therefore does not discuss these constructs here
- A healthy marriage (or relationship) is one in which partners are sufficiently **committed**
 - Commitment involves both dedication (desire to maintain and improve the relationship, Stanley and Markman 1992) and constraints to exiting the relationship (e.g., marital-specific capital)
 - One of the most important determinants of individual expression of commitment is the imagined commitment of the partner
 - Commitment correlates moderately with measures of marital quality, but is as stronger predictor of divorce
 - Measures of commitment are suggested and provided

David H. Olson, Ph.D.
President, Life Innovations

Luke Knutson
Research Associate, Life Innovations

Topic: ENRICH Marital Inventory

- “A healthy marriage can be conceptualized as a loving, committed relationship where both partners are satisfied with their relationship”
- Two cornerstones of a happy marriage are:
 - Strong communication
 - Conflict resolution skills
- Other dimensions of a healthy marriage include:
 - Balance in lives
 - Closeness
 - Flexibility
 - Shared leadership pattern
- ENRICH is a comprehensive couple assessment
 - EN-riching
 - R-relationship
 - I-ssues
 - C-ommunication
 - H-appiness
- Five typologies of couples that can be identified with ENRICH include
 - Vitalized couples
 - Harmonious couples
 - Traditional couples
 - Conflicted couples
 - Devitalized couples
- ENRICH has norms based on over 100,000 couples
 - Norms are NOT based on couples in poverty or low-educated couples
 - There is a version of ENRICH for cohabiting couples
 - PREPARE-MC was designed for step-families

Pamela J. Smock, Ph.D.
University of Michigan

Wendy D. Manning, Ph.D.
Bowling Green State University

Topic: Relationship quality among cohabiting young adults

- The authors present three main themes that emerge from their qualitative study of cohabiting young adults
- Theme 1: There are effects of financial constraints on relationship quality and conflict
 - This includes not just the amount of money, but job and economic uncertainty/insecurity faced by couples
 - Many young adults are just getting by financially
- Theme 2: There are effects of financial constraints on whether and when to marry
 - Many cohabitators say they would like to marry, but feel economic security is necessary for marriage
 - The cost of a wedding is a significant financial barrier to marriage when parents can't help pay
 - Recommend measuring perceived economic adequacy
- Theme 3: Infidelity effects relationships
 - Infidelity is a “deal breaker” that will end a relationship
 - Fear of infidelity is common and self-reported infidelity occurs in a significant minority of couples

Part Two
Recommendation Memos

Measurement and Family Demography

Prepared by Elaine A. Anderson, Ph.D.
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The majority of my research over the past 15 years has focused on low-income families and families of color. The research I have conducted includes samples of homeless women and their families, housed women and their families in the Head Start program, low-income non-residential and non-custodial fathers and their families, and low-income rural women and their families. Therefore, the suggestions I have regarding defining and measuring positive relationships and healthy marriages are based on my experiences working with the above populations.

Regarding issues of definition, I think it is critical in order for us to truly measure the experiences of families and their relationships that culture and class have paramount consideration. We must be careful to not define marriage and supportive relationships solely from a white middle-class perspective that is strictly limited by traditional and legal concepts of marriage. The best example I could provide of this caution occurred in my research with homeless and housed low-income women and their families. When trying to assess the relationship between support and family well-being, we found that the best measure of that relationship was not using the variable of marital status, but rather using ones household composition. In particular, for many low-income families that live in intergenerational households, the makeup of the persons who live together is more significant in determining how positive their relationship is with others regarding social support, depression, and health rather than if they are married. Consequently, I would strongly suggest when collecting family demographics that the number of people in the household as well as the role(s) of those individuals be identified. In addition, given that sometimes individuals can live together but have little to do with each other, it is also important to measure frequency of contact, satisfaction with contact, frequency of role responsibilities undertaken or division of labor and the satisfaction with role fulfillment. Having a partner, particularly one who is unemployed or underemployed, or who may provide relatively few emotional supports can in fact be a greater detriment to the well-being of a low-income woman, than any benefits she might accrue through a married status.

Additionally, I would argue that any discussion surrounding measurement of relationships and marriages must consider the importance of qualitative as well as quantitative data. Increasingly researchers who espouse either approach to data collection are recognizing the importance of the other approach, and even demographers, sociologists, and economists who traditionally would use larger national data sets that are predominantly quantitative in nature may be beginning to supplement their findings with qualitative data as well. However, I would encourage this discussion of measurement to incorporate the relevance of qualitative data sets, not solely as a supplement to

quantitative data, but as stand-alone data. My experience in working with low-income populations in particular is that the voices of the poor may be best represented initially through qualitative data collection, followed by the development of instruments that incorporate the results from the qualitative data. Qualitative data collection by its very nature necessitates developing a trusting face-to-face relationship with ones respondents that is a strength to be recognized for collecting and utilizing qualitative data. Additionally, the presentation of qualitative data lends itself to the presentation of policy documents. For example I would encourage you to explore the numerous policy documents on the University of Maryland Family Impact Seminar website which can be found at www.hhp.umd.edu/FMST/ under the Maryland Family Policy Impact Seminar. These policy documents have incorporated data regarding the lives of low-income individuals and families on several topics including childcare, responsible fatherhood, rural women and welfare reform, and mothers' relationships in relation to marriage policy.

Although I am not aware of a great measure that assesses the quality of marital or similar dyads, I still would not discard the Dyadic Adjustment Scale by Graham Spanier. I guess the date of the measure from 1976 perhaps suggests the challenges for researchers of developing valid and reliable instruments. However, even though this instrument was developed over 20 years ago, the items are still quite relevant and it can be used with a fairly diverse population, although diversity was certainly not taken into serious consideration at the time of its development (I was peripherally involved as a graduate student in searching for items and testing some of the earlier versions of the instrument). I also know that the instrument has been translated and used in numbers of cultures including Hispanic and Asian origins. Additionally, it has been used with samples of cohabiting and/or gay respondents. The initial report on this instrument, its development, and reliability and validity scores by Spanier, G. B., was published in the *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, February 1976, pges. 15-28.

In any discussion of positive relationships and healthy marriages there are several variables that should be explored to understand such relationships and make programmatic or policy recommendations. In contrast to exclusively focusing on negative social indicators it is important to develop positive measures of family well-being. Monitoring trends in strength indicators can inform policy makers and promote appropriate interventions to improve relationships. First I would encourage you to look at the Family Strengths Index developed by Orthner, D.K, and Cole, G.P (1998), www.dorthner@email.unc.edu. This 40-item index assesses the household and relational assets that families may use to cope with and adapt to pressures they face. For specific information about the development of the instrument, contact Orthner and Cole at the Jordan Institute for Families at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill to obtain a copy of the article "An Asset Index of Family Strength: Theory and Measurement Issues."

An additional primary concept for understanding positive relationships and healthy marriages encompasses the measurement of social support. In order to accurately

include a measurement of social support there are really three social support concepts, as operationalized by Berrera (1986) to be considered. These concepts include: enacted social support, social embeddedness, and perceived support. Enacted support measures actions that others perform when they render support to an individual, often provided when individuals face adversity and stress. This measurement is important to understanding positive relationships because it does not assume one is experiencing a good relationship or support simply because one has a partner or is surrounded by a network of family or friends. Although behavioral observations of supportive transactions would be most reliable, due to time limitations, retrospective self-report perceived support is also important. Social embeddedness is the connections individuals have to people in their social networks. Social embeddedness is often measured using broad indicators such as marital/partner status, and contact with relatives and friends. These measures quantify the number of supporters or the amount of social contact, assuming such social networks could serve as support resources to enhance relationship or marital quality. Although this support concept is perhaps most frequently used in research measuring support, one should be cautioned that embeddedness in a network alone is not necessarily a complete measure of support, because those in ones network could be more burdensome than helpful. Finally, perceived support measures an individual's confidence that adequate helpful social supports would be available if needed. This concept measures an individuals cognitive assessment of how reliably connected they are to those in their network and personal relationships. Often researchers use one or another of the above social support concepts, and in fact may describe one concept of social support in their study when in fact they collect data to measure another social support concept. The social support concepts, or components of them are used interchangeably, as if measuring the same construct. Thus, any utilization of social support with healthy relationships and marriages should attempt to capture all three social support concepts, or at minimum recognize the differences between the concepts and the limitations of each. For an application of these concepts and the selection of measures used to assess the relationships of homeless women and low-income housed women see Letiecq, B. A., Anderson, E.A., and Koblinsky S.A., Journal of Family Relations, 1996, 45, pgs. 265-272, and Letiecq, B.A., Anderson, E.A., and Koblinsky, S.A., Journal of Family Relations, 1998, 47, pgs. 415-421.

One would be remiss in this discussion of positive relationships and healthy marriages measurement to not explore issues around male involvement in the relationship. Probably in most of the father involvement literature to date, however the focus has been on father-child interactions to child outcomes. The role of fathers with their children clearly seems relevant to any discussion of adult relationship well-being, given the impact of children upon marriage in particular is well noted in professional and popular literature. There are numerous issues to any measurement consideration of father involvement with their children, but certainly the importance of including quantitative and qualitative information is relevant. I would highly recommend two articles for consideration in this discussion. The first is a paper presented at the National Conference on Health Statistics, August 1999, Washington, D.C., by Cabrera, N.J., Tamis-LeMonda, C.S., Lamb, M. E., and Boller, K entitled "Measuring Father Involvement in the Early Head Start Evaluation: A Multidimensional Conceptualization". This paper reviews

issues for measuring father involvement including both quantitative and qualitative data. Many of the measurement issues raised are important for consideration of father involvement in relationships in general. The second article by Finley, G.E. (finley@fiu.edu) and Schwartz, S.J., (Sschwartz@med.miami.edu) in press in *Educational and Psychological Measurement* presents psychometric data for two fathering measures, the “Nurturant Fathering Scale” and the “Father Involvement Scale”. These scales differ from many father involvement measures because they have been completed from the adolescent or adult child’s retrospective point of view. High internal consistency estimates are reported for both scales. The Nurturant Fathering Scale was designed to measure the affective quality of fathering and has been tested with an ethnically diverse sample. The Father Involvement Scale samples also are diverse in gender, ethnicity, and family form.

I would also suggest that any studies of positive relationship assessment and healthy marriages should assess participants’ mental health well being. My personal favorite is the Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale (CES-D) (Radloff, 1977). I have used this instrument with numerous samples of ethnically, economically, and gender diverse populations. I find the instrument easy to administer, easily understood, and non-threatening to respondents. Further it is easy to score and use in analyses. Obviously there are many studies that have used this instrument, and I feel in particular it is an appropriate instrument to be administered to both men and women. Further, it is critical to include measures of depression with low-income men and women since increasingly studies are finding their levels of reported depressive symptoms are significantly higher than in the general population. To find articles that review the development of this instrument see: Radloff, L. S. (1977). The CES-D scale: A self-report depression scale for research in the general population. *Applied Psychological Measurement*, 1(3), 385-401 and Radloff, L. S., & Locke, B. Z. (1986) and the community mental health assessment survey and the CES-D scale. In M. M. Weissman, J. K. Myers, & C. E. Ross (Eds.), *Community surveys of psychiatric disorders* (pp. 177-189). New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

Finally, this discussion must include measures related to conflict in relationships. I have used most frequently the Conflict Tactics Scale – Revised (CTS2; Straus, M., Hamby, Boney-McCoy, & Sugarman, A., 1996). This 78-item questionnaire asks the respondents to indicate how many times he/she did each of the specific behaviors during a particular time period, and how many times their partner engaged in these behaviors during that period. The CTS2 has five subscales: physical assault, psychological aggression, negotiation, injury, and sexual coercion. The CTS2 is a revision of the Conflict Tactics Scale, which is the “gold standard” measure of conflict behavior in the research literature. The strength of the CTS2 is that it includes psychological aggression items not included in the CTS.

A second conflict measure also useful that incorporates more psychological abuse variables than the Conflict Tactics Scale is the Conflict Behaviors (Multidimensional Emotional Abuse Scale) (MEAS; Murphy, Hoover, & Taft, 1999). This questionnaire

includes 28 items describing behaviors that are psychologically abusive (in contrast to physically abusive). Forms of psychological abuse include invasion of the other person's privacy, derogatory comments, rejection, refusal to talk, and threats of violence. The respondent indicates how often each behavior was exhibited during the past 4 months, by the self and by the partner.

Relationship Quality in Cohabiting Unions: Key Findings and Future Directions*

Susan L. Brown

September 15, 2003

*Memo prepared for Child Trends to use in their upcoming session on defining and measuring healthy marriages and positive relationships at the Measurement and Family Demography conference sponsored by the NICHD Family and Child Well-being Research Network and the Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics to be held in Washington, D.C. November 13-14, 2003.

Introduction

In this memo, I will address the significance of measuring positive relationships among cohabitators as my research expertise is in the area of cohabitation, relationship quality, and well-being. Understanding the relationship quality of cohabitators is important for several reasons. First, cohabitation has increased dramatically over the past few decades such that it is now arguably a normative stage in the family life course. There are over 5 million opposite-sex cohabiting couples in the U.S (U.S. Bureau of the Census 2001). A majority of persons in their twenties and thirties have experienced cohabitation (Bumpass and Lu 2000; Bumpass and Sweet 1989) and cohabitation is the modal path of entry into marriage (Bumpass, Sweet, and Cherlin 1991). Second, cohabitation is truly a family form; forty percent of cohabiting unions involve children, over 40 percent of nonmarital births are to cohabiting parents, and 40 percent of children will spend some time in a cohabiting family prior to age 16 (Bumpass et al. 1991; Bumpass and Lu 2000). Parental well-being is closely tied to children's well-being (e.g., Amato and Booth 1997) and thus the significance of promoting positive relationships among cohabitators often extends beyond the couple to include children. Third, unlike marriages, there is mounting evidence that cohabiting unions are diverse in their meanings and purposes (Casper and Sayer 2000). For some, cohabitation is a short-lived experience that functions as a prelude to marriage. For others, cohabitation is an alternative to dating without coresidence. Still others may view their cohabiting unions as a long-term alternative to marriage. These various forms of cohabitation may be associated with relationship quality as well as subsequent union transitions (e.g., the transition to marriage). I begin by describing the data and measures I have used in my research on relationship quality among cohabitators. Then, I summarize the key findings of my research. Finally, I outline directions for the future to ensure that we develop sophisticated measures of relationship quality and positive relationships among cohabitators.

Data and Measures

My analyses of cohabitators' relationship quality have relied on data from the 1987-88 and 1992-94 waves of the National Survey of Families and Households (NSFH). The NSFH is ideal for examining this topic as it contains an oversample of cohabitators, several detailed measures of relationship quality (see the Appendix for the measures I have used), and comparable measures for marrieds. Unfortunately, the data are now rather old. If the growth in cohabitation has been accompanied by a shift in the composition of the cohabiting population or if period factors influence decisions to cohabit or relationship quality (Wilhelm 1998), then we can not generalize from this NSFH sample to today's cohabitators. This is an important caveat to keep in mind and it is a strong rationale for encouraging government investment in a new family survey that will permit researchers to investigate the dynamics of contemporary cohabiting unions. Other data sets, including the National Survey of America's Families, the National Survey of Family Growth, and the National Longitudinal Study of Youth, contain few if any measures of cohabitators' relationship quality. Although the Fragile Families data include several measures of relationship quality, this sample is not representative of most cohabitators in the U.S.

Cohabitators' Relationship Quality: Key Findings

Cohabitation versus marriage. Just as scholars have argued we should measure multiple positive (e.g., happiness and interaction) and negative (e.g., disagreements and instability) dimensions of marital quality (Johnson, White, Edwards, and Booth 1986), it is important to consider several dimensions for cohabitators, too. Much of the research on cohabitators' relationship quality has been comparative, evaluating the extent to which cohabitators and marrieds experience similar levels of relationship quality. This approach implies that average marital quality is an appropriate benchmark for cohabiting relationships, which may or may not be a reasonable assumption. In work with Alan Booth, I found that cohabitators tend to report lower levels of relationship quality than marrieds (Brown and Booth 1996). Cohabitators report less happiness and more disagreements and conflict (i.e., aggression) than their married counterparts, net of sociodemographic factors, including relationship stressors such as the presence of

children and prior union experience. However, cohabitators and marrieds do not differ in their reports of time spent interacting with their partners or spouses, nor do they differ in their perception of relationship fairness. This pattern of results is similar to that found by Nock (1995), who used data from the NSFH to compare the relationship quality of cohabitators to that of marrieds who premaritally cohabited with their spouses and marrieds who did not cohabit premaritally. Nock concluded that the two married groups are much more similar to each other than either group is to the cohabitators in terms of relationship quality.

Marital intentions among cohabitators. About 75 percent of cohabitators report plans to wed their partners, suggesting cohabitation serves as a prelude to marriage (Brown and Booth 1996). For a smaller share, cohabitation seems to function as a long-term alternative to marriage (i.e., they report no marriage plans). The absence of plans to marry among cohabitators is positively associated with relationship duration as well as prior marital and cohabiting experience (Brown and Booth 1996). Cohabitators' plans to marry their partner may be associated with their relationship quality. Nonetheless, I maintain that plans to marry is not an indicator (or dimension) of relationship quality but rather an important feature of cohabiting relationships that researchers should consider when evaluating cohabitators' relationship quality. Cohabitators who plan to marry likely view their current arrangement as a stepping stone to marriage, or as a temporary arrangement until marriage is feasible. Consequently, having plans to marry is in a sense a proxy for a minimally acceptable level of positive relationship quality. The association with relationship quality is less clear for those without plans to marry. Cohabitators without marriage plans may be opposed to marriage as an institution, but that opposition should not in any way alter their appraisal of their cohabiting relationship. Still, it is just as likely that the absence of marriage plans among cohabitators results from their reluctance to wed their partner; they do not deem their partner to be marriageable. Another scenario is that some share of those without plans to marry have not progressed far enough in their relationship to consider marriage to their partner. How this would affect relationship quality is not readily apparent. I found that plans to marry among cohabitators is associated with relationship quality. Cohabitators planning to marry their partners and marrieds do not significantly differ in terms of relationship quality, except that cohabitators actually spend more time interacting together than do marrieds (Brown and Booth 1996). Thus, by taking into account cohabitators' marriage plans, we reach a different conclusion about the relationship quality of cohabitators versus marrieds. Cohabitators' relationship quality appears lower than marrieds' because the small share of cohabitators without marriage plans report especially low quality relationships. Also, since these analyses are based on cross-sectional data, it likely overrepresents persons in long cohabiting unions (i.e., those who have not already transitioned into marriage) and we know that duration and union status interact such that cohabitators in unions of long duration report particularly low levels of relationship quality (Brown and Booth 1996). Thus, most cohabitations (i.e., those in which the cohabitor reports marriage plans) are of similar quality to marriages, on average.

The role of relationship duration. How does the relationship quality of cohabiting unions change and evolve over time? Relationship duration is negatively associated with relationship quality among cohabitators and marrieds alike, yet for both groups, relationship quality appears to remain fairly stable over time. In an analysis designed to evaluate whether the dynamics of cohabitators' relationship quality exhibit a pattern similar to that which has been documented for marital quality, I found mixed results (Brown 2003). On the one hand, duration-related changes in positive dimensions of relationship quality, including relationship happiness and interaction, are essentially the same for cohabitators and marrieds; both groups experience modest declines in these dimensions over a ten-year period. On the other hand, the association between relationship duration and a negative dimension of relationship quality, instability, are distinct for cohabitators and marrieds. At higher levels of duration, cohabitators report greater instability whereas among marrieds, duration is not significantly related to instability. This finding is important because it suggests that the longer cohabitators are together, the less confident they are

in the viability of their union. This difference probably reflects the role of cohabitation in the life course. For most people, cohabitation is short-term union that functions as a prelude to marriage. Notably, plans to marry accounts for the positive effect of duration on relationship instability. Moreover, plans to marry is negatively related to instability, meaning that those with intentions to wed are more confident in the future of their union. Additional analyses show that the association between duration and relationship quality is similar only for those cohabitators with marriage plans and marrieds, although these cohabitators continue to experience greater relationship instability in longer unions (perhaps because their intentions to wed are unfulfilled). Cohabitators without marriage plans experience no duration-related changes in their relationship quality. Among cohabitators without marriage plans, previously married cohabitators report more happiness and less instability than their never-married counterparts, supporting the notion that many divorcees prefer cohabitation to remarriage. Future research should further explore the role of prior marital experience in the relationship quality dynamics of cohabitators as it is likely indicative of the meaning or purpose of cohabitation.

Relationship quality and union transitions. Cohabitators' relationship quality is associated with union outcomes (Brown 2000). I constructed couple-level measures of relationship quality and relationship expectations (i.e., plans to marry and the perceived likelihood of separation) and estimated discrete-time event history models predicting the likelihood of marriage and separation. Although I anticipated that positive dimensions of relationship quality would encourage marriage and negative dimensions would discourage marriage, in fact, being in a positive relationship (i.e., having high levels of relationship quality) does not spur marriage entry. Instead, poor relationship quality is associated with increased odds of separation. Furthermore, significant gender differences emerged in response to poor relationship quality. Women's reports of low relationship quality heighten the odds of separation but men's reports of poor quality simply decrease the odds of marriage. The influence of relationship expectations on cohabitators' union outcomes also differs by gender. When neither partner reports plans to marry or when both partners report an even to high chance of separation, the odds of marriage significantly decrease and the odds of separation significantly increase. But when partners differ in their expectations, it appears that the male's is more consequential. Couples in which only the female partner reports plans to marry are significantly less likely to marry than are couples in which both partners report plans. In contrast, couples in which only the male partner reports plans are just as likely to marry or separate as those couples in which both partners plan to wed. Couples in which only the male partner reports an even to high chance of separation are significantly less likely to marry although the odds of separation do not differ relative to those couples in which both partners report a very low chance of separation. There are also important race differences in the effects of relationship expectations on union outcomes. Although 70 percent of black and white cohabitators express intentions to marry their partner, 60 percent of these whites realize their marriage plans, whereas less than 20 percent of blacks do. Among black couples in which both partners report plans to marry, both separation and remaining in the cohabiting union are more likely outcomes than marriage! The explanation for this difference is not clear, but I did find some evidence to suggest that black couples planning to marry report lower levels of relationship quality than whites. About 50 percent of these black couples continue to cohabit, meaning they are in stable relationships, yet only two-thirds of them report plans to marry at reinterview. This pattern of findings supports the contention that cohabitation is a long-term alternative to marriage for many blacks.

Does marriage improve cohabitators' relationship quality? Implicit in recent policy debates about marriage promotion is the assumption that marriage is more conducive to positive couple relationships than cohabitation. In my examination of changes in cohabitators' relationship quality following marriage entry, I found that cohabitators who marry report more happiness and fewer disagreements as well as less instability and violent conflict resolution, net of their levels while cohabiting (Brown forthcoming). There are no changes in relationship fairness and interaction following marriage. Still, it does not appear

that marriage entry *per se* elevates cohabitators' relationship quality. Relative to those cohabitators who marry, continuously cohabiting individuals who report marriage plans at both interviews or even just at reinterview report similar levels of relationship quality. Long-term cohabitators who lack marriage plans report particularly low levels of relationship quality. In other words, it seems marriage is sufficient to prompt an increase (or, in some cases, smaller decreases) in relationship quality, but it is not necessary. A reported commitment to marriage is analogous to marriage in terms of relationship quality, undermining the notion that the structure or institution of marriage provides benefits unavailable to cohabitators. This conclusion is tempered by the fact that only a minority (one-third) of long-term cohabitators envision marriage to their partners.

Future Directions

The rapid growth in cohabitation over a short period of time signals significant family change. Not surprisingly, cohabitation research is burgeoning (see Smock 2000 for a recent summary). Early research on cohabitation emphasized its linkages to other life events, such as marriage and childbearing, but increasingly the focus is on the cohabiting relationship itself. This is a crucial first step, but we still have much to learn about the meaning(s) of cohabitation, what constitutes a healthy union, and the significance of gender and race-ethnicity in cohabitation. More broadly, the popularity of cohabitation coupled with the diversity of family living arrangements in general suggest a need to move away from narrow family definitions that only include marriage to those that encompass relationships, whether they are marital, cohabiting, living apart together (LAT), or some other form. I explore each of these directions in more detail below.

Meaning(s) of cohabitation. Why has cohabitation become so commonplace? Is cohabitation replacing marriage? These are important questions that have not received enough attention and may have implications for promoting positive relationships. There is sufficient evidence indicating that cohabitation serves various purposes, but I do not think we have clearly established the boundaries of these purposes, nor do we have measures available to fully tap into these multiple meanings. How do we measure whether cohabitation is operating as an alternative to singlehood, a prelude to marriage, or a long-term substitute for marriage? How are cohabitators distributed across these (and possibly other, yet to be identified) groups and does relationship quality vary by group? Does relationship quality influence movement among these groups? Thus far, factors such as race-ethnicity, duration, prior marital experience, and the presence of children have been used by researchers to demarcate cohabitators into different groups. For whites, cohabitation is likely to operate as a prelude to marriage, whereas for nonwhites, it is more likely to be a substitute for marriage (e.g., Brown 2000). Almost by definition, longer cohabiting unions seem less likely to be a prelude to marriage and more likely to be an alternative to marriage. Indeed, duration is negatively associated with plans to marry (Brown and Booth 1996). Prior marital and cohabiting experience are also negatively related to cohabitators' marital intentions, suggesting that many Americans desire an intimate partnership, but not one that entails marriage (Brown and Booth 1996). Research on Canadian cohabitators indicates that the presence of children stabilizes cohabiting unions, lowering the odds of both marriage and separation (Wu 1995). However, Manning's (2000) analyses of the NSFG show no stabilizing effects of children conceived during cohabitation. These factors are central to our understanding of cohabitation, and merit additional exploration so that we can more precisely pinpoint their relevance to various forms of cohabitation.

Other dimensions of relationship quality. The NSFH contains several good measures of cohabitators' relationship quality and these measures are also available for marrieds, facilitating comparisons between the two groups. Many other large surveys lack information on relationship quality altogether, contain only a few measures, or only gather information on marital quality. We need to be sure that all future family data collection efforts include extensive measures of relationship quality among cohabitators.

Measurement of cohabitators' relationship quality may even be more important than marrieds' because we know comparatively little about it. In particular, we have basically no information on how cohabitators make decisions and pool resources. We also know very little about aggression and violence in cohabitators' relationships, although studies from a decade or so ago documented higher rates of violence among cohabiting couples than either daters or marrieds (e.g., Stets and Straus 1990). I found that the transition to marriage actually results in significant declines in reported aggression among former cohabitators (Brown forthcoming). And, apart from the two waves of the NSFH, to my knowledge, we do not have prospective longitudinal measures of cohabitators' relationship quality, which would allow for more sophisticated modeling of the dynamics of cohabiting relationships.

The roles of gender and race-ethnicity. My research suggests that we ought to conceptualize relationship quality at both the individual and couple levels. Partners do not always appraise their relationships similarly, and these differences, which are interesting in themselves, also have consequences for union outcomes. Jessie Bernard (1982) called attention to his and her marriages and it appears there are his and her cohabiting relationships, too. There is also conflicting evidence regarding gender dynamics in cohabiting unions. Brines and Joyner (1999) maintain that cohabiting unions are grounded by principles of equality, yet Sanchez, Manning, and Smock (1998) demonstrate that a traditional, gender-based mate-selection process operates among cohabitators such that men's earnings and women's time spent in housework encourage the transition into marriage. What are the power dynamics undergirding cohabiting unions and how do they relate to cohabitators' relationship quality? Does the distribution of power vary across different forms of cohabitation? We need to pay closer attention to the role of gender in cohabitators' relationship quality. We also need to unravel the race-ethnic variation in cohabitation. African American cohabitators tend to experience unions of longer duration and are less likely to transition into marriage than whites (Manning and Smock 1995). Hispanics also cohabit for relatively long periods and often experience childbearing in their unions (e.g., Landale and Fenelly 1992; Manning and Landale 1996). However, I found no race difference in relationship quality among cohabitators despite the persistence of such a difference among marrieds (Brown 2003). What happens to cohabitators once they marry—do race differences in marital quality emerge and if so, why? Additionally, what are the barriers to marriage among black cohabitators who are less likely to realize their plans to marry than whites? Are there fewer relationship quality benefits for blacks who marry?

Relationship trajectories. Ideally, funding agencies would initiate a study in which we follow individuals prospectively over time to chart changes in relationship quality as people move from dating to cohabitation to marriage. Many policy makers are promoting marriage as a way to improve individual and family well-being, but we know that persons involved in marriages of poor quality exhibit lower levels of well-being than their unmarried counterparts (Gove, Hughes, and Style 1983). Positive relationships throughout the life course are integral to well-being and thus it would be beneficial for researchers to investigate relationship quality and factors contributing to positive relationships across multiple forms of partnerships. The retreat from marriage and the corresponding increase in cohabitation necessitate a greater focus on unmarried partnerships. Currently, we have no benchmarks for positive cohabiting relationships. Since there is even less information on the quality of dating relationships, we know little about whether cohabitation is associated with better quality couple relationships relative to non-coresidential dating. Thus far, our comparisons have been restricted to cohabitation versus marriage. A broader perspective will help us take account of the diverse living arrangements and intimate partnerships experienced by Americans today and will facilitate the identification of indicators of positive, healthy relationships—married and unmarried alike.

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Appendix: Relationship Quality Measures

I have used the following NSFH measures in my research on cohabitators' relationship quality.

Relationship Happiness

Taking all things together, how would you describe your relationship?

- 01 Very unhappy
- 02
- 03
- 04
- 05
- 06
- 07 Very happy

Relationship Fairness

How do you feel about the fairness in your relationship in each of the following areas?

- a. household chores
- b. working for pay
- c. spending money

- 01-Very unfair to me
- 02-Somewhat unfair to me
- 03-Fair to both
- 04-Somewhat unfair to her/him
- 05-Very unfair to her/him

Relationship Interaction

During the past month, about how often did you and your partner spend time alone with each other, talking, or sharing an activity?

- 01-Never
- 02-About once a month
- 03-Two or three times a month
- 04-About once a week
- 05-Two or three times a week
- 06-Almost every day

Relationship Disagreements

The following is a list of subjects on which couples often have disagreements. How often, if at all, in the last year have you had open disagreements about each of the following:

- a. household tasks
- b. money
- c. spending time together
- d. sex
- e. having a(n)other child
- f. in-laws

- 01-Never
- 02-Less than once a month
- 03-Several times a month
- 04-About once a week
- 05-Several times a week
- 06-Almost every day

Relationship Conflict

There are various ways that couples deal with serious disagreements. When you have a serious disagreement with your partner, how often do you:

- a. just keep your opinions to yourself?
- b. discuss your disagreements calmly?
- c. argue heatedly or shout at each other?
- d. end up hitting or throwing things at each other?

- 01-Never
- 02-Seldom
- 03-Sometimes
- 04-Very often
- 05-Always

Relationship Instability (Separation Expectations)

It is always difficult to predict what will happen in a relationship, but realistically, what do you think the chances are that you and your partner will eventually separate?

- 01-Very low
- 02-Low
- 03-About even
- 04-High
- 05-Very high

Plans to Marry

Combines YES responses to these two questions: Do you and your partner have any definite plans to get married? and Do you think that you will eventually marry him/her?

- 1-Yes
- 2-No

The author also submitted the following articles as attachments to the memo:

Brown, S.

Moving from cohabitation to marriage: effects on relationship quality. *Social Science Research* (2003).

Brown, S.

Relationship Quality Dynamics of Cohabiting Unions. *Journal of Family Issues*, Vol. 24 No. 5, (July 2003) 583-601.

Brown, S.

Union Transitions Among Cohabitors: The Significance of Relationship Assessments and Expectations. *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 62 (August 2000) 833–846.

Brown, S.; Booth, A.

Cohabitation versus Marriage: A Comparison of Relationship Quality. *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 58 (August 1996) 668-678.

The Conceptualization and Measurement of “Healthy Marriages/Couple Relationships”

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This memo describes our view of some of the central dimensions involved in defining marriages and non-married intimate couple relationships that are healthy and satisfying to the partners and that enhance the growth of the couple’s children. The memo deals with 3 topics. First, we list a variety of marital and marital-like arrangements (marital status) relevant to our discussion. Second, we present the theoretical 5-dimension systemic framework in which we view healthy couple relationships, and suggest measures for each dimension - some that we have developed and some that other investigators have created. Finally, we provide brief information concerning the validity of the measures we have developed.

We sense a tension in the request for this memo. On one hand, it would be useful if researchers could identify a few essential ingredients of healthy marriages/couple relationships along with a few very short, labor-efficient survey questions, questionnaires, or observational measures to assess them. On the other hand, based on more than 30 years of studying couples, we have come to the conclusion that well-functioning or optimal couple relationships are complex, that the 50% divorce rate is only one index of the serious challenge of sustaining a healthy partnership, and that at present there are few *simple* measurement or intervention strategies that capture the current state of marriage or couple relationships.

Marital/Couple Relationship Status

Most of the research and theoretical literature on marriage and its benefits (Waite & Gallagher, 2000) or drawbacks (Bernard, 1973) contrasts individuals who are legally married with individuals who are not. Recent studies have focused on several contrasts within the married and non-married groups, especially remarried couples (Hetherington & Clingempeel, 1992) and divorced couples (Hetherington & Kelly, 2002; Wallerstein, Lewis, & Blakeslee, 2000). If the focus is on children’s well-being or difficulties, we need to attend to the many contexts in which marital and non-marital couple relationships are conducted:

- Married, with or without children.
- Cohabiting, with or without children.
- Romantically involved but not cohabiting, with or without children.
- Legally separated or divorced, with or without children.
- Not romantically involved but co-parenting one or more children.

Couples with children in each of these categories live in varied arrangements. For many couples, all of the offspring are biological children of the couple. In other cases, a couple is raising his, hers, and/or their children – who range from infancy to adulthood. There is very little theory or research concerning what contributes to healthy relationships in each of these alternatives. For example, we do not know whether the characteristics associated with healthy relationships in married parents with children apply to relationships in which the parents are romantically involved, but living apart and raising a child together.

Defining a Health Marriage/Couple Relationship

Space limitations preclude a comprehensive summary of the marriage literature or recent controversies concerning economic and psychological benefits of marriage. The core of the current debate centers on whether studies control adequately for the selection factor - the possibility that pre-existing qualities of the spouses or relationships lead some couples to marry and other not to marry. Qualities such as motivation, mental health, and commitment could be responsible for the finding that, by and large, partners who are married enjoy substantial economic, psychological, and social advantages over those who are not. Regardless of whether this debate gets resolved, our conclusion from reviewing the literature

is that researchers who focus on marital status have ignored central issues concerning the quality of couple relationships. For example, although in general, children of divorce are at greater risk of psychological or mental health problems than children of married parents, (a) children of married parents who have high levels of unresolved conflict also are at risk (Cummings & Davies, 1994; Emery, 1999; Grych, Fincham, Jouriles, & McDonald, 2000), and (b) children of divorced parents who manage to work effectively as co-parents fare quite well in the post-divorce period (Johnston, Kline, & Tschann, 1989).

There are many reviews of the literature on marital quality (e.g., Bradbury, Fincham, & Beach, 2000; Gottman, 1994) and many books written by therapists about the essential ingredients of a good marriage (Doherty, 2001; Gurman & Jacobson, 2002; Stanley, Blumberg, & Markman, 1999a). Almost all of these writings focus on the perils to couples of not establishing clear communication or resolving major marital disagreements to prevent conflict from escalating out of control. Although the emphasis on couples' communication, problem-solving, and emotion regulation emphasizes important aspects of couple relationships, we believe that a focus on only these aspects of couples' lives is too narrow to use as a guide to define or assess healthy couple relationships.

Despite differences in orientation, authors in the clinical literature on couple relationships generally agree that couples who maintain satisfying and effective relationships as partners must somehow resolve the central dilemma of how to achieve a satisfying balance of individuality and mutuality (Cowan & Cowan, 2000; Doherty, 2001; Gottman & Silver, 1999; Satir, 1972). A healthy relationship allows both partners to honor their own and the other's needs, goals, and values, and supports some joint goals, and intimacy.

Let us begin, then, with a preliminary definition of a healthy couple relationship:

- Partners have and foster positive perceptions of the relationship and the self in relationship.
- Partners have and foster interactions that promote the development of family members and reduce the risks of both individual and relationship psychopathology.

Who decides what constitutes an optimal balance? There are two ways to assess **the** quality of couple relationships, and we suggest using both: (1) observers/researchers observe the partners' interaction and investigate which patterns are linked to the partners' satisfaction or the long-term stability of the relationship; and (2) researchers/interviewers ask partners how satisfied they are with the patterns they have or the balance of individuality and mutuality they have achieved. The observers' view and the inner view of marriage will not be perfectly correlated, since some couples are satisfied with what observers describe as maladaptive patterns, and others are unhappy with what researchers think are optimal patterns. There are married and divorced couples within each group with a range of satisfaction levels. Information from both perspectives is important for the study of couples, critical for studies of couples with children, and essential for the development of interventions to strengthen couple relationships.

Dimensions and Measures of Marital/Couple Relationship Quality

Our own work (C. P. Cowan & Cowan, 2000), based on recent developments in family research (Wagner & Reiss, 1995), proposes that couples must grapple with the challenges of striking a balance between individuality and mutuality in 5 interrelated aspects of life. Results of our 2 longitudinal studies of couples show that relationship quality is affected by each of the 5 domains (Cowan & Cowan, 1997):

- (1) The individual adjustment of each partner;
- (2) The quality of interaction between the partners;
- (3) The intergenerational connections between the partners and each of their families of origin;
- (4) The strength of the partners' connections with people and institutions outside the family; and
- (5) The ability of parents to work together as co-parents of their child(ren).

We are suggesting that a healthy couple relationship involves more than clear communication and conflict resolution. In a healthy couple relationship, the partners have reasonably good mental health, they communicate clearly, they are connected with their families of origin and people and institutions outside

the family, and, if they are parents, they function reasonably effectively in rearing their children. Just as Winnicott (1987) described a child's need for "goodenough mothering" (we would say goodenough parenting), we are suggesting criteria for a goodenough marriage or couple relationship – one that fosters the development of both partners, the relationship, and their children.

(1) The couple as two individuals

- A healthy marriage/couple relationship is one in which at least one, if not both, of the partners are free from symptoms of mental illness that interfere with love and work, and show signs of psychological adjustment (self-esteem, social competence, productive problem-solving, regulation of emotions).
Suggested Measures: Center for Epidemiological Studies in Depression Scale (Radloff, 1977); Brief Symptom Inventory (Derogatis & Melisaratos, 1983); The Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale (see Wylie, 1989).

(2) The couple as intimate partners

In a healthy marriage, the partners are able to achieve a satisfying balance of individuality/autonomy and mutuality/closeness in the following ways:

- Partners are able to confront problems together – in their relationship, with their children, and in their life together -- and arrive at solutions that satisfy both partners.
Suggested Measure: Couple Communication Questionnaire (Cowan & Cowan, 1990a)
- Partners are able to express positive and negative feelings and regulate their expression so that negative exchanges do not escalate out of control. They are able to "repair" negative interchanges by returning to difficult issues and resolving them after a fight has led to an impasse.
Suggested Measures: Observation systems have been created by a number of investigators (Gottman, 1994; Levenson & Gottman, 1983; Lindahl & Malik, 2001)
- In the language of attachment theory, each partner can use the other as a secure base when feeling vulnerable, stressed, or threatened.
Suggested Measures: Brief self report instruments created by Shaver and colleagues (Fraley & Shaver, 2000). Narrative interviews and coding systems (Alexandrov, 2003; Crowell & Treboux, 2001; Dickstein, Seifer, St Andre, & Schiller, 2001)
- Partners are satisfied with their sexual relationship in terms of desired frequency and sexual practices. There is no expectation that all couples attain some kind of external standard; the criteria here lie in the perceptions of each partner.
Suggested Measures: We are not aware of any "gold standard measure" of sexual intimacy and satisfaction, but questions on this topic are included in marital surveys.
- We find that satisfaction with the division of family roles – the "who does what" of family tasks, decisions, and care of the children -- is an essential ingredient of satisfying marriages (Cowan & Cowan, 1988).
Suggested Measure: Who Does What? (Cowan & Cowan, 1990b)
- Power is a central dimension of couple relationships. Again, there is no universal prescription. Healthy couples are reasonably satisfied with the balance of power between them (who decides and who influences decisions).
Measure: Who Does What? (Cowan & Cowan, 1990b)

- Stanley and colleagues (Stanley et al., 1999a) pointed out that researchers have ignored commitment to the relationship as an essential ingredient of healthy marriages. Because difference, conflict, and dissatisfaction are inevitable in couple relationships, some degree of commitment is necessary by both partners for the couple to weather and get beyond the “bad times.”
Measure: (Stanley, Lobitz, & Dickson, 1999b)
- Overall marital satisfaction. Although there are longer and more psychometrically elegant measures, the Short Marital Adjustment Test (Locke & Wallace, 1959) still represents the gold standard. A new 6-item questionnaire by Norton is promising (personal communication, 2003).

(3) The couple in the intergenerational family

- Partners are able to sustain relationships with parent/in-laws and draw on them as sources of support.
Suggested Measure: Family Relationships Questionnaire (Cowan & Cowan, 1982)

(4) The couple and the outside world

- Partners are able to provide income to sustain the relationship/family.
- Partners are satisfied with each partner’s participation in work outside the home.
- Partners are able to elicit and maintain support from other individuals, families, the community.
Suggested measures: There is a vast literature on these topics and we are not in a position to provide a recommendation.

(5) The couple as parents

If the couple has a child or children:

- The partners function as effective parents.
- Both parents are involved in decisions about and care of the child(ren).
- Both partners are reasonably satisfied with the division of labor around caring for the child(ren).
- Partners support and do not undermine each other’s parenting; they collaborate on childrearing issues even when they disagree.

Suggested Measures: Ideas About Parenting (G. Heming, Cowan, & Cowan, 1990)
Co-parenting observational rating scales (Cowan & Cowan, 1995)

Evidence for validity of Cowan and Cowan measures (and application to non-“standard” populations)

The measures we developed were initially for use in our two longitudinal studies of working class and middle class couples. Some researchers have extended our measures to low-income, higher-risk samples.

MEASURES OF COUPLE RELATIONSHIP QUALITY

Couple Communication Questionnaire (Cowan & Cowan, 1995). Each partner’s perception of conflict and style of resolving conflict in the couple relationship is assessed in a 64-item questionnaire. Each partner rates the amount of conflict and disagreement with the partner over the last month on typical issues of conflict. Partners are then given a list of 25 possible strategies to tackle problems in their relationship and asked to endorse the ones they tend to use (e.g., “we talk about it to clarify the problem,” “we delay action,” “one or both of us pushes, grabs, or shoves the other”). Seven items were adapted from the Conflict Tactics Scale (Straus, 1979), which is designed to assess marital violence, and the other 18 describe less volatile strategies. Responses related to the couple’s style of resolving conflict were factor analyzed using a principal components varimax rotation. Results yielded 4 factors for both wives’ and husbands’ perceptions of their problem solving style, three of which had acceptably high levels of internal consistency: validating patterns (α for mothers = .82; α for fathers = .74), conflict avoidant patterns (α for mothers = .73; α for fathers = .76), and volatile patterns (α for mothers = .80; α for fathers = .81). All 3

reliable scales were significantly correlated with overall marital satisfaction on the Locke-Wallace at the beginning of our study (Cowan, Cowan, Ablow, Johnson, & Measelle, in press): validation (mothers $r(98) = .33, p < .01$; fathers $r(98) = .34$); avoidance (mothers $r(98) = -.26, p < .01$; fathers $r(98) = -.29$); and volatility (mothers $r(98) = -.41, p < .01$; fathers $r(98) = -.44, p < .01$).

Couple Attachment Interview (Alexandro, 2003; Silver & Cohn, 1992). This is a new interview, so far only described in a recently-completed dissertation. The interviewer asks each partner about the history of the couple's relationship, and then asks for 5 adjectives to describe the relationship and an example to reflect each of the adjectives chosen. Partners are also asked about typical patterns of responding when one or the other of the partners are vulnerable. Global coding of the interviews results in three scores: secure; preoccupied; and dismissing, all of which account for significant variation in the quality of observed and self-reported marital interaction. Preliminary data suggest that these measures are also related to the quality of parent-child relationships.

Who Does What? (Cowan & Cowan, 1990b). This 44-item self-report questionnaire assesses each partner's perception of the partners' division of roles for family and household responsibilities along three dimensions: (1) 12 household and family tasks, [including laundry, cooking, paying bills, and care of plants or yard]; (2) 12 issues in family decision-making, [including handling finances, how often to see family and friends, and plans for vacations]; and (3) the division of 20 tasks involved in the care of children, including feeding, dressing, taking them to activities, responding to their distress, and scheduling baby sitters and medical appointments. On each item, parents describe who does what on a 9-point scale ranging from 1 (*she does it all*) through 5 (*we do this about equally*) to 9 (*he does it all*). Parents indicated the relative actual division of tasks and decisions and how they would like the *ideal* division to be. The discrepancy between "How it is now" and "How I'd like it to be" was used as an index of partners' satisfaction with each task and with the relative division overall.

Parents' gender-role differentiation as assessed by Who Does What? increased during the transition to parenthood: Both men and women described a more traditional division of family labor over the first months and years of parenthood, and more traditional arrangements for caring for the children than they had predicted in pregnancy, regardless of where the couple began on the traditional-to-egalitarian continuum (Cowan & Cowan, 1992; Cowan et al., 1985). Unpublished analyses show that satisfaction with the division of power in decision-making is correlated with a number of measures of observed marital and parent-child interaction. Furthermore, both husbands' and wives' satisfaction with their role arrangements was related to their marital satisfaction, self-esteem, and parenting stress at various points in the transition to parenthood (Cowan & Cowan, 1988). Finally, the measure is also correlated with measures of parent-child relationship quality. It measure is now being used in a number of studies of couples at different SES levels, but we do not have the results.

MEASURES OF THREE-GENERATIONAL RELATIONSHIPS

Family Relationships Questionnaire (Cowan & Cowan, 1982). This questionnaire assesses adults' global perceptions of the positive or negative tone of relationships in their families of origin -- with father, with mother, and between father and mother. Each adult in our study rated those relationships, as they recalled them from childhood and as they perceived them currently, using six 7-point bipolar scales (uninvolved-involved, high-conflict, unhappy-happy, distant-close, cold-warm, unsatisfying-satisfying). Alpha reliabilities for the 6 scales describing past and present relationships were very high, ranging from .85 to .95. In the present sample, there was reasonably high consistency of the parents' retrospective and current reports over a 2-year period, (pre-school to 1st grade), with Pearson correlations ranging from .75 to .84. The scales correlate moderately to highly with the continuous codes obtained in the well-validated 90-minute Adult Attachment Interview (George, Kaplan, & Main, 1985).

MEASURES OF PARENTING AND CO-PARENTING

Ideas About Parenting (Heming, Cowan, and Cowan, 1990). This questionnaire (G. Heming, Cowan, & Cowan, 1991) combines items from scales by Baumrind (1971), Block (1971), and Cohler, Grunebaum, Weiss, and Moran (1971). Fathers and mothers indicated the extent of their own agreement or disagreement with each item, and what they believed were their partners' opinions. Items factored into two scales that reflect authoritative parenting and authoritarian parenting ($\alpha = .73$ and $.56$ respectively). A permissiveness scale had an α of $.35$, unacceptably low, and was not used in this study. In a study of children with and without an ADHD diagnosis (Anderson, Hinshaw, & Simmel, 1994), the authoritative parenting scale filled out by mothers predicted overt and covert externalizing behavior in ADHD boys observed during their participation in a summer camp. Parents' scores on the authoritarian scale differentiated girls with both attention and hyperactivity disorders from girls diagnosed as inattentive but not hyperactive (Hinshaw, 2002).

Coparenting Style Observational Scale (Cowan & Cowan, 1995). Observers watching couples interact with their children in challenging and playful tasks, rate the couple on 8 scales. Each scale is rated for both highest level of the behavior shown during the interaction (e.g., high warmth) and the typical level shown overall (e.g., moderate warmth). The items with highest and typical rating items used in forming composite measures had a median interrater reliability (α) of $.80$. Two composite measures used in our study also had high inter-item consistency: negative emotion (including items assessing displeasure and coldness; $\alpha = .90$ at PRE and $.91$ at POST1); and Conflict (including items assessing anger, competition, and disagreement, scale $\alpha = .91$ at PRE and $.92$ at POST1). Evidence concerning validity comes from studies by Gottman and colleagues in which the two composite measures of the co-parenting relationship in the presence of the child were good predictors of (a) the quality of couple interaction when parents discussed a problem between them (Gottman, 1993) and (b) children's internalizing and externalizing behavior as described by 2nd grade teachers (Gottman & Katz, 1989). Additional evidence comes from two longitudinal studies in which marital warmth and conflict in the context of co-parenting were linked in theoretically expectable ways with the observed quality of parent-child interaction and with children's academic achievement and behavior problems in kindergarten (Ablow, in press; Cowan, Cowan, Schulz, & Heming, 1994).

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CO-PARENTING STYLE RATINGS

SCHOOLCHILDREN AND THEIR FAMILIES PROJECT

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The rating system described in this manual was developed originally for the Becoming a Family Project -- a longitudinal study of couples' transition to parenthood and family formation conducted by Carolyn and Phil Cowan at the University of California, Berkeley. It is designed to assess a couple's interaction with each other as they both work and play with their young child(ren) during visits to a laboratory playroom, i.e., their ability to parent together or co-parent.

The rating system was developed so that live raters could describe parents' interactions with each other while the family works and plays. The ratings in this manual were created by Victor Lieberman and Linda Kastelowitz for the Becoming a Family Project. In 1992, the coding manual was revised by Joan Kaplan and Jeffrey Measelle for use in the Schoolchildren and Their Families Project at the University of California, Berkeley.

In this system, eleven scales of parents' interaction with each other are rated. These are:

| | |
|-------------------|----------------------------|
| --pleasure | --responsiveness |
| --displeasure | --cooperation |
| --warmth | --competition |
| --coldness | --clarity of communication |
| --anger | --disagreement about |
| --interactiveness | childrearing |

Each of these scales and the range of a couple's interactions on these scales are described fully in the pages that follow. The scales are designed to be quantitative ratings of a couple's co-parenting. Each of these scales is defined on a continuum ranging from excessive levels to very low levels (e.g., a couple can display excessive to very low levels of disagreement during the session).

For each of the scales, raters evaluate the **highest** level of the interaction that one or both members of the couple display during the session. For five scales (anger, interactiveness, responsiveness, clarity, and disagreement), raters also evaluate the **typical** level of the interaction the couple displays during the session. For the remaining six scales, a couple's typical level of interaction with each other is evaluated on a continuum that combines two opposing poles -- i.e., pleasure/displeasure, warmth/coldness, and cooperation/competition -- such that ratings range from excessive pleasure to excessive displeasure.

The definitions and descriptions in this manual of the range of behaviors a couple may show on each scale often refer to descriptions that apply to rating their **typical/overall** level of co-parenting on that scale. In some instances, additional criteria for rating the highest level of co-parenting interaction are also included.

To facilitate the training and use of this coding system, we have outlined below the general criteria for rating the (1) **highest level** and (2) typical level of parents' interactions across scales. These criteria can be applied regardless of the content of the scale.

(1) The highest level of a couple's interaction denotes the peak of their behavior toward each other during the session. In rating the highest

level of a couple's behavior, raters should use the description in the manual but disregard information that refers to the duration of specific behaviors (e.g., "couple builds on each others' strategy throughout the session"). If the type of behavior described for a certain level of interaction -- excessive, high, etc. -- is exhibited even briefly by one or both parents, that level should be rated as the highest level the couple displayed during the session. The highest level may or may not be similar to the typical level; discrepancies between highest and typical can suggest the range and consistency of a couple's behavior on a given scale, such as a brief pronounced disagreement shown by a couple who does not typically disagree during the session.

(2) The typical/overall level of a couple's behavior is generally what is described in the manual. For a couple to be described as typically showing, for example, a high level of responsiveness, this must be the predominant quality of the interaction and high responsiveness must be observed during at least 80-85% of the session.

In addition to the ratings of each couple's highest and typical level of interaction during the session, raters evaluate whether both parents typically displayed equal levels of interaction on that scale or whether the wife or the husband showed more or higher levels of interaction than his/her spouse. For example, a husband and wife could both display moderate levels of cooperation, or the husband could be highly cooperative and the wife less so or vice versa.

(In the latter cases, the highest level of cooperation for the couple on the co-parenting scale would be high cooperation even though only one partner was highly cooperative, and it would be noted appropriately that either the husband or the wife showed more cooperation.)

NOTES: (1) On scales in which higher scores indicate increasing adaptation, the "excessive" rating can be recoded to the low end (e.g., excessive warmth recoded to very low warmth) before analyzing data; the recoded scale can then be interpreted as "adaptive warmth," "adaptive pleasure," etc. Before doing this, however, check the intercorrelations in your data set. We have been finding that the scales work well as is.

(2) Because these ratings were created to describe parents' ability to work with each other, only the interaction between the two parents should be evaluated on these ratings. If, for example, a mother becomes angry with her child, but the couple never becomes angry with each other, they would be evaluated as showing very low levels of anger on the co-parenting ratings.

1 (a & b) PLEASURE IN CO-PARENTING

Pleasure: Qualities

1. Couple appears to enjoy sharing and collaborating in parental role and is able to demonstrate that during the interaction.
2. Each partner appears to take pleasure in other's relationship with child; is able to watch comfortably partner's individual relationship with child.
3. Partners display playfulness and humor with each other about their respective parenting styles/practices and their relationship with their child.

Range of Scale

- (5) **Excessive Pleasure:** The amount of gratification in sharing all aspects of parenting with partner precludes individual relationship with child.
- (4) **High Pleasure:** Partners express/show their enjoyment and appreciation of how their partner plays with their child and of the relationship between their partner and their child. Can share involvement with partner or enjoy watching dyad play.
- (3) **Moderate Pleasure:** Parent seems to enjoy partner's relationship with child and parenting with partner. However, enjoyment is not present at all times and is generally muted in some way. Parents' enjoyment of each other is partly inferred rather than directly observed.
- (2) **Low Pleasure:** Though partners do not necessarily show negative feelings toward each other, parents rarely show enjoyment of partner's relationship with child. Their response to partner's relationship is either neutral or negative in tone.
- (1) **Very Low Pleasure:** Virtually no pleasure visible.

Ratings

- 1a Rate the highest level of pleasure evident at any point in the interaction (1-5).
- 1b Rate which partner showed the most pleasure during the interaction (1 = She shows more pleasure; 2 = They show about an equal degree of pleasure; 3 = He shows more pleasure).

1 (c & d) DISPLEASURE IN CO-PARENTING

Displeasure: Qualities

1. Parents express dislike of partner's style of interacting with child either directly or veiled (i.e., sarcasm).
2. Parents express dislike of the quality of partner's relationship with child. (Dislike can be reaction to how positive the relationship is or of how negative it is.)
3. Parents do not enjoy working together.

Range of Scale

- (5) **Excessive Displeasure:** Partners are both displeased and/or threatened by other partner's relationship with the child; displeasure can be expressed as jealousy (e.g., "he'll always do it your way").
- (4) **High Displeasure:** Both or one partner actively shows or says they dislike how the other is parenting, or criticizes other's relationship with child. Statements are overt; feelings are clear.
- (3) **Moderate Displeasure:** Predominantly veiled (sarcastic) or subtle comments or tone during interaction suggest parents' dislike of each other's relationship with their child, or on only one occasion a partner shows overt displeasure.
- (2) **Low Displeasure:** Parents are generally unbothered by partner's relationship with their child, however, they might occasionally jab or otherwise indicate some negative feelings.
- (1) **Very Low Displeasure:** Virtually no displeasure visible.

Ratings

- 1c Rate the highest level of displeasure evident at any point in the interaction (1-5).
- 1d Rate which partner showed the most displeasure during the interaction (1 = She shows more displeasure; 2 = They show about an equal degree of displeasure; 3 = He shows more displeasure).

1 (e) PLEASURE/DISPLEASURE IN CO-PARENTING

Range of Scale

- (1) Excessive Pleasure (same as above)
- (2) High Pleasure
- (3) Moderate Pleasure
- (4) Neither Predominant
- (5) Moderate Displeasure
- (6) High Displeasure
- (7) Excessive Displeasure (same as above)

Ratings

- 1e Rate the degree of pleasure/displeasure in co-parenting that was most typical of the overall interaction (1-7).

2 (a and b) WARMTH BETWEEN PARTNERS

Warmth: Qualities

1. Parents demonstrate affection and positive regard for each other; laugh, hug, touch, smile, say nice things to each other.
2. Responsive/working together -- a feeling of connection between partners is visible.
3. Parents provide emotional support, reassurance, and encouragement for each other.
4. Generosity of affect, touch, smiles, and self; this generosity seems authentic.

Range of Scale

- (5) **Excessive Warmth:** Indiscriminant affection expressed regardless of context. Partners' demonstration of affection seems inauthentic.
- (4) **High Warmth:** (Optimal) Parents openly, clearly demonstrates affection for each other. This regard for each other may be seen through visible displays of affection or inferred through a feeling of connectedness that exists between them.
- (3) **Moderate Warmth:** Parents display a reasonable amount of affection for each other. The sense of connectedness is apparent but not striking.
- (2) **Low Warmth:** Parents are less open and relatively tentative in their display of affection for each other. Very limited sense of connectedness between parents.
- (1) **Very Low Warmth:** Virtually no warmth visible from partners; seem disconnected from each other.

Rating

- 2a Rate the highest level of warmth evident at any point in the interaction (1-5)
- 2b Rate which partner showed the most warmth during the interaction (1 = She shows more warmth; 2 = They are about equally warm; 3 = He shows more warmth).

2. (c and d) COLDNESS BETWEEN PARTNERS

Coldness: Qualities

1. Parents seem distant, closed-off, and lack affection for each other.
2. Sense of each parent keeping a distance between him/herself and partner.
3. Parent can show disdain toward partner. Disdain visible through curtness, snubbing, or a general lack of response toward partner.
4. Parent seems to withhold affection on purpose or because they have difficulty with intimacy.

Range of Scale

- (5) **Excessive Coldness:** Non-engagement with partner predominates and appears to be intentional. Parents seem disinterested in partner. Disdain visible.
- (4) **High Coldness:** Parents interact with partner, but in a clearly withdrawn or aloof fashion. Captures essence of definition. Parent rejects partner's overtures for closeness (emotional or physical).
- (3) **Moderate Coldness:** Parent generally keeps to self during much of the session. Some snubbing of partner's attempts to engage or get close to each other (physically or emotionally).
- (2) **Low Coldness:** Some withdrawal visible. Parent is generally open to his/her partner and to their overtures for warmth without necessarily initiating this contact themselves.
- (1) **Very Low Coldness:** Virtually no coldness visible between parents.

Ratings

- 2c Rate the highest level of coldness evident at any point in the interaction (1-5).
- 2d Rate which partner showed the most coldness during the interaction (1 = She shows more coldness; 2 = They show about the same degree of coldness; 3 = He shows more coldness).

2 (e) WARMTH/COLDNESS IN CO-PARENTING

Range of Scale

- (1) Excessive Warmth:
- (2) High Warmth: (same as previous page)
- (3) Moderate Warmth:
- (4) Neither Predominant:
- (5) Moderate Coldness:
- (6) High Coldness:
- (7) Excessive Coldness:

Ratings

- 2e Rate the degree of warmth/coldness between partners that was most typical of the overall interaction (1-7).

3. (a - d) ANGER BETWEEN PARTNERS

Anger: Qualities

1. Degree to which parents express hostility or dislike toward each other or toward their specific behavior(s).
2. Anger can be expressed in a direct, expressive manner (e.g., yelling, sarcasm, scolding, or threatening), or in a more withholding manner (e.g., by becoming quiet and withdrawn, disengaging from interaction with rejecting, defiant, hostile or punishing quality).

Range of Scale

- (5) **Excessive Anger:** Repeated or continuous hostility is expressed either overtly by parent's yelling, threatening, blaming partner or more indirectly through a continual disengagement and rejection of partner. (For highest level rating, could display one burst of extreme hostility.) In general, anger seems "out of control" and out of proportion to partner's behavior. Potentially abusive and degrading.
- (4) **High Anger:** Clear hostility aimed at each other or at partner's behavior or requests. Intensity of emotion is clearly quite high and parents have difficulty calming down or letting go of the anger. Partners do not seem out of control, and anger, though quite strong, has some understandable source.
- (3) **Moderate Anger:** Irritation is shown in a variety of ways (see definition) and lasts for more than just moments or recurs at points throughout the session. Partners do not recover from anger easily or have some difficulty regulating anger.
- (2) **Low Anger:** Partners show mild irritation with each other's specific behavior. Anger is momentary, partners recover easily and return to non-angry interactions. This irritation may occur 2-3 times, and if so would be considered typical.
- (1) **Very Low Anger:** Virtually no evidence of anger observed.

Ratings

- 3a Rate the highest level of anger shown by partners at any point in the interaction (1-6).
- 3b Rate the degree of anger between partners that was most typical of the entire interaction (1-6).
- 3c If anger was present, rate which partner was more angry during the interaction (1 = She is more angry; 2 = They are about equally angry; 3 = He is more angry).
- 3d If anger was present, was it primarily expressed (choose one):
 - 1 = directly? (i.e., openly acknowledged between partners)
 - 2 = indirectly? (i.e., veiled, inhibited)
 - 3 = about equally directly and indirectly?

4 (a - c) INTERACTIVENESS

Interactiveness: Qualities

1. Degree to which parents talk with and engage with each other.
2. Interaction can be both verbal or non-verbal. Non/verbal might take the form of giving glances, touch, smiles or other expressions, and attempting to elicit these from partner.
3. Interaction can be initiated by either partner.
4. Interaction can have a positive and/or a negative emotional tone; rating is more an assessment of quantity of interaction.

Range of Scale

- (5) **Excessive Interactiveness:** Partners' continuous talking with each other detracts from family/child interactions. Parents interact so much that they exclude child.
- (4) **High Interaction:** Partners both initiate and respond eagerly to interaction with each other. Interaction between parents facilitates family play and can be conversational (i.e., not task-related).
- (3) **Moderate Interactiveness:** Partners' interactions usually occur around requirements of the task. Periods where partners are less interactive exist.
- (2) **Low Interactiveness:** Partners engage with each other as needed, but interaction seems perfunctory. Parents rarely talk with each other unless necessary.
- (1) **Very Low Interactiveness:** Parents barely engage with each other.

Ratings

- 4a Rate the highest level of interactiveness between partners that was evident at any point in the interaction (1-5).
- 4b Rate the degree of interactiveness between partners that was most typical of the entire interaction (1-5).
- 4c Rate which partner talked more during the interaction (1 = She talks more; 2 = They talk about equally; 3 = He talks more).

5 (a - c) RESPONSIVENESS BETWEEN PARTNERS

Responsiveness: Qualities

1. Non-intrusive interaction; respectful of each other's autonomy.
2. Recognition of validity of other's perspective, even when there is disagreement.
3. Attentive listening to each other's point of view; check-in with each other to insure understanding.
4. Partners negotiate with one another when called for.

Range of Scale

- (5) **Excessive Responsiveness:** Partners respond to each other too much, too early, and/or for too long. Appears as if partners are unable to let each other function independently.
- (4) **High Responsiveness:** Partners respond to each other's behaviors and needs effectively; partners respond when needed and allow each other to function independently when appropriate. Responsiveness feels smooth to observer.
- (3) **Moderate Responsiveness:** Partners respond to each other but not consistently. There are times when parents don't listen to each other or check in.
- (2) **Low Responsiveness:** Though occasionally responsive, partners are generally not responsive to each other. They can be intrusive and seem not to respect each other's point of view. Interaction suffers because of their low responsiveness.
- (1) **Very Low Responsiveness:** Partners are virtually unresponsive to each other. They generally ignore or intrude on the other during interactions and make no attempt to negotiate, even if there is disagreement. Family play is affected adversely!

Ratings

- 5a Rate the highest level of responsiveness between partners that was evident at any point in the interaction (1-5).
- 5b Rate the degree of responsiveness between partners that was most typical of the entire interaction (1-5).
- 5c Rate which partner showed more responsiveness in the interaction (1 = She shows more responsiveness; 2 = They show about equal responsiveness; 3 = He shows more responsiveness).

6 (a - b) COOPERATION BETWEEN PARTNERS

Cooperation: Qualities

1. Reflects degree to which partners help and support one another in teaching and playing with child.
2. Help and support between partners can be instrumental as well as emotional.

Range of Scale

- (5) **Excessive Cooperation:** Partners' efforts to support each other take precedence over helping the child; partners seem enmeshed and overly concerned about supporting the other's efforts.
- (4) **High Cooperation:** Each partner builds on other's efforts to help child; minimum of interrupting or distracting from partner's interventions; cooperation is easy/smooth and frequent.
- (3) **Moderate Cooperation:** Partners generally work with and support each other, though there are times when helping one another lapses and parents appear less in concert.
- (2) **Low Cooperation:** Partners are usually not supporting or working with each other; partners will appear to have separate ways of working with their child, though they'll share the same approach on occasion.
- (1) **Very Low Cooperation:** Virtually no effort is made by partners to support and assist each other; parents will appear to be working with the child independently of their partner.

Ratings

- 6a Rate the highest levels of cooperation between partners evident at any point in the interaction (1-5).
- 6b Rate which partner showed more cooperation during the interaction (1 = She shows more cooperation; 2 = They show about equal cooperation; 3 = He shows more cooperation).

6 (c and d) COMPETITION BETWEEN PARTNERS

Competition: Qualities

1. Parents try to outdo each other's efforts to teach, work, and play with child.
2. Parents vie to have child respond to their suggestions or to them.

Range of Scale

- (5) **Excessive Competition:** Efforts to outdo one another's teaching take precedence over helping child to learn or may appear completely independent of the child.
- (4) **High Competition:** Parents may be helping the child to learn, but their main concern is clearly to outdo each other--either in their parenting or in general--parents try to outdo one another throughout session.
- (3) **Moderate Competition:** Partners are visibly trying to "one up" each other but only on occasion; competition doesn't interfere with child's performance.
- (2) **Low Competition:** Parents are not engaged in efforts to out-parent or out-do one another for the most part; occasionally a comment or behavior will be made by one partner suggesting that they feel they have a more effective parenting strategy, though it comes across as constructive and not challenging.
- (1) **Very Low Competition:** Virtually no competition visible.

Ratings

- 6c Rate the highest level of competition between partners evident at any point in the interaction (1-5).
- 6d Rate which partner showed more competitiveness during the interaction (1 = She shows more competitiveness; 2 = They show about equal competitiveness; 3 = He shows more competitiveness).

6 e COOPERATION/COMPETITION BETWEEN PARTNERS

Range of Scale

- (1) Excessive Cooperation:
- (2) High Cooperation: (same as above)
- (3) Moderate Cooperation:
- (4) Neither Predominant:
- (5) Moderate Competition:
- (6) High Competition:
- (7) Excessive Competition:

Rating

- 6e Rate the degree of cooperation/competition between partners that was most typical of the entire interaction (1-7).

7 (a - c) CLARITY OF COMMUNICATION BETWEEN PARTNERS

Clarity: Qualities

1. Parent speaks clearly and easily; enunciates well.
2. Language is easily comprehensible and at a level that both partners can understand.

Range of Scale

- (5) **Excessive clarity:** Partners' communication is stiff and overly proper. Language is very detail-focused, more so than necessary.
- (4) **High Clarity:** Partners' communication is smooth and easy to comprehend; clear. Language is precise and not overly detail-focused. Facilitates partners' ability to work together.
- (3) **Moderate Clarity:** Partners' communication is for the most part comprehensible. Sometimes communication may be slightly imprecise. Parents' imprecision may affect their ability to work together.
- (2) **Low Clarity:** Partners do not always understand each other. Language is vague or mumbled.
- (1) **Very Low Clarity:** Communication is generally incomprehensible (i.e., unfocused, rambling, confusing).

Ratings

- 7a Rate the highest level of clarity between partners that was evident at any point in the interaction (1-5).
- 7b Rate the degree of clarity between partners that was most typical of the entire interaction (1-5).
- 7c Rate which partner was more clear in their communication (1 = She is more clear; 2 = They are about equally clear; 3 = He is more clear).

8 (a - d) DISAGREEMENT BETWEEN PARTNERS

Disagreement: Qualities

1. Degree to which partners disagree, or conflict, with one another about how to teach child, play with child, set limits, etc.
2. Disagreement may be expressed with varying amounts of anger or no anger. It is also likely that nonverbal disagreement will co-occur with anger.
3. Disagreement may be expressed verbally or nonverbally (facial expressions, tone, etc.).

Range of Scale

- (6) **Excessive Disagreement:** Partners have intense and frequent disagreements. Extent of disagreement between partners severely impairs interaction with child. Parents' positions seem inflexible; parents become more involved in their disagreement than in interacting with their child.
- (5) **High Disagreement:** Parents disagree with some frequency; disagreements can become intense. High disagreements can disrupt parenting.
- (4) **Moderate Disagreement:** Parents have occasional disagreements or a somewhat intense but brief disagreement once.
- (3) **Low Disagreement:** Parents occasionally have minor disagreements, but they do not interfere with interaction with child.
- (2) **Very Low Disagreement:** Minor disagreements do not interfere with interaction with child and happen only once, maybe twice.
- (1) **No Disagreement:** No disagreement seen--verbally or nonverbally.

Ratings

- 8a Rate the highest level of disagreement between partners evident at any point in the interaction (1-6).
- 8b Rate the degree of disagreement between the partners that was most typical of the entire interaction (1-6).
- 8c Rate which partner verbally disagreed more (1 = She disagrees more; 2 = They disagree about equally; 3 = He disagrees more).
- 8d If disagreement was present, was it primarily expressed (choose one):
1 = directly? (i.e., openly acknowledged between partners)
2 = indirectly? (i.e., veiled, inhibited)
3 = about equally directly and indirectly?

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COUPLE COMMUNICATION PO4*

These questions ask about how you and your partner show that you care, handle your conflicts and disagreements, and try to solve your day-to-day problems. We ask you to circle the word(s) that describe how you talk about what matters to you and show how satisfied you are with each of these aspects of your relationship as a couple.

1. **Think about how you and your partner let each other know that you care:**

a. **I show my partner that I care for him/her:**

VERY FREQUENTLY OFTEN SOMETIMES RARELY ALMOST NEVER

b. **My partner shows that he/she cares for me:**

VERY FREQUENTLY OFTEN SOMETIMES RARELY ALMOST NEVER

c. **In general, how do you feel about how you and your partner show caring right now?**

VERY PRETTY NEITHER SATISFIED SOMEWHAT VERY
SATISFIED SATISFIED NOR DISSATISFIED DISSATISFIED DISSATISFIED

2. **Are there times when you feel that you and your partner are too close?**

ALMOST ALWAYS OFTEN SOMETIMES RARELY ALMOST NEVER

3. **Are there times when you feel that you and your partner are too distant?**

ALMOST ALWAYS OFTEN SOMETIMES RARELY ALMOST NEVER

4. **In general, how do you feel about the closeness and distance in your relationship with your partner now?**

VERY PRETTY NEITHER SATISFIED SOMEWHAT VERY
SATISFIED SATISFIED NOR DISSATISFIED DISSATISFIED DISSATISFIED

5. **In general, how do you feel about your sexual relationship with your partner now?**

VERY PRETTY NEITHER SATISFIED SOMEWHAT VERY
SATISFIED SATISFIED NOR DISSATISFIED DISSATISFIED DISSATISFIED

6. **In the past year, has there been a change in your sexual relationship with your partner**

a. in how often you make love? LESS OFTEN ABOUT THE SAME MORE OFTEN

b. in how satisfied you are? LESS SATISFIED ABOUT THE SAME MORE SATISFIED

7. Overall, how do you feel about the level of **intimacy** in your relationship?

VERY PRETTY NEITHER SATISFIED SOMEWHAT VERY
 SATISFIED SATISFIED NOR DISSATISFIED DISSATISFIED DISSATISFIED

8. In the boxes **on the right** please show **how much conflict** or disagreement you and your partner have had on **every** issue on the list during the past month, using the scale below.

| | | | | | | |
|-------|---|-------------------|---|----------|---|------|
| A LOT | | A MODERATE AMOUNT | | A LITTLE | | None |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |

| | |
|---|-------|
| THE DIVISION OF WORKLOAD IN THE FAMILY | _____ |
| THE AMOUNT OF TIME WE SPEND TOGETHER AS A COUPLE | _____ |
| OUR SEXUAL RELATIONSHIP | _____ |
| THE MANAGEMENT OF FAMILY MONEY | _____ |
| THE QUALITY OF TIME WE SPEND TOGETHER AS A COUPLE | _____ |
| OUR RELATIONSHIPS WITH OUR IN-LAWS | _____ |
| IDEAS ABOUT HOW TO RAISE CHILDREN | _____ |
| WILLINGNESS TO WORK FOR IMPROVEMENT IN OUR RELATIONSHIP | _____ |
| THE WAY WE COMMUNICATE WITH ONE ANOTHER | _____ |
| OUR WORK OUTSIDE THE HOME | _____ |
| OUR CHILD(REN)'S SCHOOLING | _____ |
| ANY OTHER ISSUE? Please explain | _____ |

9. In general how do you feel about the **amount** of conflict and disagreement in your relationship with your partner **now**.

VERY PRETTY NEITHER SATISFIED SOMEWHAT VERY
 SATISFIED SATISFIED NOR DISSATISFIED DISSATISFIED DISSATISFIED

10. When you think about the conflict and disagreement between you and your partner, **would you want**

| | | | |
|----------|----------|-------------|----------|
| MORE | LESS | ABOUT THE | NO |
| CONFLICT | CONFLICT | SAME AMOUNT | CONFLICT |

11. **When you and your partner attempt to solve a marital or family problem, which of the following strategies do you tend to use? CHECK ALL THAT APPLY**

- We delay action
- We argue
- I push my partner to change My partner pushes me to change
- We talk about it to clarify the problem
- We discuss both of our points of view
- I try to get more information My partner tries to get more information
- I get advice/help from someone else My partner gets advice/help from someone else
- I give in to my partner's view or wishes My partner gives in to my view or wishes
- We compromise
- We work until we have a solution
- We do not usually have a way of dealing with differences
- We ignore the problem
- We avoid talking about it, but continue to feel uneasy
- We avoid talking about it, just accept our differences
- We talk about it and accept our differences
- I get defensive My partner gets defensive
- I stomp out of the room My partner stomps out of the room
- I yell or insult my partner My partner yells or insults me
- I throw something My partner throws something
- I throw something at my partner My partner throws something at me
- I push, grab, or shove my partner My partner pushes, grabs, or shoves me
- I slap or try to hit my partner, but not with anything
- My partner slaps or tries to hit me, but not with anything
- I slap or try to hit my partner with something hard
- My partner slaps or tries to hit me with something hard
- Other ways? Please explain _____

12. **How do you feel about your ability to solve problems in your relationship?**

VERY PRETTY NEITHER SATISFIED SOMEWHAT VERY
SATISFIED SATISFIED NOR DISSATISFIED DISSATISFIED DISSATISFIED

13. **How do you feel about your ability to deal with differences in your relationship—differences in ideas, in priorities, in behavior, etc.?**

VERY PRETTY NEITHER SATISFIED SOMEWHAT VERY
SATISFIED SATISFIED NOR DISSATISFIED DISSATISFIED DISSATISFIED

14. **The following questions are about how you and your partner express feelings to each other.**

a. **I express anger to my partner:**

VERY FREQUENTLY OFTEN SOMETIMES RARELY ALMOST NEVER

b. **I am comfortable with how I express anger to my partner:**

VERY FREQUENTLY OFTEN SOMETIMES RARELY ALMOST NEVER

c. **My partner expresses anger to me:**

VERY FREQUENTLY OFTEN SOMETIMES RARELY ALMOST NEVER

d. **I am comfortable with how my partner expresses anger to me:**

VERY FREQUENTLY OFTEN SOMETIMES RARELY ALMOST NEVER

e. **When I am feeling depressed or down, I let my partner know:**

VERY FREQUENTLY OFTEN SOMETIMES RARELY ALMOST NEVER

f. **I am comfortable with how I express my feelings of depression to my partner:**

VERY FREQUENTLY OFTEN SOMETIMES RARELY ALMOST NEVER

g. **When my partner is feeling depressed or down, he/she lets me know:**

VERY FREQUENTLY OFTEN SOMETIMES RARELY ALMOST NEVER

h. **I am comfortable with how my partner expresses his/her feelings of depression to me:**

VERY FREQUENTLY OFTEN SOMETIMES RARELY ALMOST NEVER

i. **I let my partner know when I'm feeling happy or up:**

VERY FREQUENTLY OFTEN SOMETIMES RARELY ALMOST NEVER

j. **I am comfortable with how I express my feelings of happiness to my partner:**

VERY FREQUENTLY OFTEN SOMETIMES RARELY ALMOST NEVER

k. **My partner lets me know when he/she is feeling happy or up:**

VERY FREQUENTLY OFTEN SOMETIMES RARELY ALMOST NEVER

l. **I am comfortable with how my partner expresses his/her feelings of happiness to me:**

VERY FREQUENTLY OFTEN SOMETIMES RARELY ALMOST NEVER

15. **In general, how do you feel about the ways you and your partner share your feelings?**

VERY PRETTY NEITHER SATISFIED SOMEWHAT VERY
SATISFIED SATISFIED NOR DISSATISFIED DISSATISFIED DISSATISFIED

16. **Compared with your picture of effective communication in a relationship, how do you feel about how you and your partner are doing now?**

VERY PRETTY NEITHER SATISFIED SOMEWHAT VERY
SATISFIED SATISFIED NOR DISSATISFIED DISSATISFIED DISSATISFIED

WHO DOES WHAT? 1.

Please show how you and your partner divide the family tasks listed here. Using numbers on the scale below, show **HOW IT IS NOW** on the left side and **HOW I WOULD LIKE IT TO BE** on the right.

| | | | | | | | | |
|---------------------------|---|---|----------------------------------|---|---|--------------------------|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
| she does it all | | | we both do this about equally | | | he does it all | | |

| HOW IT IS NOW | | HOW I WOULD LIKE IT TO BE |
|---------------|--|---------------------------|
| | A. Planning and preparing meals | |
| | B. Cleaning up after meals | |
| | C. Repairs around the home | |
| | D. House cleaning | |
| | E. Taking out the garbage | |
| | F. Buying groceries, household needs | |
| | G. Paying bills | |
| | H. Laundry: washing, folding, ironing | |
| | I. Writing letters/making calls to family, friends | |
| | J. Looking after the car | |
| | K. Providing income for our family | |
| | L. Caring for plants, garden, yard | |
| | M. Working outside family | |

In general, how satisfied are you with the way you and your partner divide the family tasks?

- Very Satisfied
 Pretty Satisfied
 Neutral
 Somewhat Dissatisfied
 Very Dissatisfied

In general, how satisfied are you with the way you and your partner divide the work outside the family?

- Very Satisfied
 Pretty Satisfied
 Neutral
 Somewhat Dissatisfied
 Very Dissatisfied

ATTACHMENT IN THE CONTEXT OF COUPLE RELATIONSHIPS

A coding manual for the Couple Attachment Interview (Silver & Cohn)

This manual was created by Elina Alexandrova in collaboration with Phil Cowan, Carolyn Cowan, Trudie Heming, and Sue Lyon. It is based in part on a manual for coding the Current Relationship Interview (CRI) by Judith Crowell and Gretchen Owens (1998)

Schoolchildren and their Families Project

August, 1999

This manual is a system for coding the Couple Attachment Interview (CAI; Silver & Cohn). The CAI is an interview where an individual provides a narrative about his/her relationship with a current romantic/marriage partner.

The coding system for the Couple Attachment Interview is different from the coding systems for the Adult Attachment Interview (AAI; Main & Goldwyn, 1994) and the Current Relationship Interview (CRI; Crowell & Owens, 1998). In the AAI and CRI coding systems, multiple continuous scales describing the interviewee's probable experience and state of mind are rated. A configurational analysis by the coder results in the designation of a primary attachment classification.

This manual describes a global prototype system, in which the interview is rated in terms of its resemblance to three prototypic descriptions of couple relationship narratives: Secure, Dismissing, and Preoccupied. Similarly to the AAI and CRI coding systems, the CAI coding makes an emphasis on assessing the individual's state of mind with respect to attachment (rather than on the described relationship experiences or the partner's and one's own behavior).

Resemblance to each prototype is coded on a 1-9 scale with 1 indicating that the protocol does not at all resemble the prototype, and 9 indicating that the protocol contains the central criteria and many of the secondary criteria.

The Secure prototype

Definition

The hallmark of this prototype is a coherent and credible narrative that shows a valuing of intimacy and paints a believable picture of two individuals involved in a relationship. The relationship may not be idyllic but the respondent is able to talk about the problems that exist in a fresh, balanced, and contained way. Many secure individuals appear comfortable depending on the partner and being dependent upon by the partner, as well as providing caretaking and receiving caregiving, as necessary. A prototypical member of this category views the adult relationship as a potential source of emotional support and closeness, and as a foundation for personal growth.

Central criteria (must be present)

Shows credible valuing of attachment, reciprocity, mutuality, or intimacy.
Provides relevant, believable examples of what he/she is trying to illustrate.
Demonstrates collaborative attitude through complete but succinct and clear answers.
Secondary criteria (may be present)

1. Interview is high in coherence (i.e., high internal consistency via truthfulness and logical flow of the narrative plus high collaboration with the interviewer via complete but succinct, relevant, and clear presentation of information)
2. May make metacognitive comments (i.e., high-level monitoring of thinking and speech, continuing awareness of appearance-reality distinction, ability to think about one's own mind and/or observe oneself in interactions, including the ongoing interview).
3. May demonstrate a believable collaborative attitude toward the interviewer, help understand the narrative.
4. May be openly valuing of attachment-related experiences and of partner.
5. In the narrative, may value a balance of mutuality and individuality.
6. May be able to describe both own role and that of partner's when discussing difficulties or problems (balance).
7. May be comfortable with and/or enjoy caregiving for partner
8. May be comfortable with and/or enjoy receiving care from partner, as necessary.
9. Emotion, both positive and negative, if expressed is contained.
10. May contain fresh speech, not canned or pseudo-analytical (i.e. 'psycho-babble').
11. May be able to put the partner's behavior in context, understand the partner's motivation (distinguish from pseudo-analytical).
12. May be able to convey a clear sense of the partner in contrast to dismissive respondents who may present a limited picture (i.e. over-idealized) of the partner and in contrast to preoccupied respondents who may oscillate in their evaluation of the partner.
13. May be at ease discussing attachment topic and remembering relationship episodes.

The Dismissive prototype

Definition

The hallmark of this prototype is the fact that the importance of the relationship and/or the partner is minimized or dismissed. The avoidance of attachment concerns takes the forms of downplaying or denying the importance of attachment relationship or partner; downplaying or denying the negative impact of difficulties on the relationship, the partner, and/or the self; placing the primary focus of the interview on non-relationship facets of life (fun, activities, material concerns); by derogating the partner or attachment relationships; or by insisting on lack of memory for relationship events and inability to support global statements with believable examples. There is an implicit claim to personal invulnerability and independence. Except for derogation of attachment or partner, negative emotion is not usually expressed directly. The assumption is made that negative affect is present but overcontrolled and kept at bay through the use of dismissal, denial, or idealization.

Central criteria (must be present)

Limits experience of attachment by avoiding attachment-related concerns (i.e., creates an impression that thinking and talking about relationships is foreign and uncomfortable); OR dismissing derogation (i.e., gives an impression that attention to attachment-related experiences or to the partner as attachment figure is foolish, laughable, or not worth the time; the apparent intent is to cast the individual or topic aside as being beneath consideration); OR idealization (i.e., the partner or the relationship are turned into an idea, such that an image of a “perfect” or “very good” partner is not supported with or is actively contradicted by descriptions of actual experiences or thoughts)
Minimizes the importance of attachment even if partner is described believably as loving OR pays lip service to the importance of attachment but can not give clear, rich believable examples of attachment behavior
Negative affect is minimized (derogating comments express contempt and serve the purpose of dismissing attachment considerations rather than contain immediate negative affect).
Interview is not high in coherence (low internal consistency, e.g., via inability to provide examples in support of global descriptions, or poor collaboration with the interview, e.g., via dismissing topics or asserting a lack of memory)

Secondary criteria (may be present)

Interview is not high in coherence.
Attachment concerns are not kept at bay deliberately; little metacognitive awareness.
3. May not be collaborative with interviewer (does not provide perspective/clarifications or does not answer the questions).

4. a) Independence may be valued more than interdependence, mutuality, or attachment
- b) When describing what s/he values in the relationship, may focus on materialistic or concrete goals or values, such as economic security, activities, or fun.
5. May lack recognition of the partner's individuality or lack an appreciation of the partner as a unique person.
6. Inflexible perceptions of the relationship.
7. May be uncomfortable taking care of the partner; may demonstrate a tendency to minimize the partner's distress.
8. May be uncomfortable/unwilling to depend on the partner for anything.
9. Preoccupying anger is absent; derogating (disparaging or sarcastic) statements tend to be brief, suggesting that the topic is not worth discussing.
10. Passivity of discourse is not a common feature of dismissive transcripts.
11. May present a global, limited (not multi-dimensional), even if consistent, sense of the partner. Dismissive respondents may give very positively uniform descriptions of the partner (e.g. always "wonderful," "available") but they are not able to believably support these descriptions with examples. In contrast, secure respondents may paint a picture of both the partner's strengths and weaknesses and/or give believable and rich examples to support their descriptions. Preoccupied respondents are more likely to vacillate in their descriptions/evaluations of their partners or give vague, confusing explanations.
12. a) May be derogating of attachment relationships or of the partner (anger or negative descriptors do not qualify; derogation implies that something is beneath consideration)
- b) May minimize partner's loving behavior or experience it is trivial or annoying.
13. May lack memory of events; narrative may be brief.

Preoccupied prototype

Definition

The hallmark of this category is an enmeshment or preoccupation with the relationship. This preoccupation may be exhibited by unregulated affect such as uncontained, preoccupying anger or anxiety (unsuccessful struggling against the relationship difficulties) AND/OR by vague, long, rambling, incoherent, or irrelevant explanations and descriptions (passive reception of difficulties). Non-reciprocity of the relationship may be demonstrated by descriptions of manipulative, demanding, controlling behavior on the part of the respondent towards the partner. It may also be demonstrated by the respondent's desire to "do everything" for the partner or by the respondent's excessive dependency on the partner. Strong anxiety over being abandoned by partner may be expressed or implied.

Central criteria (must be present)

Preoccupied with the relationship partner or with attachment-related experiences. Defenses are not working, as evidenced by eruption of uncontained, preoccupying anger or anxiety, or by passive, vague, rambling or vacillating speech. Lacks genuine insight into impact of own behavior on partner or importance of own behavior to partner. Interview is not high in coherence (low internal consistency, e.g., via evaluatory oscillation, or poor collaboration with the interview, e.g., via wandering to irrelevant topics)

Secondary criteria (may be present)

Interview is not high in coherence (e.g., may demonstrate evaluatory oscillating in certain sections or throughout interview (i.e., taking different, contradictory viewpoints regarding the same phenomena in a relatively rapid succession). May be pseudo-analytical ("psycho-babble," not fresh), but lack real insight into own role in the relationship or true understanding of partner's perspective; may express feelings of excessive guilt, without identifying the reasons for it. May enlist interviewer's agreement. May be very ambivalent about attachment or the relationship.

5. May lack balance of individuality/mutuality
6. May discuss relationship difficulties at length, without balance, containment, and/or concern for relevance.
7. May provide excessive (e.g., giving in, wanting to please, or feeling overly responsible for partner's well-being) and/or controlling (e.g., manipulative in attempts to ensure closeness and involvement) caregiving.
8. May appear to be excessively dependent on partner, lack self-reliance and/or appear chronically "deprived."

9. Negative affect, if expressed, may be amplified and uncontained. May have preoccupying anger (i.e., anger in-the-moment, expressive of current preoccupation and involvement; may be expressed through run-on, entangled sentences, exaggerative language, elicitation of the interviewer's agreement, excessive quotations from self or partner, or addressing the partner directly).
10. May use passive, vague speech (i.e., inability to prevent a sound or term from arising coupled with inability to specify its presumed intent or content; may be evident through inability to find words, seize on a meaning, focus on a topic, or complete a sentence or through indeliberate wandering to irrelevant topics).
11. Although might fail to support global relationship/partner descriptions due to vagueness or irrelevancies, idealization (a failure to support global positive descriptions with supportive evidence) is not likely.
12. Although anger might be expressed, dismissing derogation (brief disparaging comments) is not likely.
13. Insistence on lack of memory is not likely; interview may be long.

Expectable relationships between several key variables and three attachment prototypes

| | <input type="checkbox"/> Secure | <input type="checkbox"/> Dismissing | <input type="checkbox"/> Preoccupied |
|--|--|--|--|
| 1. Coherence of discourse | <input type="checkbox"/> High to very high | <input type="checkbox"/> Low to moderate | <input type="checkbox"/> Low to moderate |
| 2. Metacognitive monitoring/ fresh speech | <input type="checkbox"/> Little to high | <input type="checkbox"/> None to little | <input type="checkbox"/> None to some |
| 3. Collaboration with interviewer | <input type="checkbox"/> Some to high | <input type="checkbox"/> None to some | <input type="checkbox"/> None to some |
| 4. Valuing of Attachment | <input type="checkbox"/> Some to high | <input type="checkbox"/> None to some | <input type="checkbox"/> None to high |
| 5. Valuing of Mutuality | <input type="checkbox"/> Some to high | <input type="checkbox"/> None to some | <input type="checkbox"/> None to some |
| 6. Balanced picture of self/other | <input type="checkbox"/> Some to high | <input type="checkbox"/> None to some | <input type="checkbox"/> None to little |
| 7. Caregiving | <input type="checkbox"/> Some to high | <input type="checkbox"/> None to some | <input type="checkbox"/> Some to high |
| 8. Careseeking | <input type="checkbox"/> Little to high | <input type="checkbox"/> None to little | <input type="checkbox"/> Some to high |
| 9. Preoccupying Anger | <input type="checkbox"/> None | <input type="checkbox"/> None | <input type="checkbox"/> None to high |
| 10. Passivity of discourse | <input type="checkbox"/> None to little | <input type="checkbox"/> None to little | <input type="checkbox"/> None to high |
| 11. Idealization | <input type="checkbox"/> None to little | <input type="checkbox"/> None to high | <input type="checkbox"/> None to little |
| 12. Dismissing Derogation of partner or attachment | <input type="checkbox"/> None | <input type="checkbox"/> None to high | <input type="checkbox"/> None |
| 13. Lack of memory | <input type="checkbox"/> None to little | <input type="checkbox"/> None to high | <input type="checkbox"/> None to little |

COUPLE ATTACHMENT INTERVIEW (PROTOCOL)
(Daniel Silver & Deborah Cohn, 1992).

Schoolchildren and their Families Project
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As we mentioned before, this interview is about your relationship with [partner's name]. I'll be asking you questions about the history of your relationship, about how things have gone over time, and also about how things are now. The whole interview usually lasts around an hour and a quarter, although the time can vary as much as 30 minutes either way.

1. If you could you start by just helping me to get oriented to your history with Partner. It would be helpful to get a broad outline of your years together -- where you first met, where you've lived, the kind of work you have done, that kind of thing.

Note: This first question is intended to provide a gentle entry into the topic of the relationship and to allow the interviewee time to relax into the chair. You should hold the topic at the factual level here. After the subject has finished his or her initial response, feel free to ask basic questions (e.g., when, where, how long) until you have a good outline of basic information about the couple's years together.

If the following is not spontaneously offered, please ask:

1. How long had you known Partner before you began living together? Before you got married?
2. How long had you been together before the birth of your first child?
2. Could you describe your relationship with Partner, starting from when you first met?
3. Thinking about your relationship with Partner from when you first met until now, I'd like you to choose five words or adjectives that reflect your relationship. After you've chosen them, I'll ask you more about each one.

Probe A: You used the word ____ (insert the first word chosen by the participant) to describe part of your relationship with Partner. Are there any memories or incidents that come to mind with respect to that part of your relationship?

Repeat for each of the 5 adjectives.

Note: If the first response is scripted, the next probe is: that's a good general description, but is there a particular time that happened?

4. When you felt upset during your relationship, what have you done?

Note: The interpretation of "upset" is up to the subject, and variations in interpretation are important. The interviewer should ask the question, then pause to indicate that the question is completed and that a response is requested. Once a subject has completed his/her own interpretation of this initial question, you may probe further.

For this question and the ones below, be sure to get expansions of every answer. For example, if the subject states, "I withdraw," probe to find out what the subject means by "withdraw." If the subject says that the partner "helped me," probe to find out what the subject means by "helped."

5. When you've felt emotionally upset during your relationship, what have you done?

Probe A: Could you tell me about a specific time or incident when you were emotionally upset?

Note: The emotional upset does not necessarily have to involve the partner directly; that choice is up to the subject.

6. Since you've been involved with Partner, have you ever had a serious physical injury or illness?

Probe A: How do you deal with getting a bit ill, like with a flu or fever? What do you like to do? [What's your style when you're sick?]

Probe B: how does Partner respond? [What does Partner do when you're sick?]

7. Can you recall a time when you were feeling particularly happy or excited?

8. What is it like for you when you are separated from Partner?

Probe A: Is there any particular separation that stands out in your mind?

Probe B: How about daily separations? What kind of contact do you and Partner tend to have during a usual day apart?

Probe C: Have you ever felt worried or anxious during any separation from Partner?

9. Has there ever been a time when you felt rejected by Partner, even if looking back on it now you wouldn't consider it as rejection?

Probe A: Why do you think Partner behaved the way s/he did?

Probe B: Do you think s/he realized that you were feeling rejected?

10. Has there been a time when you felt frightened or worried about something?

11. Has there been a time when Partner did or said something to you that you felt at that time might have threatened your relationship?

1. How do you think this experience affected your relationship?

2. Is this experience affecting your relationship now?

Probe A: Some partners have told us of times when their partners have talked about leaving them, ending the relationship, or getting involved with someone else. Has there ever been a time in your relationship when Partner ever talked about anything like that?

If no:

1. Have you ever been worried about any of those things?

If yes:

1. How do you think this experience affected your relationship?
2. Is this experience affecting your relationship now?

12. Some people we have talked to have experienced some kind of physical or emotional abuse in their relationships. Has Partner ever done anything that you would consider abusive in any way?

Probe A: How do you think this experience affected your relationship?

Probe B: Is this experience affecting your relationship now?

13. Do you think your overall experiences in your relationship with Partner have affected your personality in any way?

14. Are there any aspects of your experience with Partner that you feel have been a setback to your development?

15. Why do you think Partner has behaved as s/he has done during your relationship?

16. Have you been married before, or been involved in another relationship that was like a marriage?

If yes:

Note: for each previous marriage or intimate relationship, first, very briefly, try to get some basic orienting information about the relationship, e.g.: How old were you when it began? How long did it last? When did it end?

Probe A: Would you say that there was anything about that relationship, or about the way it ended, that affected any part of your relationship with Partner?

Probe B: Do you think that this experience is still affecting your relationship with Partner?

Note: Some individuals may need time to open up in response to these questions, especially where there has been an abusive previous relationship, a difficult divorce, or the death of a partner. Allow the subject time if necessary.

If no:

Probe A: Would you say that there was anything about any of your experiences in previous adult relationships that affected your relationship with Partner?

17. Do you think your relationship with Partner has changed over time?

Probe A: What do you think led to these changes?

Probe B: Would you say that one of you has been more responsible than the other for these changes?

18. What is your relationship with Partner like now?

Probe A: Have there been any recent events that have affected your relationship?

[for SAF Project only]

Probe B: since we last talked to you, about a year ago, have you lost anyone who was close to you?

19. Earlier I asked you about times when you were upset, hurt, or sick in some way. Now I'd like to ask you some questions about times when Partner may have been upset or hurt in some way.

Probe A: When Partner's felt upset during your relationship, what has s/he done?

Probe B: When Partner's felt emotionally upset during your relationship, what has s/he done?

1. Could you tell me about a specific time or incident when Partner was emotionally upset?

Probe C: Has Partner ever had a serious physical injury or illness?

1. How does Partner deal with getting just a bit ill, like with flu or fever? What does Partner like to do? [What's Partner's style when s/he gets a bit sick?]

2. What do you do when Partner gets sick?

20. Do you recall a time when Partner was particularly happy or excited?

21. Have you ever done anything toward Partner that you consider to have been rejecting?

Probe A: Why do you think you behaved the way you did?

Probe B: Did you realize at the time that Partner felt rejected by you?

22. Has there been a time when Partner was frightened or worried about something?

23. Has there been a time when you did or said something that you felt might have threatened your relationship with Partner?

1. How do you think this experience affected your relationship?

2. Is this experience affecting your relationship now?

Probe A: Has there been a time when you talked to Partner about leaving the relationship or getting involved with someone else?

If no:

1. Have you ever been worried about any of those things?

If yes:

1. How do you think this experience affected your relationship?

2. Is this experience affecting your relationship now?

24. As I mentioned before, some partners we've talked to have told us of some kind of physical or emotional abuse during their relationships. Have you ever done anything toward Partner that you would consider to be abusive?

Probe A: How do you think this experience affected your relationship?

Probe B: Is this experience affecting your relationship now?

25. Do you and Partner have any differences in how you feel about expressing physical affection toward each other?

Probe A: Could you say a bit about how each of you feels about expressing physical affection?

26. Many partners say that they've experienced changes over time in aspects of their sexual relationship with each other. Would you say that there have been any changes in that part of your relationship with Partner since you first met?

If no change:

1. How do you feel about that part of your relationship?
2. Do you think that Partner knows how you feel about this?

If change:

1. How do you feel about those changes?
2. Do you think that Partner knows how you feel about this?
3. What do you think led to those changes?

27. If you had three wishes for your relationship with Partner for twenty years from now, what would they be? I'm thinking partly of the kind of future you see for yourself and Partner.

28. Is there anything that you feel you've learned above all from your relationship with Partner?

29. Is there anything that I have not asked you about that you feel is an important part of your relationship with Partner?

Couple Relationships When One Partner is in Prison

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Introduction

Of the many challenges facing American society, one of the more weighty is the problem of incarceration (Gabel & Johnson 1995; Nurse 2002; Petersilia 2003). Never before U.S. history have so many individuals been convicted and imprisoned. One of the unanticipated results of recent mandatory (or *determinate*) sentencing practices is the significant increase of men being released from prisons and returning to family life. The Department of Justice (DOJ) estimates that 95 percent of the 1.4 million prisoners currently incarcerated will eventually be released and return to their families and former communities (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2002). According to the DOJ, fully 635,000 were released in 2002, or about 1,700 each day.

This is an important issue facing couples since many former prisoners attempt to reconnect with spouses, former spouses, partners, and children. While the mission of this conference is to explore the relationships of couples in general, this memo focuses on what we know about the couple relationships of those who are incarcerated, are incarcerated and will soon be returning home, or those who have been in prison and are now reuniting. This topic is of particular interest because couple relationships, family support, type of marriage or partnership, and marital stability have been shown to influence recidivism rates for former inmates (Petersilia, 2003). In turn, the issue of arrest and re-arrest followed by imprisonment has a dramatic impact on federal and state budgets. These costs are felt not only through direct spending by state and federal corrections departments but are also felt in indirect ways through assistance programs (Harrison 2001; Nelson, Deess, & Allen 1999; Petersilia 2003). In other words, when there are increased levels of commitment, a greater sense of interpersonal responsibility, and higher levels of couple stability there is potential for a premium to state and federal assistance programs, decreases in state costs for prison facilities, and reductions in the number of children who grow up in reoccurring cycles of poverty.

The Public Policy Context

There are two larger policy issues that need to be mentioned here as context for a discussion of couple formation and maintenance of this population. First, much of the dramatic increase in prison populations and the resulting scenario of thousands of formerly incarcerated men re-entering community and family life can be traced to public policies which have spawned harsher and more uniform sentencing practices. For example, since the 1970's there have been significant shifts in sentencing guidelines, criteria for release, and subsequent decreases in state-funded programming for those about to be released (for an expose on the history of this issue see Petersilia 2003). With the advent of *determinate* sentencing (codified sentence terms for specific crimes),

prisoners are rarely released as a function of merit. Hence, the incentives for program development (such as those programs aimed at maintaining or educating inmates about marital and family life issues) have generally dissipated. Second, recent past prison policies have been reconstructed to deter couple involvement and general family contact. These policy changes include limited contact times (Petersilia 2003), cost-prohibitive phone policies (Lynch & Sabol 2001), and increases in non-local incarceration in which inmates are moved to non-proximate locations that are often many miles from their homes, children, and spouse/partner. Nurse claims that these policies were designed to create “deep breaks” from partners/spouses, family, and community life as a way to toughen public response to crime (2002: 37).

Basic Measures of Couple Interaction Among Inmates.

Contact. While in prison, researchers indicate that a key construct to be considered is couple contact (Nurse, 2002; Lynch & Sabol, 2001). We do not usually think about couple interaction in such basic terms, but in this case it becomes essential to do so. Prison researchers often access prison records to ascertain how many times spouses/partners (and other family members) visit. These measures are not sophisticated, nor are they even assessed in multiple-item scale form. Instead, they are measured simply as times visited per month or in some cases over a one-year span. Even though a simple marker, this is a key variable of couple well-being. Continued contact may indicate a higher level of commitment, loyalty, and relationship stability.

One key problem facing these couples can be labeled *ambiguous presence* (Day & Lamb, 2004). An inmate may still be psychologically present in a couple relationship even though physically absent. Measurement of inmate presence (in terms of visitation, letters, phone contact, or conjugal visits) is often confounded by the distances family members have to travel for visitation and other barriers imposed by prison systems to sustain and maintain a “deep-break” philosophy.

Relationship Simplicity. Another basic measure of couple relationship can be labeled relationship simplicity. Although not directly tested in current research, some researchers (cf. Petersilia, 2003; Nurse, 2002) have commented on the high numbers of male prisoners who report relationships from multiple partners. One could hypothesize that when there are few or possibly only one partner/spouse involved in the processes, life complexity should be simpler and therefore greater benefit should occur from the couple relationship: when there are multiple relationships of past and current spouses and/or partners one would guess that managing those relationships (especially when children are involved) would make for a more complex and less stability with regard to couple strength and stability. Relationship simplicity should help in focusing personal resources.

Potential Measures. One way researchers could assess couple relationship would be through the use of a genogram analysis. This strategy is currently being tested by an organization in New York City’s Eastside called *Family Justice*. Following the lead of McGoldrick, Gerson, Shellenberger (1999), *Family Justice* researchers use genograms to assess the history, relationship patterns, and connections of families with long-term problems such as arrests, alcoholism, drug abuse, family violence, and other health and

family systems issues. A genogram charts family members, marriages, relationships, births, deaths, relationship strengths, and problems.

Intentionality. Nurse (2002) indicates that reentry success may be facilitated by intentionality. That is, inmate's (and the spouse/partner's) intentions before release impact his success at actually reconnecting. As a basic measure, researchers have gathered records or statements from inmates and partners about relationship style courses taken in prison, general statements about their desire to return to family relationships, and what kind of plans they make as they envision their return. Most of these studies (*cf* Harrison 2001; Hairston 1998, 1995) use smaller-scale qualitative studies to gather stories and impressions from prisoners about these intentions.

Expectation Fulfillment. In a similar vein, researchers (*cf* Fishman 1986) also suggest that, as in non-prison families, the ability to accurately describe and fulfill appropriate couple expectations is key. These researchers simply ask questions about what they think will happen upon release with regard to couple interaction, providing, conflict resolution, and problem solving: more precise and workable couple expectations should generate clearer and more well-defined actions during incarceration and was released. An example can be found in Fishman's work in which wives and husbands were interviewed before and after prison release. When the offender's and partner's expectations were violated within a short time it was found that this inability to stay with the plan of couple reconnection, sobriety, and non-criminal behavior was a major source of conflict and decreased couple stability and often contributed to re-arrest.

Change of Life Patterns. Another source of concern for inmates wishing to reconnect following release is a strong commitment to decreased drug and alcohol use. Harrison (1997) found that couples with a returning inmate were better able to reconnect (and subsequently avoid re-arrest) when couples made a conscious effort to avoid substance and alcohol use. To that end, many prisons also offer drug and alcohol counseling and even extended support as the inmate transitions into community life. In some cases, these programs involve couples (Petersila, 2003).

Measures of Hard-Living. Howell (1973) found that couples who struggle with being able to meet general desired goals were more likely to be characterized as *hard-living* families. To determine hard-living, Howell suggested that one look at five potential constructs that capture the essence of hard living. The first is residential stability. Hard-living couples score higher on *rootlessness*. That is, they frequently change residence, live in substandard housing, and have ongoing problems with paying rent. Second, hard-living couples have a preoccupation with *the daily drama of life*. Much of their daily conversations focus on gossip, petty disturbance, and perpetual arguments over television, space utilization, and other events of daily living. Third, these couples report *daily couple and/or marital conflict*, or arguments, often followed by periods of break-ups, re-uniting, followed by more break-ups or separation/divorce. Fourth, these couples frequently use *harsh profanity* to describe their lives, communicate their frustration, and engage in conversation generally. Last, hard-living couples *frequently use alcohol* in the home and children have easy access to it. There is apparently no formal instrument for

measuring hard-living couple life, but it would seem that the measurement of this general construct could help identify couples and families at risk.

More Advanced Research

Surprisingly, there is little direct and systematic research in which standard couple assessments (conflict, relationship satisfaction, etc.) have been employed using couples in which one (or both) have been or are in prison. One exception is a recent article by Segrin and Flora (2001). This study sought the participation of 96 married prison inmates. Each completed a survey that measured relationship loneliness, marital satisfaction, relationship history, and couple commitment. As one would expect, these researchers found that loneliness was strongly associated with the length of time the prisoner had been separated from his partner. However, they also found that feelings of loneliness were significantly decreased by the presence of a committed and satisfying marital relationship. Hendirck's (1988) Relational Assessment Scale (RAS) was employed to measure their marital satisfaction. With this unique population the inter-item reliability score was similar to a more general population $\alpha = .87$. The inmates scored surprisingly high on this scale of relationship satisfaction. The authors indicate that the average score recorded by the prisoners (on a scale of 1-5) was 4.0 with a SD of .96.

Relational commitment was assessed using a measure developed by Stafford and Canary (1991). This 5-item measure asked prisoners to comment on their intrinsic motivation to preserve the relationship (e.g. "I want this relationship to last as long as possible," and "There are no others that I would like to be married to?"). The nature of this measure is such that it assess personal commitment rather than structural commitment. This population averaged a 3.78 (on a 1-5 point scale, SD = 1.12) and indicates, according to the authors, a higher than expected level of relational commitment.

The other measure used in the above study assessed relational history. Scores were coded from an open-ended set of questions about couple relationships. Inmates' average scores on these more subjective measures showed that were also above the mean. For example, inmates commented that issues such as a 'we-ness vs. separateness orientation was important to them and it was most disruptive to be involved in a highly chaotic relationship. That is, they reported a significant problem when life was like a 'whirlpool' and there were unpredictable hardships that attended their relationship. Others expressed great disappointment at how difficult it was to maintain their primary relationship.

A key finding of this study was that a sense of commitment and intimacy (i.e. being able to talk about important personal topics) had a significant and positive impact on prisoner's decreased feelings of loneliness and despair. Surprisingly, the average marital satisfaction scores were much higher than the researchers had and many of the inmates in this sample reported positive and powerful relationships even though physically separated from their partners.

In summary, we know very little about those who are in (or have been in) prison with regard to important couple measures. Consequently, we know little about the kinds of

characteristics found within couple relationships that could decrease recidivism rates. Research is needed that addresses and expands our understanding of the more basic features of couple interaction (i.e., connection, presence, availability, responsibility) and then moves toward measuring (over longer periods of time) the effects of other interactional processes that could strengthen prison couple relationships. The work of Segrin and Flora strongly suggests that relationships can and do thrive even in this type of severe environment. Additionally, there is growing support for the notion that when the primary relationships of prisoners is strong the transition to community and family life is more successful.

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Healthy Marriage Measures

Patrick F Fagan, The Heritage Foundation

Background:

The relational capacities of American men and women in family partnerships (marriage or cohabitation) is at a rather low level as indicated by the fact that the majority of children born in the U.S. are not be raised throughout childhood by both of their natural parents. Only about 42 of every hundred children born 18 years ago are reaching age 18 living with both biological parents. Furthermore, of all children conceived about 28% now are aborted. Of all those aborted about 82% are the fruit of unmarried parents.

Given this level of marriage disruption and non-formation, marriage assessments and marital-capacity assessments must take into account the impact of the disrupted unions and the non-unions of the parents of offspring now entering marriage.

Definition of a healthy marriage

A healthy marriage is one where the couple always belongs to each other and to their children, no matter how difficult this belonging may be at times. At minimum that means they never reject each other.

In the positive, the central dynamic of a healthy, stable marriage is that each spouse serves the other. This dynamic and the capacity to live in this way needs to be assessed, both behaviorally and cognitively.

Assessing the meta-framework regarding marriage

Every successful marriage will experience good times and difficult times, the latter endured until the former return, and a successful marriage will engage in any effort that is needed to sustain the union. In order to estimate the potential of prospective partners a few crucial questions need to be answered by both: Do you expect to encounter personal and relational challenges and are you committed to endure the suffering of coping with them, even early in marriage? Do you have the capacity to bear with this pain? Do you think your partner has the capacity to do so? What do you both need to do to increase this capacity? Who can most likely help you do that? Are you aware of the transitions in married life that tend to be more difficult times of a marriage? What are they?

These questions will draw out the cognitive framework of each partner and this framework itself in what it portends will indicate strengths and weaknesses.

Individuals who have a clear operational model of what constitutes a good marriage and what marriage demands of them (rather than of their partner) have an advantage over those who do not have this model. Understanding that romance is the habit of the joy of giving, instead of the more common interpretation of it as the emotional state of “being in love,” is an acquired strength, or an acquirable strength, for a stable healthy marriage.

Measure:

- A taker rather than a giver?
- The 5-1 ratio of giving to taking in the relationship?

Further the attitude that that problems are a part of life is a cognitive strength, as is the attitude that learning to solve problems leads to a productive life. Such attitudes (cognitive habits) engender the flexibility that will lead to the personal growth needed for a stable marriage. These attitudes are acquirable, and fit within the ‘dynamic’ set of issues delineated below.

Being willing to learn *about learning in the area of relationships*— is a disposition that is very adaptive after marriage but not as likely to be experienced prior to a marriage unless differences are unearthed and used, as would happen in a structured marriage preparation program built on a detailed assessment.

The very learning of new attitudes during marriage preparation can be an occasion of a ‘meta-learning’: that one can learn to make a relationship stronger and that such learning will be needed again and again in the future. Good marriage preparation will make sure to use these occasions to drive home the ‘meta learning’.

Another part of the assessment of the meta-frameworks couple is their sensitivity to the long-term implications for others of how they approach and live out their marriage: Are they cognizant that their relationship will form their children’s psyches and relational capacities and will affect their children’s and even their grandchildren’s future marriages?

Such an intergenerational view of how the quality of their marital relationship will impact their children is itself likely a protective factor of the marriage. “Is this the case?” is a major research question.

Other areas include predispositions about marriage formed in the years prior to meeting their spouse. Differences here need exploration for they can be part of the metaframing of marriage that each brings to their joint future and they had best be aligned or at minimum be in the open and known to each. For instance exploration of their beliefs about the nature of marriage: what is the purpose of marriage in general, and for them; does it have a transcendental aspect for them?

Introduction to the assessment of the more changeable and the less changeable aspects of the marital relationship.

There are two dimensions to each marriage partner that are worth delineating --- the dynamic and the static. Dynamic aspects are capable of change, while the static or permanent aspects are not, because they are part of an individual's biology or personal history.

Assessing attitudes towards, and distinctions between, the dynamic and static components of a relationship are central features in marital assessment and expectations. For instance a partner who expects change in a static area is on a sure road to disappointment-- potentially deep and disruptive disappointment.

DYNAMIC (CHANGEABLE) ASPECTS WITHIN MARRIAGE, Especially the areas of communication and cognition.

Assessing Dynamic Positive Views, Beliefs, and Attitudes

Views and attitudes held by each spouse are difficult to measure. In many cases, individuals in new relationships are not aware of their opinions on matters that seem trivial at the time but become significant later. Frequently, individuals will not become aware of important expectations until well into the marriage, at which point they realize their spouse has different expectations.

This knowledge of self and of the spouse is significant because:

- 1) Beliefs and attitudes are powerful because they direct the principles of operation by which each conducts their thoughts, actions, and expectations toward the relationship.
- 2) Because they are frequently unknown until after the marriage vow, these expectations will cause disappointment later on.

In the area of personal expectations, religion becomes an indicator of the potential strength of a marriage:

- 1) Couples who adhere to a community of faith and worship that has a well-articulated view of marriage and its dynamics are more likely to successfully communicate their attitudes and beliefs to each other and to have a framework within to conduct the more difficult parts of their marriage work, should it be needed.
- 2) The degree to which couples share a belief on the sacred nature of marriage will be the degree to which they share an understanding of sustaining a relationship through trial.
- 3) The degree to which individuals practice their religion in worship, personal prayer, scripture reading, and meditation will be the degree to which they share attributes that are necessary for a marriage to work well, especially in times of stress. The frequency of worship is a robust indicator of potential strength.

Their practice of religion adds to the strength of marriage relationships and may be a much better indicator of strength than the rating that couples give to the importance of religion. (e.g. Teachman, May 2003 Journal of Marriage and Family, pp. 444-455).

Communication Skills

Of no small consequence to the health of a marriage is the ability to communicate with a spouse through listening and talking. Paramount to successful communication is the ability to :

- Hear and understand the needs of the other,
- Empathize with the needs of the other,
- Describe inner thoughts, and emotions,
- Ability to recognize one's own relational needs clearly,
- And the ability to ask for the help of the other.

If not present in sufficient degree, a spouse's willingness to learn these disciplines will be imperative in order to maintain a health relationship. A thorough assessment will measure these and indicate degrees of difference between the spouses, including dynamic negative attitudes and habits in communications:

- To take differences as betrayal or opposition
- To avoid in withdrawal
- Inability to compromise to be flexible
- Lack of follow through on agreements.

Conflict Resolution Skills

Individual differences in opinion are a part of life—and the case of marriage is no exception. Partners must expect that this is the case. Conflict resolution techniques are dynamic because they can be learned and improved. Couples must be willing to learn how to negotiate their differences and arrive at agreements, even if it results in the agreement benefiting a spouse more than oneself.

ASSESSING THE PARTNERS' ATTITUDES ON THE STATIC ASPECTS OF THEIR MARRIAGE

Though here presented after the dynamic, the static aspects of a marriage are in a way foundational and first --- they are givens within which the dynamic will operate. They are the unchangeables within which change will take place. They need to be known and accepted by each about themselves and the other.

Some Aspects of Sexuality

Virginity going into the relationship, at least on the part of the female, (though probably for both) is a strength, but a history of prior sexual relationships, a static aspect, cannot be changed and must be worked with, and both be accepted as well as understood in its implications (dynamic) for the relationship.

The sexual histories of the partners (whether virgins or not, how many sexual partners, etc.) have a bearing on the probability of stability of the marriage. Given the sexual education of many this aspect is not likely to be known and its dynamic unexplored, and the research base extremely thin. The research in this area needs much development:

- What are the impacts of prior sexual relationships on the marital relationship?
- How do they place it at risk?
- What are the pathways, cognitive or in action, that this weakness develops?

For instance we know that the age of a female is when she first had sexual intercourse is inversely proportional to the likelihood that she will maintain a stable marriage—that is, a younger female who has her first sexual experience is more likely to divorce their first spouse than an older female. A recent Heritage Foundation report provides evidence that “early initiation of sexual activity and higher numbers of non-marital sex partners are linked in turn to a wide variety of negative life outcomes, including increased rates of infection with sexually transmitted diseases, increased rates of out-of-wedlock pregnancy and birth, increased single parenthood, decreased marital stability, increased maternal and child poverty, increased abortion, increased depression, and decreased happiness.”

Such histories are static (unchangeable) aspects. But how the couple deals them with is not. Research into the modes of handling such histories are another area of research for marriage preparation and marital counseling. For couples with such a static background: what are the cognitive pathways of these weaknesses.

- How do these histories express themselves in cognitions?
- On service,
- Expectations of suffering,
- Seeing problem solving as an aspect of normal life,
- On attitude of learning to learn how to be married.

Early sexual abuse has been on the rise for some time and is especially prevalent among those raised in poor single parent families. Such abuse makes the relationship much more fragile.

For instance from the Fragile Families survey we know that the mother’s distrust of the father’s sexual wandering is one of the major blocks to a parent couple interested in marriage actually moving towards marriage whether they are cohabiting or in a steady relationship.

How do couples that marry handle this obstacle in a way that makes sense (and in longitudinal follow up) proves to be successful?

We know that about 70% of the legal initiation of divorce is by the wife. To what extent is there a relationship between earlier sexual involvement and this?

Religious affiliation

It is not unusual for partners to share the same religious beliefs to some degree, but the increase in 'mixed' marriages raises the need to explore this difference in background and its impact on their future together: expectations in worship, in the religious affiliation of the children, in the religious education of children. What are the successful strategies of handling this potentially deep difference?

Gender

Gender differences are to be expected but an awareness of them will help.

SEMI-STATIC VIEWS AND BELIEFS

There is a need to organize assessment of variables to include a category that from experience is known to be rather less likely to change even though change is possible. This category is here labeled “semi-static”. Should couples go into marriage expecting significant change in themselves or their partner as a result of getting married or because of their own efforts, this category could be important, for it will highlight those areas where either partner can be setting the marriage up for major disappointment.

Some Negative Semi-Static Aspects

Given the influence of their parents’ marriages or relationships and their own sexual histories, many individuals have experiences that can make marriage more difficult.

Exploration of any differences on children: the desire for and the number expected, the spacing, the religious upbringing? Desire not to have children, either at all or not in the first four years of marriage?

Negative dynamic aspects are amenable to change but are by no means certain of change. It is necessary to assess spouse’s expectations of learning the skills that make marriage work. Again, within a culture of family fragmentation it is less likely that these skills or the attitudes that result in their practice have been acquired before marriage. Are couples aware of the presence of these static dangers in their own relationship?

A major detractor from the odds of stability is the experience of parents’ divorce. When both partners come from divorced families their probability of having a major stress on the relationship is heightened significantly. There is a clear need to assess the couple’s awareness of this static aspect (a parents’ divorce) and of their willingness to learn what their weaknesses are and how likely they are to make themselves felt. (There is need for research on the patterns of these weaknesses, the fault lines they generate and the signals that such parental modeling may become operative in a marriage.) Other areas to assess:

- History of unresolved conflict in family of origin.
- Conflict through physical violence in family of origin
- Conflict through physical violence in courtship
- Experience of child abuse
- Experience of child sexual abuse

Differences in religious beliefs can be a source of weakness in a marriage (and an absence of mutual relief in times of stress). Even more fundamental, the differences in religious views might also contain differences on the nature of marriage itself. That could put the couple in a position where there are irreconcilable differences.

Other experiences or attitudes will have a bearing on the marriage. They should be explored and measured:

- Addictions and fear of addictions
- Welfare
- Not working
- Earlier divorce
- Earlier cohabitation with another
- Number of sexual partners before marriage

References:

The Marital Assessment RELATE is probably the most advanced, because it had the benefit of the other questionnaires that preceded it and the research these have generated. Many, but not all, of the above concerns are covered in this questionnaire.

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Conceptualizing and Measuring Healthy Marriages and Positive Relationships

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Conceptualizing and Measuring Healthy Marriages and Positive Relationships

Long-term romantic relationships are multidimensional in nature and our concepts and measures must be significantly expanded if they are to reflect the richness and complexity that these relationships evidence. I propose a six dimension model to accommodate this plenitude: Individual Benefits, Individual Contributions, Couple Interaction, Relationship as Entity, Family Functioning, and Relationship Context. Unfortunately, relationship scholars have limited their attention to only two of these dimensions: Individual Benefits and Couple Interaction. In a recent, comprehensive, empirical study of the marital research literature, for example, we found that concepts and measures of marital quality seldom went beyond individual benefits such as satisfaction, intimacy, and sexual satisfaction and couple communication. (Fowers, Bucker, Calbeck, & Harrigan, 2003). This study makes it clear that scholarship on marriage is dominated by a communication-satisfaction model of relationships in which initial attraction plus high quality communication leads to intimacy and satisfaction, which form the basis for relationship commitment. Although these associations have substantial empirical support, they have not been tested against alternative theoretical explanations and this model leaves out essential aspects of long term marriages.

The virtually unquestioned primacy of communication and satisfaction and the nearly complete absence of significant alternatives suggests that marital scholarship is constrained by cultural blinders. As I have argued in a series of publications, the communication-satisfaction model of marriage is an expression of contemporary individualism rather than a result of scientific discovery (Fowers, 1993, 1998, 2000, 2001). The communication-satisfaction model is individualistic in that it takes personal satisfaction as the definitive sign of marital quality and portrays commitment primarily as a matter of whether or not the individual is fulfilled by the relationship. In the absence of satisfaction, commitment can only be seen as a less than legitimate constraint on the individual's freedom to pursue a more satisfying bond.

Another serious limitation of contemporary marital theory and research is that scholars seldom address the relationship as a distinct entity. Scholars tend to assume that relationships are the summation of a series of interactions and the subjective pleasure or displeasure that emerges from these interactions. Couple interactions and subjective evaluations are essential, but insufficient for a comprehensive understanding of long-term relationships or to inform a policy agenda designed to support marriage. In fact, concepts reflecting the relationship as an entity (partnership, teamwork, sacrifice, cooperation) are virtually absent from the relationship literature (Fowers et al., 2003).

Similarly, the personal qualities of spouses necessary for strong relationships (generosity, loyalty or commitment, accommodation, goodwill) are rarely cited by scholars. In a clear conceptual preference for individual benefits over relationship strength, satisfaction was discussed and measured 15-20 times as frequently as commitment. Commitment is obviously central to long term relationships, but has received relatively little attention in the individualistically oriented scholarly literature. Individual benefits are taken to be central to relationship strength, but the individual qualities necessary to participate in a thriving relationship are almost universally ignored. As I outline the six dimensions of a healthy long-term relationship, I will cite the best measures and indicate where additional measurement must be developed.

Individual Benefits

The first dimension focuses on the individual benefits of the relationship partners and they can be measured at the individual level. Individual benefits are arguably the most widely researched aspects of romantic relationships with enormous attention devoted to individual satisfaction (Karney & Bradbury, 1995), the experiences of emotional and physical intimacy, receiving emotional support, and the mental and physical health benefits of long-term relationships, particularly marriage (Waite & Gallagher, 2000). There are, in particular, dozens of measures of relationship satisfaction, many of which have documented psychometric strength. Among the well-validated scales, there are short, unidimensional measures of satisfaction such as the Kansas Marital Satisfaction scale (Schumm et al., 1986), the Marital Satisfaction Scale from ENRICH (Fowers & Olson, 1993), and the Quality Marriage Index (Norton, 1983) and longer, multidimensional satisfaction scales including the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (Spanier, 1976), the ENRICH inventory (Olson, 1999), the Marital Satisfaction Inventory (Snyder, 1997), and the RELATE inventory. Similarly, there are well-established measures of emotional intimacy such as PAIR (Schaefer & Olson, 1981) and the Waring Intimacy Questionnaire (Waring, 1984). It is vital that future data gathering on relational quality use well validated measures to ensure the meaningfulness and comparability of the data rather than creating new instruments of dubious quality for each study, as all too many investigators have done. Measures of individual benefit are thoroughly entwined with positive illusions about the relationship (Fowers & Applegate, 1995; Fowers, Lyons, & Montel, 1996; Fowers, Lyons, Montel, & Shaked, 1999), which raises serious questions about the meaning of marital satisfaction as the major marker for marital quality.

Individual Contributions

The Individual Contributions dimension of a healthy relationship comprises the qualities that partners must have to develop and maintain good relationships. Commitment is foremost among these and scholars have recently developed well-validated measures of relationship commitment such as the Commitment Inventory (Stanley & Markman, 1992), the Dimensions of Commitment Inventory (Adams & Jones, 1997), and the Investment Model Scale, which measures both commitment and personal investment in the relationship (Rusbult, Martz, & Agnew, 1998). Partners in close relationships do not always have fully compatible goals and interests and the normal process of cooperation often requires accommodation and sacrifice, without which the relationship will either become very conflicted or one partner will have to submerge his or her interests to the other. Rusbult and her colleagues have successfully measured accommodation and willingness to sacrifice and found that they are important components of relationship maintenance (Agnew, Van Lange, Rusbult, & Langston, 1998; Van Lange, Rusbult, Drigotas, Arriaga, Witcher, & Cox, 1997; Wieselquist, Rusbult, Foster, & Agnew, 1999).

I have proposed that character strengths such as generosity, loyalty, courage, and justice are necessary for healthy relationships as well (Fowers, 2000). Generosity is the characteristic that underlies the accommodative behavior, willingness to sacrifice, ability to forgive offenses, positive perceptions of the partner that are essential to good relationships. Loyalty to a partner prevents betrayals that can undermine relationships ranging from breaking promises to sharing partner confidences to infidelity. Courage is necessary to share vulnerabilities, communicate openly, and confront relationship difficulties. Justice is essential for the fairness and trustworthiness that characterize good relationships. As noted, there are measures available for some specific aspects of these strengths (accommodation, willingness to sacrifice, commitment). I am currently collaborating with Alan Hawkins to develop more direct measures of these personal strengths and we call the measure under development the Marital Virtues Profile (MVP; Hawkins, Fawcett, Carroll, Fowers, & Christiaens, 2003).

Initial psychometric evaluations of this measure are promising and further validation efforts are underway. The MVP contains a set of scales in which the individual describes the degree to which his or her *partner* is generous, fair, loyal, and is a character friend. We are employing partner reports as a way to avoid self-enhancing bias.

Couple Interaction

A second area in which there are many available and well-validated measures of relationship quality falls under the Couple Interaction dimension. There are a number of observational research scales that provide in-depth information on specific communicative behaviors such as the Structural Analysis of Social Behavior (Benjamin, 1974), the Conflict Rating Scale (Holtzworth-Munroe, Smutzler, & Stuart, 1998), and the Specific Affect Coding System (Gottman, 1994). These assessments provide very fine-grained detail about couple interactions, but they must be conducted in a laboratory setting, videotaped and coded by extensively trained coders, all of which makes these procedures very expensive and time-consuming. There are many short self-report measures of communication and conflict resolution that have good psychometric properties. Brief scales (approx. 10 items) addressing these variables are included in the ENRICH, Marital Satisfaction, and RELATE inventories. A somewhat longer scale called the Marital Communication Inventory has also been frequently used and has good validity (Bienvenu, 1970).

Relationship Entity

The fourth dimension of a good relationship is the Relationship Entity dimension. This aspect of relationships is critical, because it captures the relationship itself: the elements of the relationship that are distinct from the two individuals and that go beyond their interactions. Colloquially, partners frequently talk about doing things “for their relationship,” both as individuals and together, and this sense of a third entity is a vital part of every long-term relationship. Marital researchers, therapists, and educators are beginning to refer to aspects of the Relationship Entity such as teamwork, partnership, “we-ness,” couple identity, and so forth. This dimension refers to aspects of relationships that only exist when the partners hold them in common, such as teamwork, shared history, shared goals, and their shared life. It is essential to see the relationship as a third entity in the couple so that it does not get reduced to the individuals’ personal experience and the transient shifting of interactions in their relating. The Relationship Entity provides the continuity across these interactions and through the ups and downs of satisfaction that all partners experience.

Another way to see the centrality of the Relationship Entity is to recognize it as the basis for interactions and (dis)satisfactions. The sense of “we” defines the relationship and delineates how each partner fits into it and what is appropriate and inappropriate in their involvement. We take much of this for granted, but it is a key aspect of successful relationships. This concept of the relationship provides the answers to many relationship issues. For example, romantic relationships generally include sexual involvement, sexual and romantic exclusivity, an expectation of loyalty, and a kind of personal centrality that friendships do not generally include. Other issues that are more or less resolved in a couple’s concept of their relationship include whether or not they manage finances jointly, how much time they should spend together, what their shared goals are, what the events in their shared history mean, who does what, what behaviors are and are not acceptable, and so on. The way a couple answers these kinds of questions helps to define the nature of the relationship, even though the answers are often unspoken and show up in their behavior only. The degree to which partners have the same answers to relationship defining questions will go a long way toward determining the quality of the relationship. The more or less shared concept of the relationship provides the context for the couple’s interactions, defining what is appropriate, what is expected, and how the two partners will engage with one another. Moreover, the

concept of the relationship provides the basis for the subjective evaluations of the relationship such as marital satisfaction, happiness, intimacy, etc. Satisfaction is a function of how well the relationship matches up with the individual and joint definitions.

The nascent scholarly interest in the relationship as a distinct entity has generated a few measures for assessing it. In one interesting development, Gottman and his colleagues (Buehlman, Gottman, & Katz, 1992; Carrere, Buehlman, Gottman, Coan, & Ruckstuhl, 2000) have developed an oral history interview that can be coded on eight scales (Fondness/Affection, We-ness, Expansiveness, Negativity, Disappointment and Disillusionment, Chaos, Volatility, and Glorifying the Struggle), based on how the partners talk about their relationship. Some of these scales fit neatly into the communication-satisfaction model that predominates in the literature, but the “We-ness” score is relatively unique. It refers to the tendency of partners to talk in terms of *we* rather than *I*, to speak in ways that are inclusive of the partner, and to mention shared values, beliefs and goals. Although this scale tends to have good reliability and validity, it requires a 45 minute interview and trained coders who must watch a videotape of the interview for the coding. Agnew, Van Lange, Rusbult, and Langston (1998) used a similar procedure to measure “we-ness” by having respondents list their spontaneous thoughts about their relationship and simply counting the number of times they used the first person plural. These authors also used 4-item self-report centrality of relationship scale that demonstrated excellent reliability and validity. Aron, Aron, and Smollan (1992) developed a simple visual scale called the Inclusion of Other in the Self scale. It has seven drawings of two circles. One circle represents the self and the other represents the partner. The drawings range from completely separate to entirely overlapping. Respondents indicate the diagram that best represents the relationship. The Commitment Inventory (Stanley & Markman, 1992) also contains a scale with good psychometric properties called the *Couple Identity* scale. The Marital Virtues Profile (Hawkins et al., 2003) includes two scales called *Teamwork* and *Shared Vision*, which assess these two aspects of the Relationship as Entity. These scales have good preliminary psychometric properties and further assessment of their validity is under way.

Family Functions

The fifth dimension of a good relationship is the degree to which the relationship enables the partners to fulfill their familial roles. In other words, if a couple reports marvelous satisfaction with their relationship, but they are neglectful of their children, the marriage would hardly appear successful. Good relationships should provide a supportive environment for parents to raise their children. The teamwork concept highlighted above is crucial for childrearing, particularly in dual-earner couples, where tasks must be flexibly shared and managed and in stepfamilies where the stepparent’s role is so strongly dependent on the support of the biological parent. Similarly, high quality relationships would facilitate good financial management. Whether finances are shared or not, partners who are able to have shared goals and cooperate and coordinate their efforts will be more successful with their economic plans. I know of no available measurement in this area.

Marriage Context

The final dimension is made up of the social, legal, extended family, and friendship network as the contexts of relationships. Most contemporary thought, both popular and scholarly, separates romantic relationships from the public world and portrays them as private affairs of the two involved individuals. This viewpoint is the outgrowth of a long historical development that has privatized family life and made it increasingly voluntary. It is a mistake to attempt to separate the public and private in this way, because the public and the private are so thoroughly intertwined. The easiest way to recognize this error is to see that discourse on divorce frequently focuses on the failings of individuals and couples leading to

calls for strengthening couples through education and marriage preparation. Marriage education is undoubtedly a good thing, but if we focus all of our attention on helping one or ten or a hundred couples at a time, we will neglect to address some of the most potent factors in the decline of marriage. For this reason, any comprehensive account of marital quality and stability has to take social context factors into account.

The fact is that couples do not divorce one or ten or a hundred at a time. They divorce a million at a time, and this makes it clear that there are powerful social and historical factors involved in such a massive social movement away from marital stability. To take a physical health analogy, if we had a million or even 10,000 deaths a year from an illness, our primary efforts would not be focused on strengthening individuals' health, although this might be part of the response. The primary objective would be to identify and defeat the *source* of the illness. The analogy can only be taken so far because most illnesses are due to a single pathogen, whereas there are many social and historical sources of the decline of marriage, but the point of addressing divorce as a *social* rather than *dyadic* phenomenon is a critical one. The marriage movement has highlighted many of these social factors.

Unfortunately, these macro-level factors are difficult to define and assess in consensually acceptable ways. Nevertheless, it is clear that legal factors such as divorce laws and tax laws can support or undermine marriage. Similarly, what counts as news, advertising, and the stories told on television, in the movies, in magazines and novels all convey important messages about what is and what is not worthwhile in life, and many of these messages beat the drum of individual freedom from constraint and the primacy of fulfilling personal desires over commitment to marriage. The primacy of achievement and material gain in our culture promotes a work culture that demands long work hours and a prioritization of career over family life that erodes marital quality through neglect. A recently appearing social pattern, the child-centered family, can also undermine marriage when parents become overly focused on their children's lives and activities. Some balance between the appropriate needs of children and the necessary nurturance of the marital bond is important, but has, for many families, become lost in the frantic provision of activities and entertainment for their children. Simple measures of the amount of time spent weekly in work, childrearing, and marital involvement can provide a metric for assessing the extent to which marriage gets lost in the competing demands and priorities in adults' lives.

Another crucial element of the marriage context is the extent to which family and friends offer support for the relationship, recognize its legitimate place, boundaries, and needs. Do friends and family offer supportive statements regarding the relationship and encourage effort and commitment on behalf of the couple's relationship? To my knowledge, there are no measures of the extent to which families and friends provide direct support of marital commitment, which suggests that scholars tend to be blind to this important aspect of the relationship context.

Finally, the pervasive individualism in contemporary society, with the primacy of individual fulfillment, plays a strong role in undermining individual contributions to relationships, recognizing the relationship as an entity, and promotes a caustic cost-benefit approach to relationships. This individualism is reflected in both popular and scholarly portrayals of relationships and it is the ideology behind the strong historical movement toward creating the form of relationships we take for granted today: relationships based on romance, sexual fulfillment, intimacy, personal satisfaction, and privacy. The more comprehensive model of marriage that I propose here can serve as a corrective for this excessive individualism and open pathways for encouraging individuals to become better partners, strengthening individual relationships and increasing the degree to which the social context is supportive of long-term relationships. Most important of all is to expand our

assessments of marriage beyond interactions and satisfactions to include what is shared by partners: their history, their goals, their teamwork, and their shared lives.

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Couples in Stepfamilies
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Before we discuss couple measurement in stepfamilies, we need to define what we are and are not writing about. Although terms such as remarried families, stepfamilies, remarriage families, blended families, and reconstituted families are used in the literature, sometimes interchangeably, we think that scholars should carefully define these terms and others that are employed in research on stepfamilies. We define stepfamily as a family in which at least one of the adults has a child (or children) from a previous relationship. This is a broad definition, and one that includes families that are headed by gay and lesbian couples, unmarried heterosexual couples, and married couples. It also includes remarried couples that are not currently residing with children from prior relationships as well as couples that reside with stepchildren periodically as children transfer between parental households. It does *not* include remarried couples in which neither individual has children from prior relationships. In this paper we will refer mostly to remarried couples in stepfamilies, because most research on couple relationships in stepfamilies has been on legally wed unions rather than on cohabiting couples (either heterosexual or homosexual partnerships).

Researchers' growing interest in stepfamilies has been centered much more on stepparent-stepchild relationships than on remarriage or couple relationships (Coleman, Ganong, & Fine, 2000). In contrast to family therapy models and other family theories that suggest that the adult couple relationship is the most important relationship in maintaining family stability and functioning, stepfamily researchers generally seem to think that the stepparent-stepchild relationship is more critical.

Positive Couple Relationships

In general, individuals remarry for companionship, financial security for themselves and their children, and for help in raising their children (Ganong & Coleman, 2004). Some scholars conclude that formerly married individuals remarry for more pragmatic reasons than do individuals marrying for the first time (Ganong & Coleman, 1989).

Clinicians assert that there must be a strong couple bond for stepfamilies to function effectively. The characteristics of a strong couple bond and the method of developing such a bond are not clearly articulated, however. Positive couple relationships in stepfamilies are characterized by similarity in values (particularly as they apply to beliefs about raising children), mutual respect and affection, relatively egalitarian sharing of decision-making and power, shared interests (e.g., leisure activities), and cognitive and behavioral flexibility (e.g., Anderson & White, 1986; Burgoyne & Morison, 1997; Coleman, Ganong, & Weaver, 2001; Giles-Sims, 1987; Pyke, 1994). In addition, communication skills such as listening and clearly expressing thoughts and feelings and problem-solving skills are important aspects of positive stepfamily couples, just as they are for all types of relationships. These attributes that characterize positive stepfamily couples are derived from our reading of clinical and research literature on stepfamilies. We do not argue that this list includes all of the constituent attributes of positive step-couples, but these are the most important.

New or Existing Measures

Most researchers that have examined marital quality or stability in remarried couples with children from prior relationships have used measures that were originally developed for use with couples in first marriages. Essentially treating marriages as interchangeable regardless of the number of previous marriages, this “a remarriage is a marriage is a marriage” approach has dominated the literature on remarital quality and stability (Ganong & Coleman, 2004; Vemer, Coleman, Ganong, & Cooper, 1989).

Some of the most widely known and carefully conducted studies on couples in stepfamilies have employed this approach (e.g., Kurdek, 1999). Among the widely - used instruments to measure remarital relationships have been the Dyadic Adjustment Scale, the Locke-Wallace Marital Adjustment Test, the Areas of Change Questionnaire, Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale, the Marital Instability Scale, and the Conflict Tactics Scale. Observations of marital interactions of stepfamily couples have also been done using widely known coding systems such as the Marital Interaction Coding System.

However, the defining criterion for being in a stepfamily is the existence of children from prior relationships *at the start of the couple relationship*, which makes the context in which remarriage are developed and maintained considerably different from the initial contexts for couples in first marriages with no children. These children from prior unions, who are stepchildren to one of the adults (note that both adults in the couple can be stepparents if both bring children to the union), often are involved with their other parent, and these adults also affect adult couples in stepfamilies. Therefore, couple bonding in stepfamilies is different than in first marriages because stepfamily couples must concurrently develop relationships with new stepchildren and new extended kin as well as maintain ties with their children’s other parent and perhaps nonresidential children (Ganong & Coleman, 2004). The web of new relationships couples in remarriage must cope with is both more dense and more complex than is the case for first marriage couples.

We think that factors related to stepchildren are important to consider when measuring marital quality in step-couples. The presence of children is one of the best predictors of divorce in stepfamily couples (Cherlin & Furstenberg, 1994; Tzeng & Mare, 1995; White & Booth, 1985). Researchers and clinicians agree that stepchildren and financial issues are the two primary areas of disagreement and sources of conflict in stepfamilies. A closer look at the underlying bases for financial issues illustrate that many of these issues involve finances regarding stepchildren. For these reasons, researchers often include some measures related to child rearing issues. In particular, the focus often is on the extent to which the parent and stepparent agree on rules for children’s behavior and discipline of children, and on co parenting dynamics.

A few researchers have employed some dimension of child rearing in their studies of remarital relationships (e.g., Hetherington & Clingempeel, 1992; Hetherington, Henderson, & Reiss, 1999; Pasley & Ihinger-Tallman, 1987). Unfortunately, the psychometric properties of most of these measurements have not been carefully studied.

The measure developed by Hetherington and Clingempeel, the *Child-Rearing Issues Scale: Self and Spouse (CRI)*, has been used in at least two longitudinal studies of stepfamilies (Hetherington & Clingempeel, 1992; Hetherington et al., 1999), and other researchers have used this measure (Bray, 1999). The *CRI* consists of 39 items that assess how frequently adult partners argue or disagree over child rearing issues. Items include couple conflict about daily routines such as homework, bedtime, chores, manners, and responses to adult authority. The *CRI* was developed for studies of remarried couples with adolescent children, and some items relate to conflicts regarding issues such as curfews, dating, and the use of alcohol, cigarettes, and drugs. On average, Cronbach's alpha has been found to be .87 for daily routines and .75 for adolescent issues (Hetherington & Clingempeel, 1992). The *CRI* has been reported to significantly predict overall marital positivity and negativity for men and women in first marriages and remarriages (O'Connor & Insabella, 1999). Moreover, the *CRI* was significantly related to changes in marital positivity and negativity over time for husbands; although the changes for wives were not statistically significant, changes were in the hypothesized directions for them.

Pasley and Ihinger-Tallman (1987) also developed a 13-item measure related to problems in raising stepchildren. In addition, they also used a 19-item instrument, the *Areas of Disagreement Scale*, in their mailed questionnaire study of remarried couples in western Washington. Both of these scales have been used in subsequent investigations of remarriage as well. Of these two measures, the *Stepfamily Problems Scale (SPS)* items more clearly address conflicts and disagreements related to raising stepchildren. Respondents indicate how serious the problems were, ranging from 1 = not at all a problem to 4 = serious problem. Example items include: "disagreements between husband and wife over how to raise children," "stepparent feels as if he or she is neglecting their own children." Pasley and Ihinger-Tallman recommended summing the items to create a single score, with higher scores indicating more serious difficulties in child rearing. We have not been able to find any studies of the psychometric properties of the PRS.

Other scholars that have examined marital quality among remarried couples have employed similar measures that assess some dimension of the level of agreement between the partners. For example, although the measure was not aimed at assessing decisions regarding children, Kurdek (1990) adapted a measure of shared decision-making from an earlier tool. In our view, the broader focus of such measures make them less useful than tools such as the *CRI* and *SPS*.

Advantage and limitations of measures

The use of instruments with a population (i.e., remarried couples) that were normed on a different population (i.e., first marriage couples) is always questionable. We suspect the context of these marriages are often different in ways that could influence the couple relationship. To better understand the remarried couple relationship, it is probably important that measures be developed that tap people's reasons for remarriage. For example, we have found that financial stability for the children is an underlying motive for the remarriage of most women. If the new husband is not as financially stable or ambitious as the remarried mother

had hope, she may be disillusioned with the remarriage and the couple relationship would be seriously weakened.

The relative absence of studies of the reliability and validity of the instruments that focus on co-parenting in stepfamily couples, combined with the fact that the studies in which these assessments have been employed have been of white, generally middle class samples, suggests that much more research must be done before they are recommended for general use.

There are potential problems with incorporating questions about child rearing in measurement of couple relationships in stepfamilies. For instance, researchers often are interested in how well marital (couple) quality (or couple dynamics) predicts the quality of child rearing and how well the stepparent relates to the stepchild. If the degree to which the stepparent and parent agree about child rearing decisions is part of an assessment of couple quality, then this may artificially inflate the predictive power of the instrument because it is essentially measuring the same underlying phenomenon, at least in part.

The advantages of including parent-stepparent agreement on childrearing as part of assessment of couple quality outweigh the disadvantages. The findings from the body of research comparing remarried couples in stepfamilies to first married couples have been somewhat inconsistent. There may be many reasons for this inconsistency, but in terms of measurement, it might be that a vital component of remarital dynamics often is omitted.

Measurement with Subpopulations

We do not know of any studies in which the relationships of couples in cohabiting stepfamilies and gay and lesbian couples in stepfamilies have been examined. There may be differences between these couples and heterosexual remarried couples in terms of expectations for how much the “stepparent” will be involved in co-parenting stepchildren. Such differences would affect the utility of employing some measure of couple agreement regarding childrearing, but this is an empirical question that could be addressed in future research.

There are also no studies designed to measure remarried couple relationships in either low-income populations or race/ethnicity groups. This seems particularly unfortunate to us. We need to know more about the relationship between the couple dynamics and stepfamily stability in these sub-populations. We suspect, based on observations from interviews that we have conducted, that the couple relationship in African American stepfamilies is less affected by the stepparent/stepchild relationship than is true for white middle-class stepfamilies. African American stepchildren seem more positive towards stepparents, especially those who bring resources to the family, than white stepchildren. Therefore, African American parents are likely to be less ambivalent about the couple relationship and less torn between their children and their spouses.

One of the primary reasons why measurements that reflect the dynamics and functioning of stepfamilies and stepfamily relationships are lagging behind other areas of relationship and family measurement is that sampling adequate numbers of stepfamily members is often difficult. Even large national data sets such as the National Study of Families

and Households contain relatively small numbers of stepfamilies. Stigma attached to stepfamilies, reluctance to identify to researchers that they are remarried or are stepparents, and the socially constructed nature of family life are all factors that contribute to relatively small pools of stepfamily members in studies. Measurement studies are challenging enough to do without selecting target populations that are hard to locate, so it is not surprising that researchers have relied on widely known measures of marital quality rather than trying to develop instruments for stepfamily couples.

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THE SOUND RELATIONSHIP HOUSE QUESTIONNAIRES

This packet of self-report questionnaires can help assess RELATIONSHIPS in specific areas of the John Gottman Sound Relationship House theory. The theory is described in detail in Gottman's (1999) book *THE MARRIAGE CLINIC* (New York: W.W. Norton). The questionnaires in this packet are written to be generalized across type of couple relationship (married or unmarried, same sex, or heterosexual).

Review of the Sound Relationship House

Four Outcomes. There are four outcomes in the Sound Relationship House:

The Quality of the Friendship. The first goal of the Sound Relationship House consists of three levels that are about the couple's friendship. These levels include Love Maps (knowing each other, feeling known; this is also about interest and whether they ask open-ended questions of one another), The Fondness and Admiration System, Turning Toward or Away (the "emotional bank account"), and Emotional Disengagement and Loneliness.

The Quality of sex, romance, and passion. The second goal is to increase the quality of sex, romance, and passion in the relationship.

Conflict (Destructive or Constructive? On solvable or perpetual issues?). The third goal of the Sound Relationship House has to do with the Regulation of Conflict. In this level, we can decide which of the couple's issues are Perpetual Problems and which are Solvable Situational Problems. With regard to Regulation Conflict, we will help assess Startup (whether it is harsh), Accepting Influence, and how good the couple is at Compromise. With regard to Perpetual Problems, we will help decide if the couple is in Gridlock, and if the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse have visited the relationship.

The Quality of the Shared Meaning System. The fourth part of the Sound Relationship House has to do with the couple's ability to honor one another's dreams and to create shared meaning together. This is important in its own right, and it also affects the basic friendship.

Three Processes. There are three processes in the Sound Relationship House.

Flooding. This concept has to do with a person feeling overwhelmed by the way one's partner complains or brings up issues. It may or may not be related to high levels of physiological arousal.

Negative Sentiment Override. The Sound Relationship House assesses the extent to which there is negative sentiment override (Weiss, 1980). We will assess whether or not (and to what extent) the couple has is in a Negative Perspective.

Repair Effectiveness. This construct assesses whether repair attempts are perceived as being effective in reversing an interaction that has become negative.

Scoring

Outcomes. On the following true-false questionnaires, add up the number of items scored true on each scale. There are four outcomes. The scoring is as follows:

1. The quality of the friendship: Love Maps + Fondness&Admiration + Turning Toward – Emotional Disengagement&Loneliness.
2. Quality of sex, romance, and passion: Number of positive items checked.
3. Constructive versus Destructive Conflict: Startup + Four Horsemen + Gridlock – Accepting Influence – Compromise.
4. Quality of shared meaning system: Number of positive items checked: Rituals + Roles + Goals + Symbols.

Processes. The following three processes are assessed:

1. Flooding. The number of items checked true on the flooding scale.
2. Negative Sentiment Override. The number of items checked true on the negative sentiment override scale.
3. Repair Effectiveness. The number of items checked true on the repair scale.

Reliabilities.

In our first reliability study using these questionnaires, the scales were administered to 56 couples who participated in a 2-day workshop. In the area of friendship: Love Maps (20 items, sample item: I know my partner's current worries), Fondness and Admiration (20 items, sample item: I am really proud of my partner), Turning Toward (sample item: My partner is usually interested in hearing my views on things), and Emotional Disengagement (20 items, sample item: Sometimes our relationship feels empty to me). In the area of Sex, Romance, and Passion (two 6-item scales from the 17-areas scale, the Romance and Passion scale, and the sex problems scale. Sample romance item: The fire has gone out of this relationship; sample sex item: One problem is the amount of love in our love making). In the area of conflict: Harsh Startup (sample item: I hate the way my partner raises an issue), Accepting Influence (20 items, sample item: I believe in lots of give and take in our discussions), Compromise (20 items, sample item: In discussing issues we can usually find our common ground of agreement), The Four Horsemen (33 items, sample item: I can get mean and insulting in our disputes), and Gridlock on Perpetual Issues (20 items, sample item: The same problems keep coming up again and again in our relationship). In the area of shared meaning: Shared goals (10 items, sample item: We share many of the same goals in our life together), shared roles (7 items, sample item: My partner and I have compatible views about the role of work in one's life), shared rituals (20 items, sample item: During weekends we do a lot of things together that we enjoy and value), and shared symbols (20 items, sample item: We see eye-to-eye about what a "home" means). There were also

separate scales for Negative Sentiment Override (20 items, sample item: In the recent past in my relationship: I felt innocent of blame for this problem), Flooding (15 items, sample item: I have a hard time calming down), and Repair Effectiveness (20 items, sample item: I can say that I am wrong).

The scales had the following Cronbach alphas. For husband and wife, respectively: friendship: Love Maps (.61, .59), Fondness and Admiration (.91, .91), Turning Toward (.91, .90), and Emotional Distance (.91, .91); for Sex, Romance, and Passion (.90, .89); in the area of conflict: Harsh Startup (.93, .91), Accepting Influence (.39, .37), Compromise (.62, .61), The Four Horsemen (.94, .93), and Gridlock on Perpetual Issues (.91, .90); in the area of shared meaning: Shared goals (.86, .72), shared rituals (.77, .76) shared roles (.45, .49), shared symbols (.85, .80); for the scales of Negative Sentiment Override (.92, .92), Flooding (.89, .88), and Repair Effectiveness (.87, .87). The scales Accepting Influence, and Shared Meaning via Roles were deemed to have reliabilities too low to be useful, unless combined with other scales.

For data reduction purposes, data from these scales were combined to form the seven constructs previously described. The friendship score was the sum of the following scales: love maps, fondness and admiration, turning toward, minus emotional distance. Sex, romance, and passion was a combination of two 6-item scales. Destructive-to-constructive conflict was the sum of the following scales: harsh startup, plus the four horsemen, and gridlock, minus accepting influence, and minus compromise; lower or more negative scores on this composite indicate constructive rather than destructive conflict. The shared meaning total score was the sum of the four shared meaning scales, rituals, roles, goals, and symbols.

The final Cronbach alphas were, for husband and wife, respectively: Outcomes: Friendship: .95, .94; Destructive or constructive conflict (abbreviated as “destructive conflict”): .94, .94; Sex, romance and passion: .90, .89; and Shared meaning total score: .93, .90. Processes: Flooding: .89, .88; Negative sentiment override: .92, .92; Repair effectiveness: .87, .87.

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION SHEET

Please supply the information below. We realize that some of this information is very personal and sensitive, and we are asking you to trust us and report honestly. All information will be kept completely confidential. This demographic information sheet applies to you as an individual, not as a couple.

1. Date the questionnaires were completed:

2. Full name: _____

3. Partner's full name: _____

4. Address: _____

5. Your Age: _____

6. Your Date of birth: _____

7. Your Sex Male (1) Female (2)

8. Partner's Sex Male (1) Female (2)

9. Highest levels of education completed (check all those that apply):

Less than high school (1) Some graduate education (8)

Finished high school or equivalent (2) Professional Degree (e.g. Law) (9)

Some college (3) Master's Degree (10)

Two years of college (4) Ph.D. (11)

Associate of Arts Degree (5) Ed.D. (12)

M.F.A. Degree or equivalent (6) Finished college (BA/BS Degree) (7)

Other advanced degree (13) please specify: _____

10. Ethnic or Racial Group Membership (check all that you feel apply):

Caucasian or Euro American (1) Native American (5)

Black (2) Hawaiian Islander (6)

African American (3) Asian American (7)

please specify: _____

Hispanic/Latino American (4) Other (8)

please specify: _____

11. Religious Affiliation, if any
(please specify): _____

12. Current Personal Annual Income

- | | | | |
|-------------------------------|------------------------------|---------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Less than \$10,000 | <input type="checkbox"/> (1) | Between \$60,000 and \$70,000 | <input type="checkbox"/> (7) |
| Between \$10,000 and \$20,000 | <input type="checkbox"/> (2) | Between \$70,000 and \$80,000 | <input type="checkbox"/> (8) |
| Between \$20,000 and \$30,000 | <input type="checkbox"/> (3) | Between \$80,000 and \$90,000 | <input type="checkbox"/> (9) |
| Between \$30,000 and \$40,000 | <input type="checkbox"/> (4) | Between \$90,000 and \$100,000 | <input type="checkbox"/> (10) |
| Between \$40,000 and \$50,000 | <input type="checkbox"/> (5) | Between \$100,000 and \$150,000 | <input type="checkbox"/> (11) |
| Between \$50,000 and \$60,000 | <input type="checkbox"/> (6) | Above \$150,000 | <input type="checkbox"/> (12) |

13. Your Occupation(s): Please briefly describe your occupation(s) and what you do: _____

13. If you are married, is this your first relationship? Yes (1) No (2) If no, which one? _____

14. The names, addresses, and phone numbers of three people who will always know where you live and be able to reach you:

- a. _____
- b. _____
- c. _____

**THE QUALITY OF THE COUPLE'S FRIENDSHIP
(= LOVE MAPS + FONDNESS&ADMIRATION+TURNING TOWARD
– EMOTIONAL DISENGAGEMENT&LONELINESS)**

1. LOVE MAPS

Read each statement and place a check mark in the appropriate TRUE or FALSE box.

| STATEMENT | RESPONSE |
|--|--|
| I can name my partner's best friends. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| I can tell you what stresses my partner is currently facing. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| I know the names of some of the people who have been irritating in my partner's current life. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| I can tell you some of my partner's life dreams. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| I am very familiar with my partner's religious beliefs and ideas. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| I can tell you about my partner's basic philosophy of life. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| I can list the relatives my partner likes the least. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| I know my partner's favorite music. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| I can list my partner's three favorite movies. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| My partner is familiar with what are my current stresses. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| I know the three times that have been most special in my partner's life. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| I can tell you the most stressful thing that happened to my partner as a child. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| I can list my partner's major aspirations and hopes in life. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| I know my partner's major current worries. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |

| | |
|---|--|
| My partner knows who my friends are. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| I know what my partner would want to do if he or she suddenly won the lottery. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| I can tell you in detail my first impressions of my partner. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| Periodically, I update my knowledge of my partner's world. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| I feel that my partner knows me pretty well. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| My partner is familiar with my own hopes and aspirations. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |

2. FONDNESS AND ADMIRATION SYSTEM

Read each statement and place a check mark in the appropriate TRUE or FALSE box.

| STATEMENT | RESPONSE |
|---|--|
| I can easily list the three things I most admire about my partner. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| When we are apart I often think fondly of my partner. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| I will often find some way to tell my partner "I love you." | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| I often touch or kiss my partner affectionately. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| My partner really respects me. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| I feel loved and cared for in this relationship. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| I feel accepted and liked by my partner. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| My partner finds me sexy and attractive. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| My partner turns me on sexually. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| There is fire and passion in this relationship. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| Romance is something our relationship definitely still has in it. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| I am really proud of my partner. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| My partner really enjoys my achievements and accomplishments. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| I can easily tell you why I am committed to my partner. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| If I had it to do all over again I would be with the same person. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| We rarely go to sleep without some show of love or affection. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| When I come into a room my partner's face brightens. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |

| | |
|---|--|
| | |
| My partner appreciates the things I do in this relationship. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| My partner generally likes my personality. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| Our sex life is generally satisfying. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |

3. TURNING TOWARD OR AWAY

Read each statement and place a check mark in the appropriate TRUE or FALSE box.

| STATEMENT | RESPONSE |
|---|--|
| We enjoy doing even the smallest things together, like folding laundry or watching TV. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| I look forward to spending my free time with my partner. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| At the end of a day my partner is glad to see me. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| My partner is usually interested in hearing my views on things. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| I really enjoy discussing things with my partner. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| My partner is one of my best friends. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| I think my partner would consider me a very close friend. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| We love just talking to each other. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| When we go out, the time goes very quickly. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| We always have a lot to say to each other. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| We have a lot of fun together in our everyday lives. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| We are spiritually very compatible. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| We tend to share the same basic values in life. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| We like to spend time together in similar ways. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| We really have a lot of interests in common. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| We have many of the same dreams and life goals. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| We like to do a lot of the same things. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |

| | |
|--|--|
| Even though our interests are somewhat different, I enjoy my partner's interests. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| Whatever we do together we usually tend to have a good time. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| My partner tells me when he or she has had a bad day. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |

4. EMOTIONAL DISENGAGEMENT AND LONELINESS

Read each statement and place a check mark in the appropriate TRUE or FALSE box.

| STATEMENT | RESPONSE |
|---|--|
| I often find myself disappointed in this relationship. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| I have learned to expect less from my partner. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| I will at times find myself quite lonely in this relationship. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| It is hard for my deepest feelings to get much attention in this relationship. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| I often try to avoid saying things I will later regret. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| I feel like I have to be so careful it is like walking on eggshells. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| Suddenly once again I find I have said the wrong thing. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| There is not much intimacy in this relationship right now. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| Our relationship problems are not really solvable. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| Sometimes our relationship feels empty to me. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| This relationship is not quite what I expected and I feel let down by it. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| We are pretty separate and unconnected emotionally. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| We don't really talk very deeply to each other. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| There is not enough closeness between us. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| I sometimes think I expect too much and should settle for less in my relationship. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| I am coping with a lot of relationship stress but it will be okay eventually. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |

| | |
|--|--|
| | |
| I have adapted to a lot in this relationship and I am not so sure it's a good idea. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| There's certainly not much romance in this relationship. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| I can't really say that we are very good friends right now. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| I am lonely in this relationship. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |

**CONSTRUCTIVE VERSUS DESTRUCTIVE CONFLICT
(= HARSH STARTUP + FOUR HORSEMEN + GRIDLOCK -
ACCEPTING INFLUENCE -COMPROMISE)**

1. HARSH STARTUP

Read each statement and place a check mark in the appropriate TRUE or FALSE box.

| WHEN WE DISCUSS OUR ISSUES: | RESPONSE |
|--|--|
| My partner is often very critical of me. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| I hate the way my partner raises an issue. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| Arguments often seem to come out of nowhere. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| Before I know it we are in a fight. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| When my partner complains I feel picked on. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| I seem to always get blamed for issues. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| My partner is negative all out of proportion. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| I feel I have to ward off personal attacks. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| I often have to deny charges leveled against me. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| My partner's feelings are too easily hurt. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| What goes wrong is often not my responsibility. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| My partner criticizes my personality. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| Issues get raised in an insulting manner. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| My partner will at times complain in a smug or superior way. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| I have just about had it with all this negativity between us. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |

| | |
|---|--|
| | |
| I feel basically disrespected when my partner complains. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| I just want to leave the scene when complaints arise. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| Our calm is suddenly shattered. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| I find my partner's negativity unnerving and unsettling. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| I think my partner can be totally irrational. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |

2. THE FOUR HORSEMEN

Read each statement and place a check mark in the appropriate TRUE or FALSE box.

| WHEN WE DISCUSS OUR ISSUES: | RESPONSE |
|---|--|
| I feel attacked or criticized when we talk about our disagreements. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| I usually feel like my personality is being assaulted. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| In our disputes, at times, I don't even feel like my partner likes me very much. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| I have to defend myself because the charges against me are so unfair. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| I often feel unappreciated by my partner. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| My feelings and intentions are often misunderstood. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| I don't feel appreciated for all the good I do in this relationship. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| I often just want to leave the scene of the arguments. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| I get disgusted by all the negativity between us. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| I feel insulted by my partner at times. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| I sometimes just clam up and become quiet. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| I can get mean and insulting in our disputes. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| I feel basically disrespected. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| Many of our issues are just not my problem. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| The way we talk makes me want to just withdraw from the whole relationship. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| I think to myself, "Who needs all this conflict?" | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |

| | |
|--|--|
| | |
| My partner never really changes. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| Our problems have made me feel desperate at times. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| My partner doesn't face issues responsibly and maturely. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| I try to point out flaws in my partner's personality that need improvement. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |

WHEN WE DISCUSS OUR ISSUES:**RESPONSE**

| | |
|---|--|
| I feel explosive and out of control about our issues at times. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| My partner uses phrases like "You always" or "You never" when complaining. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| I often get the blame for what are really <i>our</i> problems. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| I don't have a lot of respect for my partner's position on our basic issues. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| My partner can be quite selfish and self-centered. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| I feel disgusted by some of my partner's attitudes. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| My partner gets far too emotional. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| I am just not guilty of many of the things I get accused of. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| Small issues often escalate out of proportion. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| Arguments seem to come out of nowhere. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| My partner's feelings get hurt too easily. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| I often will become silent to cool things down a bit. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| My partner has a lot of trouble being rational and logical. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |

3. GRIDLOCK ON PERPETUAL ISSUES

Read each statement and place a check mark in the appropriate TRUE or FALSE box.

| WHEN WE DISCUSS OUR ISSUES: | RESPONSE |
|---|--|
| The same problems keep coming up again and again in our relationship. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| We rarely make much progress on our central issues. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| We keep hurting each other whenever we discuss our core issues. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| I feel criticized and misunderstood when we discuss our hot topics. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| My partner has a long list of basically unreasonable demands. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| When we discuss our basic issues, I often feel that my partner doesn't even like me. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| My partner wants me to change my basic personality. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| I often keep quiet and withdraw to avoid stirring up too much conflict. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| I don't feel respected when we disagree. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| My partner often acts in a selfish manner. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| What I say in our discussions rarely has much effect. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| I feel put down in our discussions of key issues. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| I can't really be myself in this relationship. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| I often think that my partner is manipulating me. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| Sometimes I think that my partner doesn't care about my feelings. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| My partner rarely makes a real effort to change. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |

| | |
|---|--|
| There are some basic faults in my partner's personality that he or she will not change. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| My partner disregards my fundamental needs. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| Sometimes I feel that my values don't matter to my partner. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| When we discuss our issues, my partner acts as if I am totally wrong and he or she is totally right. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |

4. ACCEPTING INFLUENCE

Read each statement and place a check mark in the appropriate TRUE or FALSE box.

| WHEN WE DISCUSS OUR ISSUES: | RESPONSE |
|--|--|
| I find that I am really interested in my partner's opinion on our basic issues. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| I usually learn a lot from my partner even when we disagree. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| I want my partner to feel that what he or she says really counts with me. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| I generally want my partner to feel influential in this relationship. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| I can listen to my partner,. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| My partner has a lot of basic common sense. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| I try to communicate respect even during our disagreements. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| I don't keep trying to convince my partner so that I will eventually win out. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| I don't reject my partner's opinions out of hand. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| My partner is rational enough to take seriously when we discuss our issues. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| I believe in lots of give and take in our discussions. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| I am very persuasive, but don't usually try to win arguments with my partner. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| I feel important in our decisions. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| My partner usually has good ideas. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| My partner is basically a great help as a problem solver. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |

| | |
|---|--|
| I try to listen respectfully even when I disagree. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| My ideas for solutions are not better than my partner's. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| I can usually find something to agree with in my partner's position. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| My partner is not usually too emotional. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| I am not the one who needs to make the major decisions in this relationship. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |

5. COMPROMISE

Read each statement and place a check mark in the appropriate TRUE or FALSE box.

| DURING OUR ATTEMPTS TO RESOLVE CONFLICT BETWEEN US: | RESPONSE |
|--|--|
| Our decisions often get made by both of us compromising. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| We are usually good at resolving our differences. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| I can give in when I need to, and often do. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| I can be stubborn in an argument but I'm not opposed to compromising. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| I think that sharing power in a relationship is very important. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| My partner is not a very stubborn person. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| I don't believe one person is usually right and the other wrong on most issues. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| We both believe in meeting each other half way when we disagree. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| I am able to yield somewhat even when I feel strongly on an issue. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| The two of us usually arrive at a better decision through give and take. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| It's a good idea to give in somewhat, in my view. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| In discussing issues we can usually find our common ground of agreement. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| Everyone gets some of what they want when there is a compromise. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| My partner can give in, and often does. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| I don't wait until my partner gives in before I do. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |

| | |
|---|--|
| | |
| When I give in first my partner then gives in too. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| Yielding power is not very difficult for my partner. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| Yielding power is not very difficult for me. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| Give and take in making decisions is not a problem in this relationship. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| I will compromise even when I believe I am right. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |

THE QUALITY OF SEX, ROMANCE, AND PASSION IN THE RELATIONSHIP

For each item check the one box below that applies to your relationship right now:

1. Is the relationship

- romantic and passionate?**
- or it is becoming passionless, that is, the fire is going out?**

2. I would say that

- My partner has stopped being verbally affectionate.**
- My partner is still verbally affectionate.**

3. I would say that

- My partner expresses love or admiration less frequently these days**
- My partner expresses love and admiration to me.**

4. I would say that

- We rarely touch each other these days.**
- We do touch each other.**

5. I would say that

- My partner (or I) have stopped feeling very romantic.**
- My partner and I still feel romantic toward one another.**

6. I would say that

- We rarely cuddle with one another**
- We do cuddle with one another.**

7. I would say that

- We have few tender or passionate moments.**
- We still have our tender and passionate moments.**

8. I would say that

- Our sex life is fine.**
- There are definite problems in this area .**

9. I would say that

- The frequency of sex is a problem.**
- The frequency of sex is not a problem**

10. I would say that

- The satisfaction I (or my partner) get from sex is a problem**
- The satisfaction I (or my partner) get from sex is not a problem**

11. I would say that

- Being able to talk about sexual problems is a serious issue between us**
- Being able to talk about sexual problems is not a serious issue between us.**

12. I would say that

- The two of us want different things sexually**
- The two of us generally want the same thing sexually.**

13. I would say that

- Differences in desire are an issue in this relationship**
- Differences in desire are not an issue in this relationship**

14. I would say that

- The amount of love in our lovemaking is a problem**
- The amount of love in our lovemaking is not a problem.**

Comments: (In the space below, please explain your responses in detail)

Additional space for comments here:

**THE QUALITY OF THE SHARED MEANING SYSTEM
(= RITUALS + ROLES + GOALS + SYMBOLS)**

**SHARED MEANINGS QUESTIONNAIRE
HONORING EACH OTHERS DREAMS**

We want you to think about how well you and your partner have been able to create a sense of shared meaning in your lives together. We think that when people become committed to one another they create a new culture, and some relationships also involve the union of two very different cultures. But even if two people are coming from the same regional, cultural, ethnic, and religious background, they will have been raised in two very different families, and their merging involves the creation of a new culture.

| YOUR RITUALS | RESPONSE |
|--|--|
| We see eye-to-eye about the rituals that involve family dinner times in our home. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| Holiday meals (like Thanksgiving, Christmas, Passover) are very special and happy times for us. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| Reunions at the end of each day in our home are generally special times in my day. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| We see eye-to-eye about the role of TV in our home. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| Bedtimes are generally good times for being close. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| During weekends we do a lot of things together that we enjoy and value. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| We have the same values about entertaining in our home (having friends over, parties, etc.). | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| We both value special celebrations (like birthdays, anniversaries, family reunions). | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| When I become sick I feel taken care of and loved by my partner. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| I really look forward to and enjoy our vacations and the travel we do together. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| The mornings together are special times for me. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| When we do errands together we generally have a good time. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |

| | |
|---|--|
| We have ways of becoming renewed and refreshed when we are burned out or fatigued. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
|---|--|

| YOUR ROLES | RESPONSE |
|--|--|
| We share many similar values in our roles as lovers and partners. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| (If relevant) We share many similar values in our roles as mother and father. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| We have many similar views about what it means to be a good friend to others. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |

| | |
|---|--|
| My partner and I have compatible views about the role of work in one's life. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| My partner and I have similar philosophies about balancing work and family life. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| My partner supports what I would see as my basic mission in life. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| My partner shares my views on the importance of family and kin (sisters, brothers, moms, dads) in our life together. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |

| YOUR GOALS | RESPONSE |
|--|--|
| We share many of the same goals in our life together. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| If I were to look back on my life in very old age, I think I would see that our paths in life had meshed very well. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| My partner values my own accomplishments. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| My partner honors my own very personal goals, unrelated to my relationship. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| We share many of the same goals for others who are important to us (children, kin, friends and community). | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| We have very similar financial goals. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| We tend to have compatible financial disaster scenarios (ones we both want to avoid). | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| Our hopes and aspirations, as individuals and together, for our | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |

| | |
|---|--|
| children, for our life in general, and for our old age are quite compatible. | |
| Our life dreams tend to be similar or compatible. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| Even when different, we have been able to find a way to honor our life dreams. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |

| YOUR SYMBOLS | RESPONSE |
|---|--|
| We see eye-to-eye about what “home” means. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| Our philosophies of what love ought to be are quite compatible. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| We have similar values about the importance of “peacefulness” in our lives. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| We have similar views about the meaning of “family.” | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| We have similar views about the role of sex in our lives. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| We have similar views about the role of love and affection in our lives. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| We have similar values about the meaning of being married. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| We have similar values about the importance and meaning of money in our lives. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| We have similar values about the importance of education in our lives. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| We have similar values about the importance of “fun” and “play” in our lives. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| We have similar values about the significance of adventure. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| We have similar values about “trust.” | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| We have similar values about personal “freedom.” | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| We have similar values about “autonomy” and “independence.” | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |

| | |
|--|--|
| We have similar values about sharing “power” in our relationship. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| We have similar values about being “interdependent,” of being a “we.” | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| We have similar values about the meaning of “having possessions,” of “owning things” (like cars, nice clothes, books, music, a house and land). | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| We have similar values about the meaning of “nature,” and of our relationship to the seasons. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| We are both sentimental and tend to reminisce about things in our past. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| We have similar views about what we want in retirement and old age. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |

THE THREE RELATIONSHIP PROCESSES

FLOODING

Read each statement and place a check mark in the appropriate TRUE or FALSE box.

| STATEMENT | RESPONSE |
|---|--|
| Our discussions get too heated. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| I have a hard time calming down. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| One of us is going to say something we will regret. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| My partner gets too upset. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| After a fight, I want to keep my distance. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| My partner yells unnecessarily. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| I feel overwhelmed by our arguments. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| I can't think straight when my partner gets hostile. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| I think to myself, "Why can't we talk more logically?" | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| My partner's negativity often comes out of nowhere. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| There's often no stopping my partner's temper. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| I feel like running away during our fights. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| Small issues suddenly become big ones. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| I can't calm down very easily during an argument | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| My partner has a long list of unreasonable demands. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |

NEGATIVE SENTIMENT OVERRIDE

Fill this form out thinking about your immediate past (last 2 to 4 weeks), or a recent discussion of an existing issue. Read each statement and place a check mark in the appropriate TRUE or FALSE box.

IN THE RECENT PAST IN MY RELATIONSHIP, GENERALLY: RESPONSE

| | | |
|--|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| I felt hurt. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) | False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| I felt misunderstood. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) | False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| I thought, “I don’t have to take this.” | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) | False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| I felt innocent of blame for this problem. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) | False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| I thought to myself, just get up and leave. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) | False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| I was angry. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) | False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| I felt disappointed. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) | False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| I felt unjustly accused. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) | False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| I thought, “My partner has no right to say those things.” | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) | False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| I was frustrated. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) | False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| I felt personally attacked. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) | False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| I wanted to strike back. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) | False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| I felt like I was warding off a barrage. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) | False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| I felt like getting even. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) | False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| I wanted to protect myself. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) | False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| I took my partner’s complaints as sleights. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) | False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| I felt like my partner was trying to control me. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) | False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |

| | |
|---|--|
| | |
| I thought that my partner was very manipulative. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| I felt unjustly criticized. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| I wanted the negativity to just stop. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |

EFFECTIVE REPAIR ATTEMPTS

Read each statement and place a check mark in the appropriate TRUE or FALSE box.

| DURING OUR ATTEMPTS TO RESOLVE CONFLICT BETWEEN US: | RESPONSE |
|---|--|
| We are good at taking breaks when we need them. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| When I apologize it usually gets accepted by my partner. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| I can say that I am wrong. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| I am pretty good at calming myself down. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| Even when arguing we can maintain a sense of humor. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| When my partner says we should talk to each other in a different way, it usually makes a lot of sense. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| My attempts to repair our discussions when they get negative are usually effective. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| We are pretty good listeners even when we have different positions on things. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| If things get heated we can usually pull out of it and change things. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| My partner is good at soothing me when I get upset. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| I feel confident that we can resolve most issues between us. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| When I comment on how we could communicate better my partner listens to me. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| Even if things get hard at times, I know we can get past our differences. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| We can be affectionate even when we are disagreeing. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| Teasing and humor usually work with my partner for getting over negativity. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |

| | |
|--|--|
| We can start all over again and improve our discussions when we need to. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| When emotions run hot, expressing how upset I feel makes a real difference. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| Even when there are big differences between us we can discuss these. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| My partner expresses appreciation for nice things I do. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |
| If I keep trying to communicate it will eventually work. | True <input type="checkbox"/> (1) False <input type="checkbox"/> (2) |

Healthy Relationships: Definitional and Measurement Issues

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Overview: Health and Disease

“Health” is a complex construct. Traditional Western conceptualizations of well-being focused on pathology and thus viewed health as a lack of disease (Seeman, 1990). As medicine scored countless successes in understanding pathological agents and in conquering disease — and the world reeled from the human-induced carnage of two World Wars — notions of health notably shifted toward holistic well-being. In 1946, the World Health Organization defined health as “a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.”

The concept of a “healthy relationship” seems to be following a similar trajectory. The earliest scientific research on marriage asked participants about “happiness” (e.g., Terman, 1938). Later measures — principally the two most widely used assessments of relationship well-being, the Marital Adjustment Test (Locke & Wallace, 1959) and the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (Spanier, 1976) — used the hodgepodge construct of “adjustment,” comprised mainly of questions about frequency of disagreements. Although criticized on numerous scientific grounds, these measures allowed a large literature to emerge on relationship distress’ evolution, sequelae, and treatment. The field also expanded its focus beyond relationship distress (i.e., low scores on marital adjustment) to include a variety of negative factors (e.g., partner abuse, the impact of relationship conflict on physical and mental health, the impact on children of witnessing couple violence and conflict), buffering factors (e.g., social support), and positive factors (e.g., love, commitment).

In sum, although the term “healthy relationship” or “healthy marriage” is of relatively recent coinage, the implicit concept evolved in a similar fashion to that of health in general: the focus on pathology gave way to a biopsychosocial conceptualization of well-being.

Definition of a Healthy Relationship

In expanding the World Health Organization’s (1946) definition of “health” to a definition of a “healthy relationship,” one is confronted with the fact that a romantic relationship is a symbiotic association (i.e., a “close, prolonged association between two or more different organisms ... that may, but does not necessarily, benefit each member,” American Heritage Dictionary, 2003). The definition must simultaneously take into account the health of the relationship, the health of the individual partners, and the health of those directly impacted by couple interactions.

Thus, I define a healthy relationship as one that safeguards partners’ physical integrity, minimizes their risk of preventable physical and mental disorders, and promotes their physical and mental well-being. Similarly, when partners are parents, a healthy relationship safeguards children’s physical integrity, minimizes their risk of preventable physical and mental disorders, and promotes their physical and mental development and well-being.

Measurement of Healthy Relationships

The remainder of this memo will make recommendations concerning the measurement of each of these constructs. I should note from the outset that health is a continuous construct. Relationship health is also a continuous construct, as are the constituent measures discussed below. Although one could try to discriminate “healthy” from “unhealthy” couples, one would have to validate whether such taxonomy is warranted and valid.

Safeguard Partners' Physical Integrity

“Safeguarding partners' physical integrity” refers to one of the primary needs of human beings — that of physical integrity and safety (i.e., the bottom two levels Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs) and the freedom from fear (i.e., one of Franklin Roosevelt's four freedoms). In relationships, this need refers primarily to the freedom from (a) physical and sexual aggression and (b) threats of physical or sexual aggression¹. Finally, physical aggression (even at low levels) is predictive of relationship dissolution (e.g., Rogge & Bradbury, 1999) and thus is a marker for poor relationship health.

The most widely used measure of physical, emotional, and sexual aggression is the Revised Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS2; Straus, Hamby, Boney-McCoy, & Sugarman, 1996; See Appendix D). The CTS2 is an expanded version of the original CTS, which has been used in hundreds of studies and extensive testing of reliability and inter-rater agreement. While still including the items from the original CTS, the CTS2 has “(1) additional items to enhance content validity and reliability; (2) revised wording to increase clarity and specificity; (3) better differentiation between minor and severe levels of each scale; (4) new scales to measure sexual coercion and physical injury; (5) new format to simplify administration and reduce response sets.” Psychometric evaluations, although completed, have not yet been published; Straus' pilot work with college students indicated good construct and discriminative validity and internal consistencies of scales between .79 and .95. The CTS2 improves upon the commonly criticized aspects of the original CTS (e.g., no measurement of injury, weak verbal coercion scale) while still retaining the items found on the reliable and valid CTS.

Minimize Partners' Risk of Preventable Physical and Mental Disorders

Being in a relationship can reduce disease risk: “Morbidity and mortality are reliably lower for the married than the unmarried across a variety of acute and chronic conditions, including such diverse health threats as cancer, heart attacks, and surgery” (Kiecolt-Glaser & Newton, 2001, p. 472). However, this effect reverses for those in conflictual relationships. Kiecolt-Glaser and colleagues' work has documented the pathway through which conflict compromises health: both direct and lasting immunosuppressant effects. Similarly, relationship ills have been linked to heightened risk for major depressive disorder and posttraumatic stress disorder in women, and dysthymia in men (Whisman, 1999), to relapse in schizophrenia, mood disorders, and eating disorders (e.g., Butzlaff & Hooley, 1998), and to increased risk for child maltreatment (Black, Heyman, & Slep, 2001), partner violence (Schumacher, Feldbau-Kohn, Slep, & Heyman, 2001), and youth violence (Garbarino, 1999).

Couple Conflict

Given that risk seems to be conveyed through conflict, measures of relationship conflict should be included in assessments of relationship health. Such a construct is most fruitfully built via both observation of couples typical conflicts by independent, reliable observers (see Heyman, 2001 for a comprehensive review and Appendix A for one possible way of setting up interactions) and by self-report (because brief laboratory observations are inherently limited). Other measures to be considered are the Areas of Change Questionnaire and the Marital Status Inventory (which measures steps taken toward divorce). (See Appendix D).

Rapid Marital Interaction Coding System (RMICS; Heyman & Vivian, 1993). Couples conflict tasks will be coded with the RMICS, an event-based system for observed dyadic behavior. “Behavior” is defined broadly to include all observable actions (i.e., affective, motoric,

¹ Although women are far less likely to cause injuries to men than vice versa, female physical aggression heightens the risk of injury to both men and woman (via men's retaliation) and thus should be included

paralinguistic, and linguistic). The RMICS was designed to measure frequencies of behavior and behavioral patterns (i.e., sequences) between intimate partners during conflicts. The RMICS is the second-generation extension of the Marital Interaction Coding System (MICS), the oldest and most widely used couples observational system (Heyman, 2001).

The RMICS has been used in approximately 25 separate investigations with a wide range of ages (primarily adult married couples, but also pre-teen siblings, high school dating couples, and engaged couples), populations (e.g., general married population, couple clinics, cancer patients and their partners, families at risk for adolescent drug abuse, Vietnam veterans), and research purposes. Across 17 studies for which inter-rater agreement data was available, the average overall Cohen's kappa per couple was .59 ($SD = .17, n = 469$), with kappa per code ranging from .46 to .73 (Heyman, in press). Across studies representing over 1,000 couples, the RMICS has demonstrated discriminative, convergent, predictive, and construct validity (Heyman, in press).

Conflicts and Problem-Solving Scales (CPS; Kerig, 1996). The CPS assesses the frequency and severity of couples' conflicts. The CPS has demonstrated convergent validity and test-retest reliability ($r = .63$) (Kerig, 1996). Based on Kerig's (1996) second-order factor analysis, I suggest retaining the items whose factors loaded on the "Nonconstructive Conflict Resolution Strategies" factor (Frequency of conflict, Severity of conflict, extent of Resolution, Avoidance/Capitulation, Stalemate, Verbal Aggression, and Child Involvement). "Name-calling, cursing, insulting" and "Say or do something to hurt partner's feelings" can be dropped because of their overlap with the CTS2 verbal abuse items. See Appendix E for the measure and manual.

Overall Couples Conflict Score. In studies where structural equation modeling is not being used for construct formation, Slep and Heyman (2003) recently suggested the following method of combining observed and self-reported conflict scores on these measures: The frequency of hostility and distress-maintaining attribution codes for the couple can be z-scored to compute an observational conflict index. Men's and women's "Nonconstructive Conflict Resolution Strategies" scores can be z-scored and then averaged to compute a couple-level self-report conflict index. The observational and self-report conflict indices can then be averaged to yield an aggregated index of couple conflict.

Attributions and Efficacy Expectancies

Distressed, compared to nondistressed, partners tend to "locate the cause of negative relationship events in the partner, view the cause as more stable and global, and see the partner's behavior as intentional, blameworthy and reflecting selfish motivation" (Fincham et al, 2000, p. 267). Work in this area is impressive and large (e.g., Bradbury & Fincham, 1990). Negative attributions are associated with relationship dissatisfaction over and above observed negative behavior (Bradbury & Fincham, 1992) and have been associated longitudinally with declining relationship satisfaction (Fincham et al., 2000). Attributions are important because they can amplify the negative impact of a partner's perceived negative behaviors or dampen the positive impact of a partner's intended positive behavior. Whereas attributions are about causes, efficacy expectancies refer to predictions about one's ability to perform a specified behavior. A measure of efficacy expectancies (e.g., that of Bradbury used in Fincham, 2000) should be considered because (a) low efficacy expectancies may inhibit the performance of behaviors taught in relationship-strengthening interventions; and (b) efficacy expectancies mediate the longitudinal association of attributions and relationship satisfaction. See Appendix B below for information about attribution and efficacy expectancy measures.

Promote Partners' Physical and Mental Well-Being

Research on what behaviors actually facilitate well-being is expanding but is still in the early stages. The traditional conflict-resolution paradigm and its associated coding systems seem well suited to understanding what nondistressed couples do not do in conflicts (thus inhibiting pathology)

but is poorly suited to understanding what they do do that promotes satisfaction. Whereas it is relatively easy to get unhappy couples to argue on command, behaviors that promote the various forms of love (e.g., Aron & Aron, 1986; Sternberg & Barnes, 1988), such as flirtation, support during acute crises, and spontaneous acts of caring, are much more challenging to witness in the laboratory (or even at home with sufficient frequency to allow for meaningful analyses).

Self-Reports

Marital satisfaction is the central measure of relationship health. Although adjustment measures are used more widely, a pure measure of satisfaction is preferable because the “adjustment” construct shares variance with most dependent and/or independent variables in relationship studies. We prefer the Quality of Marriage Index (QMI; Norton, 1983). The QMI is six-item inventory that assesses marital satisfaction using broadly-worded, global items (e.g., “We have a good relationship”). It has excellent (>.90) internal consistency, convergent validity with the Dyadic Adjustment Scale, and discriminative validity. Also of note — especially for studies including both positive and negative aspects of relationship health — is Fincham and Linfield’s (1997) measure of both positive and negative feelings about relationship quality. Finally, there is an extensive literature within social psychology measuring love (e.g., the work of Arthur Aron, Robert Sternberg, and many others). Measures of love should be considered when studying healthy relationships.

Observational Measures

Thus far, published research has focused on social support provision by instructing partners to discuss individual problems and coding observed socially supportive behaviors (e.g., Pasch & Bradbury, 1998). However, a promising new approach by Roberts and Linney (in press) has partners write down their vulnerabilities and then discuss them with each other for 10 min. This paradigm, and its accompanying coding system, have excellent preliminary indications of content and construct validity. In conclusion, although we have learned a lot about dysfunctional relationships by watching what unhappy couples do when they are fighting, we will probably only learn a lot about functional relationships by watching what happy couples do when they are *not* fighting.

Safeguard Children’s Physical Integrity

The Parent-Child Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS-PC; Straus, Hamby, Finkelhor, Moore, & Runyan, 1998) is a measure similar to the above-described CTS2 but focused on parent-child aggression (including physical aggression of varying severities). The emotional aggression and neglect scales are of questionable validity, as they are likely not specific enough to discriminate emotionally abused and neglected children from those who would not been classified that way by some type of “gold standard.” My colleagues and I at Stony Brook are currently pilot testing (with about 1,000 respondents) a more extensive and specific self-report measure that can discriminate child maltreatment from less severe, inadvisable (but not maltreating) parenting.

Minimize Children’s Risk of Preventable Physical and Mental Disorders

Repetti, Taylor, & Seemen’s (2002, p. 330) masterful recent review of risky families brought together a large literature on how unhealthy couple and parent-child relationships can impact children. They summarized this literature as follows: “Risky families are characterized by conflict and aggression and by relationships that are cold, unsupportive, and neglectful. These family characteristics create vulnerabilities and/or interact with genetically based vulnerabilities in offspring that produce disruptions in psychosocial functioning (specifically emotion processing and social competence), disruptions in stress-responsive biological regulatory systems, including sympathetic-adrenomedullary and hypothalamic–pituitary–adrenocortical functioning, and poor health behaviors, especially substance abuse. This integrated biobehavioral profile leads to consequent accumulating

risk for mental health disorders, major chronic diseases, and early mortality. We conclude that childhood family environments represent vital links for understanding mental and physical health across the life span.”

One suggested measurement strategy for children’s exposure to relationship conflict is Cummings and colleagues’ (2002) diaries of couple conflict and children’s emotional responses. Other suggestions include observing the impact of couple interactions on children (either via family observations, Reid, 1978, [Appendix C] or children watching videos of parental conflict, Gottman, Katz, & Hooven, 1997).

Promote Children’s’ Physical and Mental Well-Being

A recent meta-analysis of 39 studies (Krishnakumar and Buehler, 2000) reported that interparental conflict is related to not only harsh discipline but also parental acceptance. Although it is beyond my area of expertise, an ideal study would isolate the associations between (a) children’s’ physical and mental well-being and (b) (direct association) children’s exposure to positive couple behaviors and (indirect association) the residual variance in positive parenting due to positive couples behaviors..

Advantages and Disadvantages of Measurement Approaches

The advantages of including the measures suggested above is that, as part of a well-formulated assessment and analysis plan, they could assess both the risk (promoting myriad physical and emotional pathologies) and protective (buffering of negative predispositions or events) effects of relationships as well as associated positive and negative outcomes. Among the disadvantages are (a) the time and expense that a comprehensive assessment battery would take, especially when added to the typically list of additional measures needed to be administered; (b) the lack of comprehensiveness of the suggested list (e.g., no enumeration of cognitive, genetic or physiological measurement); (c) lack of discussion of longitudinal approaches and developmental stages of both relationships and children that need to be taken into account. A final problem, of exceptional concern given the instructions for creating the memos, is the lack of psychometric data for the use of these measures and assessment paradigms with couples from special populations. Most studies have recruited haphazardly through newspaper advertisements and do not contain enough couples from a particular special population to allow separate analyses. It is also possible that some such studies exist (especially for highly studied topics such as the effects of conflict on children) but that I am unaware of them and would have to do extensive searches to ferret them out. Thus, I can add little information about the reliability and validity of the above mentioned approaches with low-income populations, racial/ethnicity/linguistic minority groups, cohabiting and visiting couples, etc.

Finally, I should note that discussing measurement without a particular goal or theory is difficult. To address such a complicated research topic (i.e., the relation of an unspecified “healthy relationship” construct to unspecified good and bad outcomes at unspecified developmental stages of both partners and children), at the very least one needs to (1) specify an overarching conceptual model; (2) use the conceptual model to specify important facets of couple relations and their impact on children; (3) carefully measure a variety of hypothesized facets, ideally using a multi-method, multi-trait strategy; (4) assess a range of couple and child outcomes concurrently and longitudinally; (5) relate facets to outcomes, in the context of related non-relationship factors (e.g., income, living arrangements, physiological and genetic contributions; child victimization, inept parenting), retaining only the facets that provide significant unique explanations of variance for that outcome. I hope, however, that this memo provides some useful food for thought in the important endeavor of researching how to promote healthy relationships.

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Appendix A: Couple Conflict

(From Heyman, R. E. & Slep, A. M. S. (in press). Analogue behavioral observation. In M. Hersen (Ed.) & E. M. Heiby & S. N. Haynes (Vol. Eds.), *Comprehensive handbook of psychological assessment: Vol. 3. Behavioral assessment*. New York: Wiley.)

“The standard couples [analogue behavioral observation] (ABO) paradigm can be used in either research or clinical assessment. In research contexts, investigators ask couples to discuss 1-2 conflict areas for 10-15 min each; in clinical contexts, about 5-7 min each is minimally sufficient (e.g., Gottman, 1999). Although in research contexts no one is in the room except for the partners, in clinical contexts the therapist usually instructs the couple to act as if she were not there, stays in the room, and takes notes about the communication process to provide feedback later (O’Leary, Heyman, & Jongsma, 1998). Within these general parameters, there is wide variability in exactly how the ABO conversations are structured. A prototypical protocol is presented [below]; other approaches range from a detailed “play-by-play” interview to narrow the discussion topic (Gottman, 1995) to providing a list of general topics from which top problem areas are selected, either by the investigator (e.g., Markman, Floyd, Stanley, & Storaasli, 1988) or the couple (e.g., Snyder & Wills, 1989) to standardized, role-played topics that may not relate to the couples’ own problems (e.g., Olson & Ryder, 1970) to re-enactment of prior conflicts (Margolin, Burman, & John, 1989). Non-conflict ABOs have also been developed, including assessments of social support (e.g., Pasch & Bradbury, 1998; Roberts & Linney, in press) and shared exciting activities (Aron et al., 2000).

The standard ABO paradigm appears to elicit reasonably generalizable (externally validity) behavior. First, behavioral frequencies in ABOs in home and laboratory settings are substantially similar, with laboratory interactions a bit less negative (Gottman, 1979; Gottman & Krokoff, 1989). Second, couples judge laboratory ABO behavior as typical of at-home behavior; when not acting typically, partners were far more likely to be judged as being more supportive and less undermining than usual (Foster et al., 1997). Third, spouses’ self-consciousness and reactivity while being observed are relatively low (Christensen & Hazzard, 1983; Jacob, Tennenbaum, Seilhamer, Bargiel, & Sharon, 1994). Finally, although there are no empirical studies, it is our impression that reactivity in treatment-seeking couples’ ABOs is lower than that of research-only couples; treatment couples appear to be motivated to let the therapist see just how bad things are and to unmask their partners. If this is true, then the ABO behavior of distressed couples in clinical ABO is even more negative and discernable than the literature on non-treatment participants would suggest. To summarize, even if typical interaction samples researchers have collected are not quite as negative as they are at home, they still reveal detectable differences in affect, behavior, physiology, and interactional patterns and processes (Gottman, 1979 , 1994 , 1999).”

Couples conflict discussion procedures used to elicit “best vs. typical” and “wife-topic vs. husband-topic” interactions

1. Order of interactions
 - a. Wife’s topic: both “at their best”
 - b. Wife’s topic: typical interaction
 - c. Husband’s topic: typical interaction
2. Setup (prior to 1st interaction)
 - a. Look at couple’s Areas of Change Questionnaire (ACQ) ratings. Pick wife’s two top areas of desired changed and the husband’s top area. In cases of ties, use random number sheet to determine order. If both spouses pick the same topic, choose a different topic (i.e., three different topics must be selected).
 - b. If husband’s top topic is the same as one of the wife’s top two topics, pick another one of equal value for him.
 - i. If there are no topics of equal value, see if the wife has a third topic that is tied with

- the topic in question.
- ii. If the wife has no tied topic, pick the husband's next highest topic as his topic.
3. First interaction (wife's topic, "at their best" instructions)
 - a. Initial instructions (given to spouses in separate rooms).
 - i. To wife, begin with "You wrote that you'd like to see your husband [ACQ topic]..."
 - ii. To husband, begin with "Your wife wrote that she'd like to see you [ACQ topic]..."
 - iii. "We'd like you to have a conversation with [name] about that topic for 10 minutes and try to get somewhere with it. In this conversation, we'd like you to communicate as you do at your best. By that, I mean when you think that you're handling things as well as you possibly can. I want you to think for a moment about the things you do during a discussion that help it go well, so that you can keep those in mind during the interaction here. [pause] OK, now I want you to think to yourself about the things that sometimes go wrong during your discussions and think of some strategies you could use to help keep things on the right track. OK, we're just about ready. The last thing is to make sure that you know how you will start. Think to yourself about what you would do if you were to do the best job of bringing up [ACQ topic] at home. Do you know how you would start?" [Check to make sure that she have some way to start, and that they understand what "best" means]
 - b. Bring both spouses into video studio, clip on lavalier microphones, and repeat instructions: "We'd like you to have a conversation about [topic] for 10 minutes and try to get somewhere with it. [Wife's name] will start the conversation. Remember, in this conversation, we'd like you to communicate as you do at your best. By that, I mean when you think that you're handling things as well as you possibly can. You can start when I leave the room. Do you have any questions before we begin?"
 4. Second and Third interactions
 - a. say "The next interaction will be the two of you talking just like you normally do at home."
 - b. To the person with topic, begin with "You wrote that you would like to see your spouse [ACQ topic]..."
 - c. To partner, begin with "Your partner wrote that he/she would like to see you [ACQ topic]..."
 - d. To both: "...We'd like you to have a conversation with [name] about that topic for 10 minutes and try to get somewhere with it. We'd like to see you demonstrate how you typically discuss problems when you are at home. We've already seen what it's like when you're at your best, and this time we'd like to see what it's like when you're *not* at your best, but you're just being yourselves. Remember, for this discussion just try to discuss the problem like you might normally do at home."

Notes. From NIMH grant R01MH57779 "Anger Escalation and De-Escalation in Aggressive Men," Principal Investigators Richard E. Heyman and Amy M. Smith Slep.

Appendix B: Attributions and Efficacy Expectancies

From Fincham, F. D., Harold, G. T., Gano-Phillips, S. (2000). The longitudinal association between attributions and marital satisfaction: Direction of effects and role of efficacy expectations. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 14, 267-285.

“Relationship Attribution Measure (RAM; Fincham & Bradbury, 1992). This measure presents respondents with four negative partner behaviors that have been found to occur in virtually all marriages (e.g., "Your spouse criticizes something you say") and asks them to rate their agreement, on a 6-point scale ranging from 1 (disagree strongly) to 6 (agree strongly), with each of six statements that reflect causal and responsibility attribution dimensions. Reliability of the indices pertaining to each attribution type is high (average $\alpha = .90$; average 2-week test—retest reliability = .76), and both types of attributions correlate with observed behavior independently of marital satisfaction (Fincham & Bradbury, 1992).

The Causal Attribution Index (RAM-C) comprises 12 judgments (3 dimensions by 4 stimulus events), and the Responsibility Attribution Index (RAM-R) similarly comprises 12 judgments. The RAM-C index was formed by summing the responses across assessment of causal locus, stability, and globality and was found to be highly reliable in the present study (for Time 1, husbands' $\alpha = .82$, wives' $\alpha = .87$; for Time 2, husbands' $\alpha = .84$, wives' $\alpha = .87$). For responsibility attributions, respondents indicated the extent to which the partner behaved intentionally, was selfishly motivated, and was blameworthy for the event (for Time 1, husbands' $\alpha = .92$, wives' $\alpha = .93$; for Time 2, husbands' $\alpha = .90$, wives' $\alpha = .92$). For both indices, higher scores indicate attributions that are likely to accentuate the impact of negative events and are therefore posited to be inversely related to marital satisfaction.

Efficacy expectations. A measure devised by Bradbury (1989) was used to assess the extent to which a spouse believed he or she had the ability to resolve conflicts with his or her partner. This measure requires respondents to rate the extent to which they agree, on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree), with seven statements (e.g., "I am able to do the things needed to settle our conflicts"). Higher scores reflect greater perceived efficacy and correlate directly with higher quality problem-solving behavior among wives and inversely with the amount of anger displayed during a problem-solving discussion by both husbands and wives. 3 Coefficient alpha for this measure was high (husbands = .87; wives = .90).

Appendix C: Family Observation

Rules for Quasi-Naturalistic Family Observation Sessions

1. Everyone in the family must be present.
2. No guests.
3. The family is limited to two rooms.
4. The observers will wait only 10 minutes for all to be present in the two rooms.
5. Telephone: No calls out; briefly answer incoming calls.
6. No TV.
7. No talking to observers while they are coding.
8. Do not discuss anything with the observers that relates to your problems or the procedures you are using to deal with them.

Notes. From Reid, 1978, p. 8

Appendix D: Suggested Couples Assessment Questionnaires

Conflict Tactics Scale – Revised (CTS2)

No matter how well a couple gets along, there are times when they disagree, get annoyed with the other person, want different things from each other, or just have spats or fights because they are in bad moods, are tired, or for some other reason. Couples also have many different ways of trying to settle their differences. This is a list of things that might happen when you have differences. Please circle how many times you did each of these things in the past year, and how many times your partner did them in the past year. If you or your partner did not do one of these things in the past year, but it happened before then, check the box marked “Not this year, but has happened in the past.”

How many times in the past year:

| | 1 time | 2 times | 3-5 times | 6-10 times | 11-20 times | More than 20 times | Never | Not this year, but has happened in the past |
|---|--------|---------|-----------|------------|-------------|--------------------|-------|---|
| 1. Have you showed your partner you cared even though you disagreed? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 0 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. Has your partner showed care for you even though you disagreed? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 0 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. Have you explained your side of a disagreement to your partner? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 0 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. Has your partner explained her side of a disagreement to you? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 0 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5. Have you thrown something at your partner that could hurt? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 0 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 6. Has your partner thrown something at you that could hurt? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 0 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 7. Have you insulted or sworn at your partner? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 0 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 8. Has your partner insulted or sworn at you? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 0 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 9. Have you twisted your partner's arm or hair? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 0 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 10. Has your partner twisted your arm or hair? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 0 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 11. Have you had a sprain, bruise or small cut because of a fight with your partner? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 0 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 12. Has your partner had a sprain, bruise or small cut because of a fight with you? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 0 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 13. Have you shown respect for your partner's feelings about an issue? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 0 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 14. Has your partner shown respect for your feelings about an issue? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 0 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 15. Have you made your partner have sex without a condom? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 0 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 16. Has your partner made you have sex without a condom? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 0 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 17. Have you pushed or shoved your partner? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 0 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 18. Has your partner pushed or shoved you? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 0 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 19. Have you used force (like hitting, holding down, or using a weapon) to make your partner have anal or oral sex? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 0 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 20. Has your partner used force (like hitting, holding down, or using a weapon) to make you have oral or anal sex? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 0 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 21. Have you used a knife or gun on your partner? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 0 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 22. Has your partner used a knife or gun on you? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 0 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 23. Have you passed out from being hit on the head by your partner in a fight? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 0 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 24. Has your partner passed out from being hit on the head by you in a fight? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 0 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 25. Have you called your partner fat or ugly? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 0 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 26. Has your partner called you fat or ugly? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 0 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 27. Have you punched or hit your partner with something that could hurt? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 0 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 28. Has your partner punched or hit you with something that could hurt? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 0 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 29. Have you destroyed something belonging to your partner? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 0 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 30. Has your partner destroyed something belonging to you? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 0 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 31. Have you gone to the doctor because of a fight with your partner? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 0 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 32. Has your partner gone to the doctor because of a fight with you? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 0 | <input type="checkbox"/> |

| | 1 time | 2 times | 3-5 times | 6-10 times | 11-20 times | More than 20 times | Never | Not this year, but has happened in the past |
|---|--------|---------|-----------|------------|-------------|--------------------|-------|---|
| 33. Have you choked your partner? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 0 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 34. Has your partner choked you? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 0 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 35. Have you shouted or yelled at your partner? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 0 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 36. Has your partner shouted or yelled at you? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 0 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 37. Have you slammed your partner against a wall? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 0 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 38. Has your partner slammed you against a wall? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 0 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 39. Have you said you were sure that you and your partner could work out a problem? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 0 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 40. Has your partner said that she was sure that you and your partner could work out a problem? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 0 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 41. Have you needed to see a doctor because of a fight with your partner, but didn't? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 0 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 42. Has your partner needed to see a doctor because of a fight with you, but didn't? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 0 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 43. Have you beat up your partner? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 0 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 44. Has your partner beat you up? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 0 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 45. Have you grabbed your partner? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 0 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 46. Has your partner grabbed you? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 0 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 47. Have you used force (like hitting, holding down, or using a weapon) to make your partner have sex? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 0 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 48. Has your partner used force (like hitting, holding down, or using a weapon) to make you have sex? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 0 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 49. Have you stomped out of the room or house or yard during a disagreement? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 0 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 50. Has your partner stomped out of the room or house or yard during a disagreement? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 0 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 51. Have you insisted on sex when your partner did not want to (but did not use physical force)? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 0 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 52. Has your partner insisted on sex when you did not want to (but did not use physical force)? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 0 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 53. Have you slapped your partner? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 0 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 54. Has your partner slapped you? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 0 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 55. Have you had a broken bone from a fight with your partner? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 0 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 56. Has your partner had a broken bone from a fight with you? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 0 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 57. Have you used threats to make your partner have oral or anal sex? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 0 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 58. Has your partner used threats to make you have oral or anal sex? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 0 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 59. Have you suggested a compromise to a disagreement? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 0 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 60. Has your partner suggested a compromise to a disagreement? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 0 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 61. Have you burned or scalded your partner on purpose? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 0 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 62. Has your partner burned or scalded you on purpose? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 0 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 63. Have you insisted on oral or anal sex when your partner did not want to (but did not use physical force)? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 0 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 64. Has your partner insisted on oral or anal sex when you did not want to (but did not use physical force)? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 0 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 65. Have you accused your partner of being a lousy lover? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 0 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 66. Has your partner accused you of being a lousy lover? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 0 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 67. Have you done something to spite your partner? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 0 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 68. Has your partner done something to spite you? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 0 | <input type="checkbox"/> |

| | 1 time | 2 times | 3-5 times | 6-10 times | 11-20 times | More than 20 times | Never | Not this year, but has happened in the past |
|--|--------|---------|-----------|------------|-------------|--------------------|-------|---|
| 69. Have you threatened to hit or throw something at your partner? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 0 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 70. Has your partner threatened to hit or throw something at you? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 0 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 71. Have you felt a physical pain that still hurt the next day because of a fight with your partner? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 0 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 72. Has your partner felt a physical pain that still hurt the next day because of a fight with you? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 0 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 73. Have you kicked your partner? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 0 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 74. Has your partner kicked you? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 0 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 75. Have you used threats to make your partner have sex? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 0 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 76. Has your partner used threats to make you have sex? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 0 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 77. Have you agreed to try a solution to a disagreement your partner suggested? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 0 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 78. Has your partner agreed to a solution to a disagreement that you suggested? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 0 | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Quality of Marriage Index (QMI)

Instructions: Circle the number that best describes the degree of satisfaction you feel in various areas of your relationship.

| | Very Strongly Disagree | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neither Agree nor Disagree | Agree | Strongly Agree | Very Strongly Agree | | | |
|---|------------------------|-------------------|----------|----------------------------|-------|----------------|---------------------|---|---|-----------------|
| 79. We have a good relationship. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | | | |
| 80. My relationship with my partner is very stable | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | | | |
| 81. My relationship with my partner is strong | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | | | |
| 82. My relationship with my partner makes me happy | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | | | |
| 83. I really feel like part of a team with my partner | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | | | |
| 84. All things considered, what degree of happiness best describes your relationship? | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |
| Unhappy | | | | | Happy | | | | | Perfectly happy |

Reference

Norton, R. (1983). Measuring marital quality: A critical look at the dependent variable. Journal of Marriage and the Family, 45, 141-151.

These are the cutoffs that we use for community couples:

37: Happy relationship

27: Distressed relationship

Error band around scores +/- 3

Areas of Change Questionnaire

The Areas of Change Questionnaire (ACQ; Weiss, Hops, & Patterson, 1973) is a form often used clinically to identify specific behaviors for intervention. It lists 34 specific areas of marital functioning (e.g., "Have meals ready on time," "Spend time with me") and asks the respondents the degree of change desired from their partners in each area. The amount of change is rated on a seven point scale (from -3 [much less] to +3 [much more]). Each item of the ACQ has been shown to discriminate between distressed and nondistressed couples in that distressed spouses want more change in their partners' behavior (Margolin, Talovic, & Weinstein, 1983). Total scores based on the absolute amount of change desired also correlate strongly ($r = .67$) with measures of marital adjustment (Heyman, Sayers, & Bellack, 1994).

Instructions: The following pages list typical behaviors that can cause relationship dissatisfactions. Indicate the direction of change in behavior you would like to see using the following scale:

I WANT MY PARTNER TO:

| | Much Less | Less | Somewhat Less | No Change Desired | Somewhat More | More | Much More | |
|--|------------------|-------------|----------------------|--------------------------|----------------------|-------------|------------------|---|
| 85. ...participate in decisions about spending money. | -3 | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | |
| 86. ...spend time keeping the house clean. | -3 | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | |
| 87. ...have meals ready on time. | -3 | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | |
| 88. ...pay attention to his/her appearance. | -3 | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | |
| 89. ...hit me. | -3 | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | |
| 90. ...get together with my friends. | -3 | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | |
| 91. ...pay the bills on time. | -3 | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | |
| 92. ...prepare interesting meals. | -3 | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | |
| 93. ...start interesting conversations with me. | -3 | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | |
| 94. ...go out with me. | -3 | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | |
| 95. ...show appreciation for things I do well. | -3 | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | |
| 96. ...get together with my relatives. | -3 | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | |
| 97. ...have sexual relations with me. | -3 | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | |
| 98. ...drink. | -3 | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | |
| 99. ...work late. | -3 | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | |
| 100. ...get together with our friends. | | -3 | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 101. ...help with the housework when asked. | | -3 | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 102. ...argue with me. | | -3 | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 103. ...discipline children. | -3 | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | |
| 104. ...engage in extra-marital sexual relations. | -3 | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | |
| 105. ...spend time in outside activities. | | -3 | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 106. ...pay attention to my sexual needs. | -3 | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | |
| 107. ...spend time with children. | -3 | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | |
| 108. ...to give me attention when I need it. | -3 | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | |
| 109. ...assume responsibility for finances. | | -3 | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 110. ...leave me time to myself. | -3 | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | |
| 111. ...agree to do things I like when we go out together. | -3 | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | |
| 112. ...accept praise. | | -3 | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 113. ...accomplish his/her responsibilities promptly. | | -3 | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 114. ...help in planning our free time. | | -3 | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 115. ...express his/her emotions clearly. | -3 | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | |
| 116. ...have non-sexual relationships with men/women | -3 | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | |
| 117. ...spend time with me. | -3 | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | |
| 118. ...come to meals on time. | | -3 | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 |

Marital Status Inventory

- | | <u>True</u> | <u>False</u> | |
|-----|-------------|--------------|---|
| 1. | / | / | I have made specific plans to discuss separation or divorce with my spouse. I have considered what I would say, etc. |
| 2. | / | / | I have set up an independent bank account in my name to protect my interests if we divorce or separate. |
| 3. | / | / | Thoughts of divorce occur to me very frequently, as often as once a week or more. |
| 4. | / | / | I have suggested to my spouse that I wished to be divorced, separated, or rid of him/her. |
| 5. | / | / | I have thought specifically about divorce or separation; I have considered who would get the kids, how things would be divided, pros and cons of such actions, etc. |
| 6. | / | / | My spouse and I have separated. (This is a / trial separation / permanent separation) |
| 7. | / | / | I have discussed the question of my divorce or separation with someone other than my spouse (trusted friend, psychologist, minister, etc.) |
| 8. | / | / | I have occasionally thought of divorce or wished that we were separated, usually after an argument or other incident. |
| 9. | / | / | I have discussed separation or divorce seriously or at length with my spouse. |
| 10. | / | / | I have filed for divorce (or we are already divorced). |
| 11. | / | / | I have asked friends or other nonprofessionals about how long it takes to get a divorce, grounds necessary for divorce, costs involved in divorcing, etc. |
| 12. | / | / | I have contacted a lawyer to make preliminary plans for a divorce. |
| 13. | / | / | I have consulted a lawyer (or other legal services) to ask questions about divorce. |
| 14. | / | / | I have considered divorce or separation a few times <i>other than</i> during or shortly after a fight. These thoughts, however, were only in vague terms. |

Appendix E: Couple Conflicts and Problem-Solving Strategies

INSTRUCTIONS:

All couples have conflicts from time to time, and there are many ways that partners can try to handle disagreements when they arise. Please tell us about yours **DURING THE LAST YEAR.**

1. How often do you and your partner have **minor** disagreements (e.g. “spats”, getting on each other's nerves)? Please place a check mark () inside the box that corresponds to what is true for you.

- once a year or less
- every 4 - 6 months
- every 2 - 3 months
- once or twice a month
- once or twice a week
- just about every day

2. How often do you and your partner have **major** disagreements (e.g. big fights, “blow-ups”)?

- once a year or less
- every 4 - 6 months
- every 2 - 3 months
- once or twice a month
- once or twice a week
- just about every day

please continue on the next page

Left side: For each issue, please rate how much of a problem it is currently in your relationship on a scale ranging from: **0 (no problem at all) to 100 (a severe problem):**

Right side: For each problem, please rate how often you resolve disagreements to your mutual satisfaction from **0 (never) to 100% (always).** If it is no problem at all, leave this column blank



| Degree of problem 0 - 100 | | % of time resolved 0 - 100% |
|--------------------------------------|--|--|
| | 1. Childrearing / issues concerning child(ren) | % |
| | 2. Career decisions | % |
| | 3. Balancing demands of work and homelife | % |
| | 4. Household tasks, who does what around house | % |
| | 5. Money, handling family finances | % |
| | 6. Recreation, leisure time activities | % |
| | 7. Relationships with in-laws | % |
| | 8. Relationships with friends | % |
| | 9. Jealousy/mistrust/extramarital affairs | % |
| | 10. Our sexual relationship | % |
| | 11. Communication between us | % |
| | 12. Demonstrating affection, intimacy, closeness | % |
| | 13. Amount of time spent together | % |
| | 14. Alcohol and/or drug use | % |
| | 15. Conduct (right, good, or proper behavior) | % |
| | 16. Aims, goals, values, philosophy of life | % |
| | 17. Religion | % |
| | 18. How we make decisions, who "calls the shots", who is going to be the "boss" | % |
| | 19. Personality clashes or differences (e.g. feeling the other is moody, overly critical, or hard to get along with) | % |
| | 20. Differences of opinion regarding egalitarian versus traditional sex roles | % |
| | 21. Others : (specify) _____ | % |
| | 22. _____ | % |

please continue on the next page

0 1 2 3
 Never Rarely Sometimes Often

| Me | | | | | My Partner | | | |
|-----------|--------|-----------|-------|--|-------------------|--------|-----------|-------|
| never | rarely | sometimes | often | | never | rarely | sometimes | often |
| 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 22. Become angry with child when really angry with partner | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 23. Argue in front of the child(ren) | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 24. Involve the child(ren) in our argument | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 45. Argue when the child(ren) might be able to overhear | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 46. Confide in child(ren) about problems with partner | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 25. Insist on own point of view | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 26. Try to convince partner of own way of thinking | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 27. Raise voice, yell, shout | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 28. Interrupt/don't listen to partner | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 29. Be sarcastic | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 30. Make accusations | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 31. Name-calling, cursing, insulting | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 32. Say or do something to hurt partner's feelings | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 33. Threaten to end relationship | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 34. Withdraw love or affection | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 35. Throw objects, slam doors, break things | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 36. Throw something at partner | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 37. Threaten to hurt partner | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 38. Push, pull, shove, grab, handle partner roughly | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 39. Slap partner | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 40. Strike, kick, bite partner | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 41. Beat partner severely | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 42. Harm self | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 43. Others: (specify) _____ | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 44. _____ | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 |

For each statement, please circle the rating that best describes the **outcomes** of your disagreements:

| | Never | Rarely | Sometimes | Usually |
|---|-------|--------|-----------|---------|
| 1. We feel that we've resolved it, or come to an understanding. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 2. We feel closer to one another than before the fight. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 3. We have fun making up with one another. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 4. We don't resolve the issue, but "agree to disagree". | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 5. We each give in a little bit to the other. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 6. We feel worse about one another than before the fight. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 7. We feel like talking about it was a big waste of time. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 8. We don't resolve the issue; we continue to hold grudges. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 9. We end up feeling angry and annoyed with one another. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 10. The whole family ends up feeling upset. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 11. We stay mad at one another for a long time. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 12. We don't speak to one another for a while. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 13. We break up with each other for a time. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 |

14. How satisfied are you with the strategies that you have for resolving your conflicts?

- very satisfied
 works OK most of the time
 works sometimes but could be better
 mostly dissatisfied
 extremely dissatisfied

15. Overall, how happy are you with this relationship?

- extremely unhappy
 fairly unhappy
 a little unhappy
 a little happy
 fairly happy
 extremely happy
 perfect

Conflicts and Problem-Solving Scales

Patricia K. Kerig
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University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Thank you for your interest in the CPS. I hope you will find the measure useful, and that you will keep me informed as to any use you make of it, and any comments that you have about it.

Scale scoring

Conflict dimensions

Frequency/Severity: Sum of ratings of frequency, weighted for intensity of conflicts.

Answers to item 1 are scored 1-6. Responses to item 2 are scored 2-12. Sum.

Degree of Problem #1-22

Average.

Efficacy: % of times resolved #1-22. Be sure not to include items rated 0 on Severity.

Average.

Resolution: Weight frequency scores by resolution quality, and then sum.

Items 1,2,3 x 2

Items 4,5 x 1

Items 6-13 x -2

Conflict strategies

Cooperation

Sum items 1-6.

Avoidance/Capitulation

Sum items 8-17

Stonewalling

Sum items 7, 18-21, 33-34

Verbal aggression

Sum items 25-32

Physical aggression

Sum items 35-41

Child Involvement

Sum items 22-24, 45-46, (*plus* item 1 from list of problems on p. 2, recoded so that:

0 - 25% = 0

26 - 50% = 1

52 - 75% = 2

76 - 100% = 3)

Conflict strategy scales can be formed in a number of ways: for each partner separately (regarding their reports of themselves, their partners, or their relationship), or averaged across both partners for a summary score regarding their relationship:

wme = wife's ratings of herself

wp = wife's ratings of her partner

w = wife's ratings of herself + her partner (wme + wp)

hme = husband's ratings of himself

hp = husband's ratings of his partner

h = husband's ratings of himself + his partner (hme + hp)

ave = average (w + h) / 2

Kerig, P.K. (1996). Assessing the links between marital conflict and child development: The Conflicts and Problem-Solving Scales. Journal of Family Psychology, 10, 454-473.

Violence (V) Form: Shortened and revised version for assessing interparental violence

Changes:

Excludes Degree, Resolution, and Efficacy scales.

Item numbers corrected to be sequential

Increased number of Physical Violence items in extreme range

Emotional Abuse scale added

Dominance-isolation, Emotional-verbal (from Tolman, 1989)

Sexual (from Rodenburg & Fantuzzo, 1993)

Psychological (from Shepard & Campbell, 1992)

Scoring:

Frequency/Severity: Sum of ratings of frequency, weighted for intensity of conflicts.

Answers to item 1 are scored 1-6. Responses to item 2 are scored 2-12. Sum.

Global evaluation of marital quality (Fincham & Bradbury, 1987). Item 3. Scored from “extremely unhappy” (0) to “extremely happy” (5).

Conflict strategies

Cooperation

Sum items 1-6.

Avoidance/Capitulation

Sum items 8-17, 19

Stonewalling

Sum items 7, 18-21, 35-36

Verbal aggression

Sum items 27-36

Physical aggression

Moderate

Sum items 37-41

Severe

Sum items 42-49

Child Involvement

Sum items 22-26

Emotional Abuse

Sum items 50-69

Divorce (D) Form: Shortened and revised version for assessing interparental conflict during divorce
Changes:

Includes Severity/Frequency ratings for before and after divorce

Excludes Resolution and Efficacy scales.

Uses same Conflict Strategies scales as V form

Cooperation

Sum items 1-6.

Avoidance/Capitulation

Sum items 8-17, 19

Stonewalling

Sum items 7, 18-21, 35-36

Verbal aggression

Sum items 27-36

Physical aggression

Moderate

Sum items 37-41

Severe

Sum items 42-49

Child Involvement

Sum items 22-26

Emotional Abuse

Sum items 50-69

Includes ratings of affect before and after conflicts

Thought on “Healthy Marriage”

By Thomas B. Holman

For the Measurement and Family Demography Conference

While marriage and other types of couple relationships are “overlapping sets,” they are not the same set. Therefore, I will limit my thoughts to “healthy marriage,” largely because that is where my scholarly work has been and continues to be.

Conceptual, Measurement, and Methods Issues

We are in a period of what Kuhn calls “normal science” where basic assumptions about epistemology, ontology, and methodology—and the theories and methods coming out of these assumptions—are generally accepted. We mostly build models, often based on empirical generalization rather than careful theoretical thinking, and we test our models. In our time of “normal science” our research is not used to test and revise theory very often. If used at all, theories are generally used in the introduction part of empirical publications simply to justify the hypotheses tested. Little if any effort is evident of attempts to revise, expand, advance, or get rid of a general theoretical perspective. Even less often do we discuss the world-view underlying theoretical perspectives, whether they be social exchange theory, behavioral theory, family systems theory, or whatever theoretical perspective we use to justify our hypotheses.

While we are careful in our research to discuss sampling and analytic procedures, we generally neither expect nor encourage a discussion of the historical roots of the theory or the ideas about the world that are necessary if the theory and reasoning behind our research is true (Slife & Williams, 1995). I was trained in the time when Kerlinger’s feared research text was the standard for your first graduate-level research class. One of the most important lessons I learned from Kerlinger that I still believe is that “The purpose of research is theory” (Kerlinger, 1979). Therefore, I call on us to do the hard theoretical and philosophical work that needs to be done.

Going straight from empirical findings to applications, without filtering it consciously through theory is dangerous (Burr, Mead, & Rollings, 1973). It is dangerous in the first place because we *inevitably* interpret findings through our often unacknowledged—even to ourselves—“prejudices” or “preunderstandings” (Knapp, 1997). Secondly, if we do not filter empirical findings through a well-reasoned and clearly articulated theoretical position, we are more likely to make serious misjudgments about the practical applications of a particular set of empirical findings. Third, if we don’t go from research to theory before going to application, the theory—which is the purpose of research after all—cannot respond to possible theory-changing, and even paradigm-changing findings.

There is a number of other conceptual, measurement, or methods issues we need to respond to if, indeed, our measurements are going to provide us the information we need to revise theory and recommend practical/policy applications. Most of my ideas about this come from chapter authors in the book by Tom Bradbury, *The Developmental Course of Marital Dysfunction* (1998). In my mind, any serious scholar/researcher of marriage development must read and respond to Bradbury, Cohen, and Karney’s chapter in Part 1, and all the chapters in Part II of that book. I will briefly summarize some of the points of these chapters.

Bradbury et al.’s chapters suggests the limitations of using a social-learning approach to marriage. This perspective places undue reliance on so-called “changeable elements” of marriage and restrict our understanding of the longitudinal course of marriage, and this can lead to prevention programming that is not maximally effective. Bradbury and his colleagues then suggest a model based not only on behavioral principles, but also on crisis theory. This carefully

crafted model—which is consistent with the findings of 115 longitudinal studies of marriage—provides a starting point for the study of marriage (Karney & Bradbury, 1995). Interestingly, my colleagues and I independently reviewed much of the same literature at the same time and came up with a model suggesting essentially the same variables and interconnectedness between variables (Larson & Holman, 1994; Holman & Associates, 2000). Both theoretical models can be seen in Appendix A.

Christensen—a marriage and family therapy practitioner/scholar—notes the importance of measuring events and specific incidences in relationships as well as the precursors and results of these events and incidences. He suggests that the research can be overwhelming for a practitioners. Much of the research is atheoretical and does not control for important factors. Thus, practitioners and policy makers are left to chose which variable they want to intervene on.

Parke expands on this idea by suggesting that we use a life-span view which sensitizes us to the need to measure normative and non-normative events and take into account multiple developmental trajectories. Furthermore, we need to recognize the interplay of individual, dyadic, and family trajectories. We need to integrate concurrent influences and prior history into our research models. A life course theoretical perspective recognizes that the timing of normative events can alter the impact of these transitions, but the theory does not tell us at what time point to optimally *measure* the event(s). Thus the need to theory-based research; research that will help us time our measurement and interventions most appropriately.

Kenny articulates the difficulties of conducting longitudinal research with married couples and provides a “checklist of things I would like to see in the analysis of longitudinal data on heterosexual couples, with particular emphasis on effects involving couple, gender, and time.” He and others in the volume (e.g., Bradbury et al. & Glenn) discuss the serious problem of missing data and attrition, and note that concerted work on this problem is needed.

Gottman expresses concern about “common method variance” and calls for more multi-method perspectives in longitudinal research. He admonishes researchers to “overcome methodological laziness” when we develop and test models of marriage and change.

Glenn, in my mind, provides the most cogent critique of longitudinal research on marriage in this volume. He has two major criticisms. “First, most ... authors seem to overestimate what can be accomplished with the kinds of panel designs they use, which leads them to make unwarranted conclusions. Second, most ... researchers fail to use fully the information their data collection strategies provide....” Glenn also discusses the identification problem when estimating the effects of spousal differences, panel conditioning effects, and the problem of most research by psychologists leaving out “social and cultural context” variables such as the state of the economy. In my mind, this is an illustration of a theory problem; if we develop theories for “understanding” phenomenon, and not just “predicting” an event or a particular variable, we will look beyond our disciplinary boundaries more often. For example, in our recent theory testing (Holman & Associates, 2001), we hypothesized—based on an ecosystemic, developmental perspective—that parents’ marital status of intact or divorced would not have a direct effect on adult children’s marital quality, but that its effect would be indirect through the quality of the parent-child relationship’s direct effect on marital quality. This is exactly what we found. Without good theory, we could have easily left out an important variable—parents’ marital quality—simply because it didn’t have a direct effect on adult children’s marital quality.

Berscheid also suggests, as I have above, the need for good theory and a better understanding of “the implicit as well as explicit assumptions underlying the theoretical frameworks currently guiding relationship research.” She notes the limitations of social learning theory, as did Bradbury et al., and suggests that a “social psychology” perspective adds the important dimension of the interaction between the individual’s social/physical environment and

an individual's behavior. She uses interdependence theory—aka social exchange theory—to demonstrate the viability of this approach.

In a project that a number of colleagues and I undertook in the late 1990s—the RELATE project—we have attempted to address some of the issues I raise. The next section describes the RELATE project, describes some of the measures we have used, provides the psychometric information you requested on these (and other) measures, and provides the distributions of the scales by the variables you suggested. The initial description borrows directly from the Busby, Holman, and Taniguchi (2001) article I helped write. I will not use quotation marks because I change the wording here and there for this memo, but much of these next few paragraphs come directly from that article.

The RELATionship Evaluation (RELATE)

It is challenging to capture the dynamics of a couple relationship. Scholars have used interviews, observations, surveys, tasks, and even physiological measures to attempt to understand the quality of relationships. One group of scholars, The RELATE Institute (RI, previously the Marriage Study Consortium) was formed in 1979 by a diverse group of researchers, clinicians, and educators who were dedicated to the dual goals of strengthening and understanding premarital and marital relationships.

Over the last twenty years, members of the RI have grappled with trying to measure the complexities of adult romantic relationships from a variety of different angles. Through this endeavor three versions of a comprehensive instrument have been published, the most recent version being the **RELAT**ionship Evaluation Questionnaire (RELATE, Holman, Busby, Doxey, Klein, & Loyer-Carlson, 1997).

The RELATE model was developed by reviewing over 50 years of research that delimited the important premarital predictors of later marital quality and stability. The comprehensive review of research on premarital predictors of marital quality by Larson and Holman (1994) was a foundational document for RELATE. Since the 1994 review, new research indicated additional constructs to include in the model (e.g., Gottman, 1994). The couple process model extensively studied and researched by Gottman was included as part of the couple constructs in RELATE.

Researchers have recently emphasized the need to develop relationship models that are more comprehensive and that include constructs that (a) target trait-like characteristics of partners, and (b) capture behavioral exchanges between partners (Bradbury, Campbell, & Fincham, 1995). Because of the comprehensive nature of RELATE, it contains extensive measures of both types of constructs, as well as measures of family background, culture, and values.

Whereas the initial scales included in the instrument came from existing research and from previous versions of RELATE, there is a conceptual model that organizes the numerous subcategories and suggests relationships between the constructs assessed via the scales. The systemic theory underlying RELATE is that relationships are developed and maintained within a series of contexts or subsystems (Bradbury & Fincham, 1987, 1988, 1991) as noted in Appendix B. Although numerous contexts can be measured, the most important ones for premarital and marital relationships include the individual, couple, familial, and cultural contexts (Holman & Associates, 2000; Larson & Holman, 1994).

The RELATE approach is to measure a large number of concepts with scales that generally have 3-5 items. The attempt was to be comprehensive rather than exhaustive. In a recent conversation with Dr. Vaughn Call, one of the key figures in the National Study of Families and Households surveys, he suggested that one of the major problems with many surveys is having too many items, and thus not being able to measure enough concepts before

respondent fatigue sets in. RELATE is a reflection of our interest in looking at the tip of many icebergs, assuming the tip will give us adequate information on the whole, rather than understanding all the dimensionality of a very few icebergs. While I am willing to discuss all the measures in RELATE and their usefulness for understanding marital relationships, for this memo I will discuss specifically our measures of relationship satisfaction, relationship stability, and frequency of relationship problems. We use these individually or together as representing the latent variable of relationship (marital) quality. These scales are reproduced in Appendix C. The psychometric information on these scales, and all the RELATE scales, is contained in the attached reprint of the Busby, Holman, and Taniguchi (2001) article. In short, the alpha reliabilities are in the .80-.85 range, and the test-retest coefficients are in the high 70s to high 80s.

Scale Distributions and Tabulations

Our current data set has over 19,000 individuals in it who are in a relationship of at least 3 months in length. See the attached Frequency tables for scale distributions of satisfaction, stability, and problem frequency. I have also included the frequencies for income, gender, race, and education.

Advantages and Disadvantages of Suggested Measures

I will mention the specific measures of relationship satisfaction, relationship stability, and problem frequency, and then discuss the full RELATE instrument. The advantages of the three measures of relationship quality are that they are short, but not too short; unidimensional; and taken together give a fuller picture of relationship quality than just satisfaction. I have found that very short measures like the Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale or the single item measure seen on a lot of large, national surveys, are too short to get good variability. On the other hand, the DAS and MAT—which are longer—are multidimensional and weight different dimensions unequally without a theoretical rationale for the different weightings. The disadvantages of the three measures I recommend for some research purposes is that they are too short. Another is that they are part of the “normal (relationship) science” paradigm and have not been part of a discussion of what “marital happiness” is from different paradigmatic views.

The RELATE questionnaire has several advantages for marital scholars and begins to address some of the issues from Bradbury’s book I alluded to above. Most importantly, it is theory-based, having been developed from an eco-systemic, developmental perspective. The questionnaire lends itself to theory-based model building that explores understanding, and not just prediction.

It is a comprehensive survey (~270 items) that has short measures for most of the constructs previous research as found to be important for predicting marital quality.

RELATE collects data from individuals, but about 2/3 of the time, both partners submit data. Partners rate both self and partner on almost all the couple scales and the individual personality scales. We currently have data on almost 10,000 couples who have completed RELATE.

There are some practical benefits to using RELATE. It is online and can be completed in about 40 minutes. Thus, time and money do not need to be spent for printing, mailing, remailing, etc. The cross-sectional data come in daily without effort on our part (except maintaining the site) are immediately available for analysis. We charge each person between \$5-\$10 to take it because they received a multi-page RELATE Report with information on the

relationship they can go over by themselves or with a counselor, teacher, workshop leader, or clergy. Scholars who want to use RELATE can use it at a much reduced rate (free under some circumstances) and can also have access to the large sample of already collected data, if approved by the RELATE Institute.

We are currently doing online follow-up research. We have written a program to automatically send an email inviting respondents to participate in a follow-up questionnaire through a link on the email, one year after they completed RELATE initially. In other words, we are collecting follow-up data continuously at an interval of one year for all respondents. So far we are getting a return rate of about 21.5%, and 39% of those are from couples, i.e., we have gotten data from both partners of the relationship. What we hope to do in the future is develop items in the original RELATE which will allow us to know when events or normative transitions will take place, so we can send our follow-up emails at those times.

The follow-up asks them the status of the relationship they were in when first completing RELATE. If they are still in a relationship with the same person (marital or non-marital), we ask them to complete what we call RELATE-L (for RELATE-Longitudinal). If they have broken up with that person, we invite them to complete our Break Up Questionnaire, and to take RELATE again with their new partner (if they have one).

RELATE is currently available in English, Spanish, and Portuguese (with the Spanish and Portuguese going online by November, 2003) so we can collect data from Spanish and Portuguese speakers. The Spanish and Portuguese versions are designed primarily for individuals living in the U.S. whose first language is Spanish or Portuguese. These versions contain a 14 items acculturation scale.

I have attached a recently published article by Holman and Jarvis (2003) which used the RELATE data set. I have also attached an in-review paper by Holman, Carroll, Draper, and Tobler which uses the three outcome scales (satisfaction, stability, and relationship problems) as indicator variables of the latent variable "relationship quality" in a model tested with SEM techniques.

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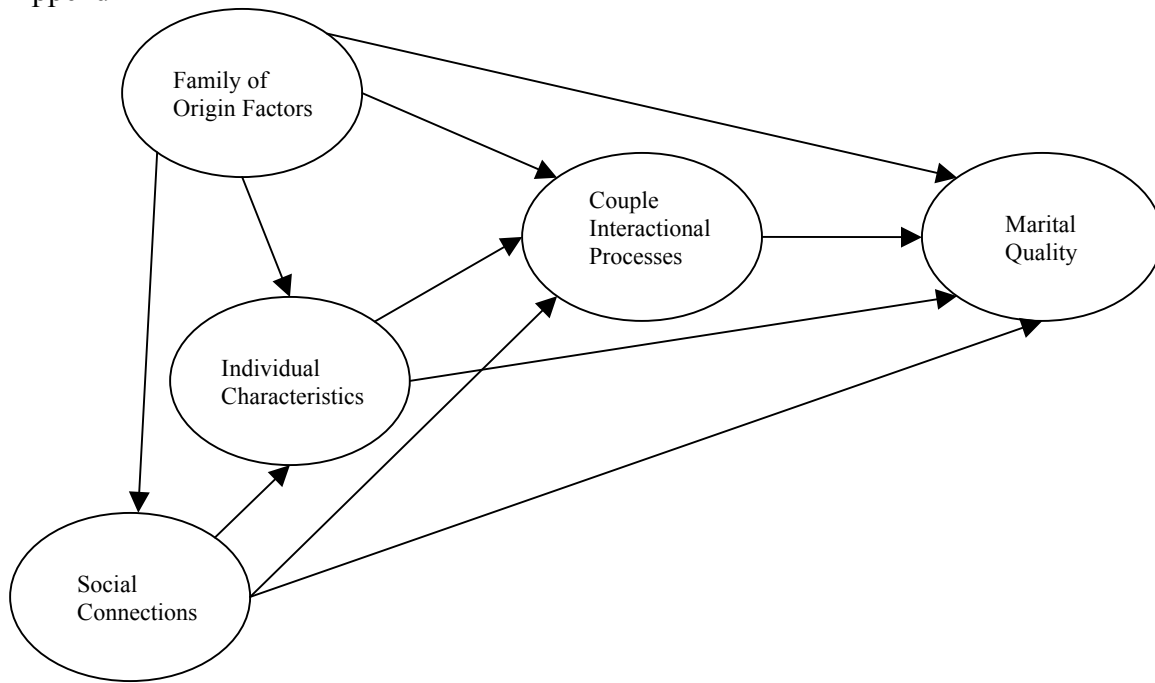
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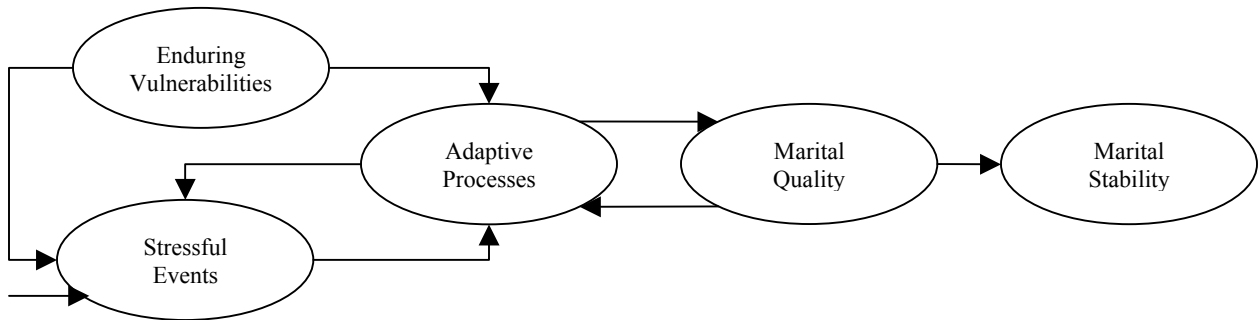
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Appendix A

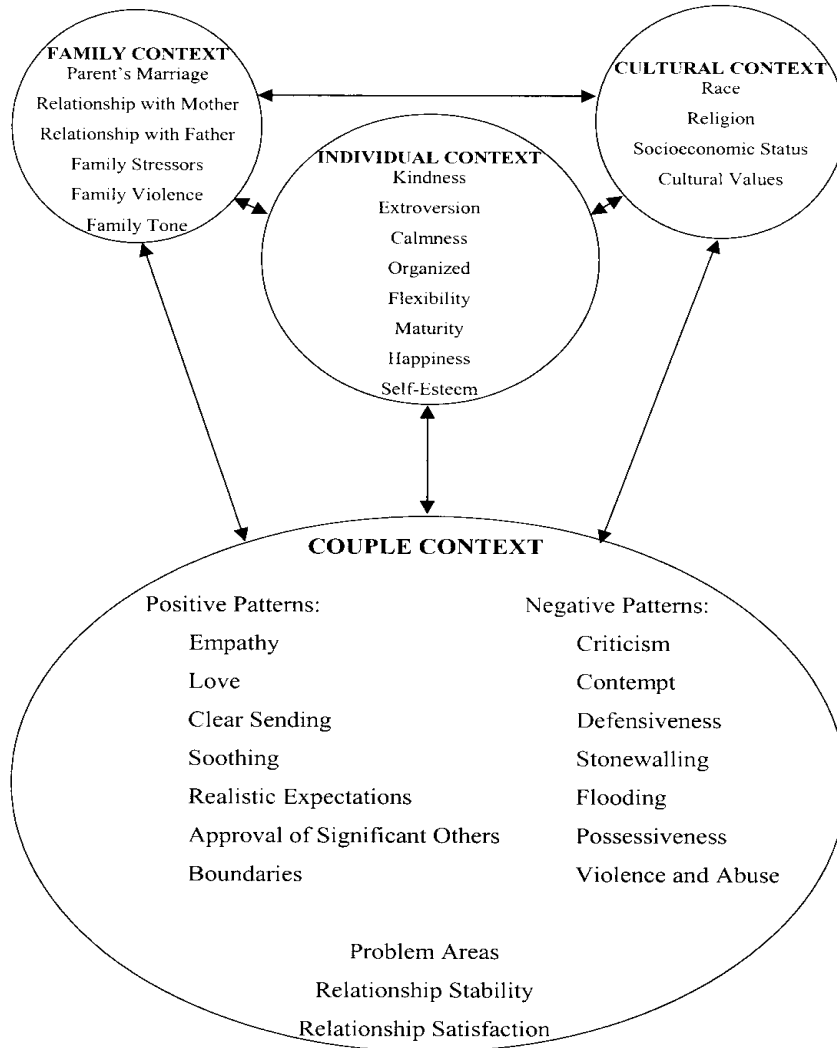


Holman & Associates general model of premarital factors relationship to marital quality



Karney and Bradbury's (1995) vulnerability-stress-adaption model of marriage.

Appendix B



Appendix C

Relationship Satisfaction

| | | | | |
|---------------------|----------------|-------------|--------|-----------|
| 1=Very Dissatisfied | 2=Dissatisfied | | | |
| | 3=Neutral | 4=Satisfied | 5=Very | satisfied |

In your relationship, how satisfied are you with:
The physical intimacy you experience.
The love you experience.
How conflicts are resolved.
The amount of relationship equality you experience.
The amount of time together you have.
The quality of your communication.
Your overall relationship with your partner

Relationship Stability

| | | | | |
|---------|----------|--------------|--|--|
| 1=Never | 2=Rarely | 3=Sometimes | | |
| | 4=Often | 5=Very Often | | |

How often have you thought your relationship (marriage) might be in trouble?
How often have you and your partner discussed ending your relationship (marriage)?
How often have you broken up or separated and then gotten back together?

Problem Areas Checklist

How often have the following areas been a problem in your relationship?

| | | | | |
|---------|----------|--------------|--|--|
| 1=Never | 2=Rarely | 3=Sometimes | | |
| | 4=Often | 5=Very Often | | |

Financial matters
Communication
Having children
Rearing children
Intimacy/Sexuality
Parents/In-laws
Roles (Who does what)
Weight
Who's in charge
Time spent together
Substance/chemical abuse

Frequencies

| Statistics | | | | |
|----------------|---------|--|---|--|
| | | SATIS Relationship Satisfaction Scale (v179, v180, v181, v182, v183, v184, v185) | STABLE Relationship Stability Scale (rv248, rv249, rv250) | PROBS Problem Areas Scale (v251, v252, v253, v254, v255, v256, v257, v258, v259, v260, v261) |
| N | Valid | 19627 | 19497 | 19513 |
| | Missing | 157 | 287 | 271 |
| Mean | | 3.8672 | 4.1289 | 1.8497 |
| Std. Deviation | | .75174 | .78513 | .59561 |

Frequency Table

| SATIS Relationship Satisfaction Scale (v179, v180, v181, v182, v183, v184, v185) | | | | | |
|--|------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
| Valid | 1.00 | 61 | .3 | .3 | .3 |
| | 1.14 | 14 | .1 | .1 | .4 |
| | 1.29 | 26 | .1 | .1 | .5 |
| | 1.43 | 40 | .2 | .2 | .7 |
| | 1.50 | 3 | .0 | .0 | .7 |
| | 1.57 | 58 | .3 | .3 | 1.0 |
| | 1.67 | 1 | .0 | .0 | 1.0 |
| | 1.71 | 66 | .3 | .3 | 1.4 |
| | 1.86 | 108 | .5 | .6 | 1.9 |
| | 2.00 | 164 | .8 | .8 | 2.8 |
| | 2.14 | 165 | .8 | .8 | 3.6 |
| | 2.17 | 2 | .0 | .0 | 3.6 |
| | 2.29 | 197 | 1.0 | 1.0 | 4.6 |
| | 2.33 | 5 | .0 | .0 | 4.6 |
| | 2.43 | 243 | 1.2 | 1.2 | 5.9 |
| | 2.50 | 2 | .0 | .0 | 5.9 |
| | 2.57 | 282 | 1.4 | 1.4 | 7.3 |
| | 2.67 | 4 | .0 | .0 | 7.3 |
| 2.71 | 303 | 1.5 | 1.5 | 8.9 | |

| | | | | | |
|----------------|---------------|-------|------|-------|-------|
| | 2.83 | 2 | .0 | .0 | 8.9 |
| | 2.86 | 450 | 2.3 | 2.3 | 11.2 |
| | 3.00 | 660 | 3.3 | 3.4 | 14.6 |
| | 3.14 | 621 | 3.1 | 3.2 | 17.7 |
| | 3.17 | 6 | .0 | .0 | 17.7 |
| | 3.25 | 1 | .0 | .0 | 17.8 |
| | 3.29 | 780 | 3.9 | 4.0 | 21.7 |
| | 3.33 | 9 | .0 | .0 | 21.8 |
| | 3.43 | 874 | 4.4 | 4.5 | 26.2 |
| | 3.50 | 7 | .0 | .0 | 26.3 |
| | 3.57 | 1116 | 5.6 | 5.7 | 31.9 |
| | 3.60 | 1 | .0 | .0 | 32.0 |
| | 3.67 | 16 | .1 | .1 | 32.0 |
| | 3.71 | 1319 | 6.7 | 6.7 | 38.8 |
| | 3.75 | 2 | .0 | .0 | 38.8 |
| | 3.80 | 1 | .0 | .0 | 38.8 |
| | 3.83 | 20 | .1 | .1 | 38.9 |
| | 3.86 | 1531 | 7.7 | 7.8 | 46.7 |
| | 4.00 | 1893 | 9.6 | 9.6 | 56.3 |
| | 4.14 | 1530 | 7.7 | 7.8 | 64.1 |
| | 4.17 | 6 | .0 | .0 | 64.1 |
| | 4.20 | 1 | .0 | .0 | 64.1 |
| | 4.25 | 1 | .0 | .0 | 64.2 |
| | 4.29 | 1493 | 7.5 | 7.6 | 71.8 |
| | 4.33 | 20 | .1 | .1 | 71.9 |
| | 4.43 | 1428 | 7.2 | 7.3 | 79.1 |
| | 4.50 | 13 | .1 | .1 | 79.2 |
| | 4.57 | 1309 | 6.6 | 6.7 | 85.9 |
| | 4.60 | 4 | .0 | .0 | 85.9 |
| | 4.67 | 9 | .0 | .0 | 85.9 |
| | 4.71 | 1056 | 5.3 | 5.4 | 91.3 |
| | 4.75 | 1 | .0 | .0 | 91.3 |
| | 4.80 | 1 | .0 | .0 | 91.3 |
| | 4.83 | 11 | .1 | .1 | 91.4 |
| | 4.86 | 911 | 4.6 | 4.6 | 96.0 |
| | 5.00 | 780 | 3.9 | 4.0 | 100.0 |
| | Total | 19627 | 99.2 | 100.0 | |
| Missing | System | 157 | .8 | | |

| | | | | |
|--------------|-------|-------|--|--|
| Total | 19784 | 100.0 | | |
|--------------|-------|-------|--|--|

| STABLE Relationship Stability Scale (rv248, rv249, rv250) | | | | | |
|--|---------------|------------------|----------------|----------------------|---------------------------|
| | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
| Valid | 1.00 | 53 | .3 | .3 | .3 |
| | 1.33 | 53 | .3 | .3 | .5 |
| | 1.67 | 103 | .5 | .5 | 1.1 |
| | 2.00 | 245 | 1.2 | 1.3 | 2.3 |
| | 2.33 | 368 | 1.9 | 1.9 | 4.2 |
| | 2.50 | 2 | .0 | .0 | 4.2 |
| | 2.67 | 545 | 2.8 | 2.8 | 7.0 |
| | 3.00 | 1129 | 5.7 | 5.8 | 12.8 |
| | 3.33 | 1339 | 6.8 | 6.9 | 19.7 |
| | 3.50 | 10 | .1 | .1 | 19.7 |
| | 3.67 | 1853 | 9.4 | 9.5 | 29.2 |
| | 4.00 | 2921 | 14.8 | 15.0 | 44.2 |
| | 4.33 | 3220 | 16.3 | 16.5 | 60.7 |
| | 4.50 | 14 | .1 | .1 | 60.8 |
| | 4.67 | 3571 | 18.0 | 18.3 | 79.1 |
| | 5.00 | 4071 | 20.6 | 20.9 | 100.0 |
| Total | 19497 | 98.5 | 100.0 | | |
| Missing | System | 287 | 1.5 | | |
| Total | | 19784 | 100.0 | | |

| PROBS Problem Areas Scale (v251, v252, v253, v254, v255, v256, v257, v258, v259, v260, v261) | | | | | |
|---|-------------|------------------|----------------|----------------------|---------------------------|
| | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
| Valid | 1.00 | 1031 | 5.2 | 5.3 | 5.3 |
| | 1.09 | 758 | 3.8 | 3.9 | 9.2 |
| | 1.10 | 6 | .0 | .0 | 9.2 |
| | 1.13 | 1 | .0 | .0 | 9.2 |
| | 1.14 | 1 | .0 | .0 | 9.2 |
| | 1.18 | 1035 | 5.2 | 5.3 | 14.5 |
| | 1.20 | 11 | .1 | .1 | 14.6 |
| | 1.22 | 2 | .0 | .0 | 14.6 |
| | 1.25 | 1 | .0 | .0 | 14.6 |
| | 1.27 | 1082 | 5.5 | 5.5 | 20.1 |
| | 1.30 | 12 | .1 | .1 | 20.2 |

| | | | | |
|------|------|-----|-----|------|
| 1.33 | 6 | .0 | .0 | 20.2 |
| 1.36 | 1285 | 6.5 | 6.6 | 26.8 |
| 1.40 | 8 | .0 | .0 | 26.8 |
| 1.43 | 1 | .0 | .0 | 26.9 |
| 1.44 | 2 | .0 | .0 | 26.9 |
| 1.45 | 1240 | 6.3 | 6.4 | 33.2 |
| 1.50 | 18 | .1 | .1 | 33.3 |
| 1.55 | 1196 | 6.0 | 6.1 | 39.4 |
| 1.60 | 9 | .0 | .0 | 39.5 |
| 1.63 | 1 | .0 | .0 | 39.5 |
| 1.64 | 1113 | 5.6 | 5.7 | 45.2 |
| 1.67 | 3 | .0 | .0 | 45.2 |
| 1.70 | 6 | .0 | .0 | 45.2 |
| 1.73 | 1114 | 5.6 | 5.7 | 51.0 |
| 1.80 | 11 | .1 | .1 | 51.0 |
| 1.82 | 1080 | 5.5 | 5.5 | 56.5 |
| 1.89 | 1 | .0 | .0 | 56.5 |
| 1.90 | 7 | .0 | .0 | 56.6 |
| 1.91 | 1000 | 5.1 | 5.1 | 61.7 |
| 2.00 | 1026 | 5.2 | 5.3 | 67.0 |
| 2.09 | 844 | 4.3 | 4.3 | 71.3 |
| 2.10 | 9 | .0 | .0 | 71.3 |
| 2.11 | 1 | .0 | .0 | 71.3 |
| 2.13 | 1 | .0 | .0 | 71.3 |
| 2.18 | 795 | 4.0 | 4.1 | 75.4 |
| 2.20 | 11 | .1 | .1 | 75.5 |
| 2.22 | 1 | .0 | .0 | 75.5 |
| 2.25 | 1 | .0 | .0 | 75.5 |
| 2.27 | 713 | 3.6 | 3.7 | 79.1 |
| 2.30 | 11 | .1 | .1 | 79.2 |
| 2.36 | 643 | 3.3 | 3.3 | 82.5 |
| 2.40 | 4 | .0 | .0 | 82.5 |
| 2.45 | 519 | 2.6 | 2.7 | 85.2 |
| 2.50 | 10 | .1 | .1 | 85.2 |
| 2.55 | 470 | 2.4 | 2.4 | 87.6 |
| 2.60 | 9 | .0 | .0 | 87.7 |
| 2.64 | 423 | 2.1 | 2.2 | 89.8 |
| 2.67 | 1 | .0 | .0 | 89.9 |

| | | | | | |
|----------------|---------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| | 2.70 | 4 | .0 | .0 | 89.9 |
| | 2.73 | 370 | 1.9 | 1.9 | 91.8 |
| | 2.80 | 4 | .0 | .0 | 91.8 |
| | 2.82 | 319 | 1.6 | 1.6 | 93.4 |
| | 2.89 | 1 | .0 | .0 | 93.4 |
| | 2.90 | 2 | .0 | .0 | 93.4 |
| | 2.91 | 257 | 1.3 | 1.3 | 94.8 |
| | 3.00 | 247 | 1.2 | 1.3 | 96.0 |
| | 3.09 | 180 | .9 | .9 | 96.9 |
| | 3.18 | 135 | .7 | .7 | 97.6 |
| | 3.20 | 1 | .0 | .0 | 97.6 |
| | 3.27 | 119 | .6 | .6 | 98.3 |
| | 3.36 | 88 | .4 | .5 | 98.7 |
| | 3.40 | 1 | .0 | .0 | 98.7 |
| | 3.45 | 62 | .3 | .3 | 99.0 |
| | 3.55 | 48 | .2 | .2 | 99.3 |
| | 3.60 | 3 | .0 | .0 | 99.3 |
| | 3.64 | 34 | .2 | .2 | 99.5 |
| | 3.67 | 2 | .0 | .0 | 99.5 |
| | 3.73 | 25 | .1 | .1 | 99.6 |
| | 3.80 | 1 | .0 | .0 | 99.6 |
| | 3.82 | 21 | .1 | .1 | 99.7 |
| | 3.89 | 1 | .0 | .0 | 99.7 |
| | 3.91 | 15 | .1 | .1 | 99.8 |
| | 4.00 | 16 | .1 | .1 | 99.9 |
| | 4.09 | 7 | .0 | .0 | 99.9 |
| | 4.18 | 3 | .0 | .0 | 99.9 |
| | 4.27 | 3 | .0 | .0 | 99.9 |
| | 4.36 | 3 | .0 | .0 | 100.0 |
| | 4.45 | 2 | .0 | .0 | 100.0 |
| | 4.55 | 1 | .0 | .0 | 100.0 |
| | 4.64 | 1 | .0 | .0 | 100.0 |
| | 5.00 | 4 | .0 | .0 | 100.0 |
| | Total | 19513 | 98.6 | 100.0 | |
| Missing | System | 271 | 1.4 | | |
| Total | | 19784 | 100.0 | | |

Frequencies

| Statistics | | | | | |
|------------|---------|--|--------------------------|-----------------------------------|--|
| | | V71 Your current personal yearly gross income before taxes & deductions: | V68 Participant's Gender | V72 Your race or ethnic group is: | V70 How much education have you completed? |
| N | Valid | 19707 | 19774 | 19745 | 19475 |
| | Missing | 77 | 10 | 39 | 309 |

Frequency Table

| V71 Your current personal yearly gross income before taxes & deductions: | | | | | |
|--|--------------------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
| Valid | 0 None | 1175 | 5.9 | 6.0 | 6.0 |
| | 1 Under \$5,000 | 4185 | 21.2 | 21.2 | 27.2 |
| | 2 \$5,000-14,999 | 4783 | 24.2 | 24.3 | 51.5 |
| | 3 \$15,000-24,999 | 2210 | 11.2 | 11.2 | 62.7 |
| | 4 \$25,000-29,999 | 1087 | 5.5 | 5.5 | 68.2 |
| | 5 \$30,000-39,999 | 1608 | 8.1 | 8.2 | 76.4 |
| | 6 \$40,000-49,999 | 1233 | 6.2 | 6.3 | 82.6 |
| | 7 \$50,000-74,999 | 1769 | 8.9 | 9.0 | 91.6 |
| | 8 \$75,000-100,000 | 780 | 3.9 | 4.0 | 95.5 |
| | 9 Over \$100,000 | 877 | 4.4 | 4.5 | 100.0 |
| | Total | 19707 | 99.6 | 100.0 | |
| Missing | System | 77 | .4 | | |
| Total | | 19784 | 100.0 | | |

| V68 Participant's Gender | | | | | |
|--------------------------|----------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
| Valid | 1 Male | 14448 | 73.0 | 73.1 | 73.1 |
| | 2 Female | 5326 | 26.9 | 26.9 | 100.0 |
| | Total | 19774 | 99.9 | 100.0 | |
| Missing | System | 10 | .1 | | |
| Total | | 19784 | 100.0 | | |

| V72 Your race or ethnic group is: | | | | | |
|--|---|------------------|----------------|----------------------|---------------------------|
| | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
| Valid | 0 African (Black) | 450 | 2.3 | 2.3 | 2.3 |
| | 1 Asian | 399 | 2.0 | 2.0 | 4.3 |
| | 2 Caucasian (White) | 17012 | 86.0 | 86.2 | 90.5 |
| | 3 American Indian | 234 | 1.2 | 1.2 | 91.6 |
| | 4 Latino (Mexican American, Puerto Rican, Cuban, etc.) | 816 | 4.1 | 4.1 | 95.8 |
| | 5 Mixed/Biracial | 344 | 1.7 | 1.7 | 97.5 |
| | 6 Other (please specify) | 364 | 1.8 | 1.8 | 99.4 |
| | 7 | 126 | .6 | .6 | 100.0 |
| | Total | 19745 | 99.8 | 100.0 | |
| Missing | System | 39 | .2 | | |
| Total | | 19784 | 100.0 | | |

| V70 How much education have you completed? | | | | | |
|---|---|------------------|----------------|----------------------|---------------------------|
| | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
| Valid | 1 Less than high school | 198 | 1.0 | 1.0 | 1.0 |
| | 2 High school equivalency (GED) | 226 | 1.1 | 1.2 | 2.2 |
| | 3 High school diploma | 948 | 4.8 | 4.9 | 7.0 |
| | 4 Some college, not currently enrolled | 2055 | 10.4 | 10.6 | 17.6 |
| | 5 Some college, currently enrolled | 8744 | 44.2 | 44.9 | 62.5 |
| | 6 Associate's degree | 1320 | 6.7 | 6.8 | 69.3 |
| | 7 Bachelor's degree | 3082 | 15.6 | 15.8 | 85.1 |
| | 8 Graduate or professional degree, not completed | 1081 | 5.5 | 5.6 | 90.6 |
| | 9 Graduate or professional degree, completed | 1821 | 9.2 | 9.4 | 100.0 |
| | Total | 19475 | 98.4 | 100.0 | |
| Missing | System | 309 | 1.6 | | |
| Total | | 19784 | 100.0 | | |

The author also submitted the following articles as attachments to the memo:

Busby, D., Holman, T., and Taniguchi, Narumi. RELATE: Relationship Evaluation of the Individual, Family, Cultural, and Couple Contexts. *Family Relations* 50 (2001) 308-316.

Holman, T., Carroll, J., Draper, T., and Tobler, S. Attachment, Affect Regulation, and Adult Romantic Relationship Quality.

Holman, T. and Jarvis, M. Hostile, Volatile, Avoiding, and Validating Couple-conflict types: An Investigation of Gottman's Couple-Conflict Types. *Personal Relationships* 10 (2003) 267-282.

Intimate Violence and Relationship Health Michael P. Johnson, Pennsylvania State University¹

It has now been over 30 years since the second wave of the U.S. women's movement began to focus public policy on the problem of domestic violence, and it has been almost 30 years since the first National Family Violence Survey (NFVS) surprised us with its estimates of the prevalence of violence in marital relationships (Straus, 1977). Although there are some indications that rates of partner violence may have declined recently (Hitt, 2001), it is still reasonable to suggest that within any 12 month period one out of six marriages may experience some violence, and that over the course of an entire marriage the figure may be as high as 50% (Jones et al., 1999). One can hardly hope to understand the health of marriages in the U.S. without including some assessment of the prevalence and nature of this violence.

Of course, throughout these 30 years we have been measuring the violence in intimate relationships, from young people's dating relationships to marriages across the life cycle. The instrument most often used—by far—has been the Conflict Tactics Scales (CTS), which was developed around the time of the first NFVS in 1975 and has now provided assessments of partner violence in hundreds of studies (Straus, Hamby, Boney-McCoy, & Sugarman, 1996). The CTS, however, has been the target of considerable criticism for its narrow behavioral focus on the identification of specific violent acts that have occurred in the relationship (Dobash, Dobash, Wilson, & Daly, 1992). In my view, the most serious consequence of this narrow focus is lack of attention to the broader interpersonal context of the violence. This neglect has led to the conflating of dramatically different types of partner violence, and has produced a literature that is full of ostensible inconsistencies. What may be even more troubling is the possibility that even consistent findings, because they are based on data that treat intimate partner violence as if it were a unitary phenomenon, may not correctly represent any of the particular types of violence that individuals actually experience.

I have argued elsewhere for the need to distinguish among types of violence on the basis of the control contexts in which they are embedded (Johnson, 1995), and I have shown, using a number of different data sets, that the different types of violence have different causes, different developmental trajectories, and different consequences (Johnson, 1999, 2001, forthcoming, in press; Johnson, Conklin, & Menon, 2002; Johnson & Leone, in press; Leone, Johnson, & Cohan, 2003; Leone, Johnson, Cohan, & Lloyd, 2001). I have also shown that distinguishing among these types resolves some of the major inconsistencies in the literature. For example, it had long appeared that there was strong evidence both that intimate partner violence is gender symmetric and that it is gender asymmetric (Archer, 2000; Dobash et al., 1992; Straus, 1999). Distinguishing among types of violence, I have shown that one of the major types of intimate partner violence is primarily male-perpetrated (intimate terrorism, the type that predominates in agency samples), while another (situational couple violence, the type likely to dominate general survey samples) is gender symmetric (Johnson, 1999, 2001).

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This control typology of intimate partner violence includes three major types of violence. “Intimate terrorism” is violence embedded in a general pattern of coercive control. This is the violence that is encountered most often among shelter populations, in emergency rooms, and by law enforcement. In heterosexual relationships, it is perpetrated almost entirely by men, and it has been the basis of most “feminist” theorizing about the nature of domestic violence. “Situational couple violence” has a completely different interpersonal dynamic. It is a type of violence that is not about general control, but comes from the escalation of specific conflicts. General social surveys uncover mostly situational couple violence, and they have been the source of most “family violence” theorizing about the nature of domestic violence. Finally, neither of these two types of violence looks much like the “violent resistance” that we see among women trying to cope with their partner’s intimate terrorism.² The meaning and effects of acts of violence are a function of the type of control context in which they are embedded. Thus, the assessment procedures suggested below involve a combination of the CTS with other measures designed to establish the relational context of the violence.

Constructing the Control Typology of Intimate Partner Violence

The typology is somewhat unusual in terms of level of analysis, identifying individual-level types but taking into account dyadic information. *Intimate terrorism* involves an individual who is violent toward his/her partner and generally controlling within the relationship, and whose partner is not violent and controlling. *Violent resistance* involves an individual who is violent toward his/her partner but not controlling, and whose partner is an intimate terrorist (i.e., violent and controlling). An individual is involved in *common couple violence* if he/she is violent toward his/her partner but not controlling, and his/her partner is not violent and controlling. The partner may either be violent and not controlling or nonviolent—identifying two subtypes of common couple violence that may be important. *Mutual violent control* is involved when both partners are violent and controlling, essentially two intimate terrorists vying for general control over their partner (see footnote 1). Of course, there is a fifth type of individual who is *nonviolent* toward his or her partner.

Thus, the empirical construction of the typology requires information about both violence and control for *both* partners. In most cases, such information would be collected from one partner, although the ideal would be to collect all four pieces of information from each of the two partners (Szinovacz & Egley, 1995). For purposes of the typology, the CTS would be used only to establish whether an individual had or had not been violent toward his/her partner. The typology does not define types in terms of level of violence, but rather in terms of the control context within which the violence takes place (whatever the level of violence). Thus, all that is needed from the CTS is information regarding

² There is a fourth logically possible type, “mutual violent control,” consisting essentially of two intimate terrorists vying for control of their relationship. We know very little about this type, its frequency in the one sample in which it has been identified is quite small, and some theorists have questioned its very existence (Stark, in press). There is also a fifth type: non-violent.

whether the individual has ever (perhaps within the standard one-year time frame of the CTS) committed any of the violent acts included in the instrument.

The second piece of information required (for both partners) is whether the individual is generally controlling in the relationship. Below I will suggest the use of Tolman's Psychological Maltreatment of Women Inventory (PMWI) to gather this information. The problem with this piece of the puzzle is that one must make a decision about the level of control in which an individual must engage to be considered to be *generally* controlling. Remember that this typology is not single-incident-focused—it deals with the extent to which the individual is attempting to exert *general* control over his or her partner. Although a number of studies have used cluster analysis to establish these types (Graham-Kevan & Archer, 2003, in press; Johnson, 1999, 2001; Leone et al., 2001; Macmillan & Gartner, 1999), cluster analysis does not provide definitive criteria that could be used to maintain comparability of types across studies. Research that has used a cutoff on a measure of control has involved secondary analyses of data sets that used different questions to tap control (Johnson et al., 2002; Johnson & Leone, in press). Thus there is not yet a standard criterion for the establishment of generally controlling behavior within a relationship. Establishment of a standard cutoff for the PMWI could proceed through (a) a comparison of scores with the results of cluster analyses, (b) a search for an inflection in a curvilinear relationship with an important dependent variable such as Post-traumatic Stress Disorder, or (c) a more arbitrary cutoff based on a percentile in a “normative” sample.

Once each of the two individuals in the relationship has been classified in terms of violence and control, the dyadic information can be used to classify each individual in terms of the control typology of intimate partner violence.

Intimate Partner Violence, Relationship Health, and Child Development

One could reasonably argue that a violent relationship is by definition unhealthy. In addition, however, the occurrence of violence in a relationship is related to a variety of other indicators of relationship health, such as marital satisfaction and marital stability (Arias, Lyons, & Street, 1997; Fincham, Bradbury, Arias, Byrne, & Karney, 1997; Lawrence & Bradbury, 2001; Marshall, Weston, & Honeycutt, 2000; Rogge & Bradbury, 1999; Testa & Leonard, 2001). More importantly, research using the typology has shown that the effect of violence on a variety of individual and relationship outcomes is a function of the type of violence perpetrated (Johnson et al., 2002; Johnson & Leone, in press; Leone et al., 2001).

As for child development, there is an extensive literature on the negative effects of intimate partner violence on the children who witness it (Attala, Bauza, Pratt, & Vieira, 1995; Brandwein, 1998; Campbell & Lewandowski, 1997; Kolbo, Blakely, & Engleman, 1996; Widom, 1989; Wolak & Finkelhor, 1998). Although there are findings in this literature that would suggest that the impact of situational couple violence on children is different from the effects of intimate terrorism, as far as I know there are as yet no studies that directly test this hypothesis.

Measuring Violence and Control

The Revised Conflict Tactics Scales (see Appendix A). In response to decades of criticism, Murray Straus and his colleagues revised the CTS in the 1990s (all scale statistics reported below are from Straus et al., 1996). Appendix A includes the entire set of scales in the CTS, but I would suggest a focus on the Physical Assault Scale,³ the Sexual Coercion Scale, and the Injury Scale. The revised Physical Assault Scale, far-and-away the most widely used measure of intimate partner violence in family research, consists of 12 items with an alpha of .86. The new Sexual Coercion Scale is a response to the criticism that the CTS did not include sexual violence, often a major aspect of intimate terrorism. It has an alpha reliability of .87. The Injury Scale is a response to the criticism that that the narrow behavioral focus of the CTS items allowed dramatically different acts to be treated as identical. Imagine, for example, a 105 lb. woman slapping her 250 lb. husband, who laughs and breaks her jaw with a return slap; the CTS Physical Assault Scale does not distinguish between the two slaps. The Injury Scale has an alpha of .95.

Although the full CTS consists of 78 items (39 behaviors, each reported for both self and partner), the three scales recommended above would consist of 50 items. Twelve more items could be eliminated if instead of using the full seven-item Sexual Coercion Scale, one used only the most general violent sexual coercion item⁴ as an addition to the Physical Assault Scale.

The Psychological Maltreatment of Women Inventory (see Appendix B). The title of this scale is, in my view, something of a misnomer. The inventory appears to me to tap most of the elements of coercive control identified in the literature. Factor analyses of the scale have shown it to have two major dimensions. Tolman describes the first as a “dominance-isolation factor, which includes items dealing with isolation from resources, demands for subservience, and rigid observance of traditional sex roles” (Tolman, 1989, p. 106). The second dimension is described as “an emotional-verbal factor that includes verbal attacks, behavior that demeans the woman, and withholding of emotional resources” (Tolman, 1989, p. 106). The two subscales have been shown to discriminate among battered women, non-abused women in distressed marriages, and relationship-satisfied women. Although the 58-item version of the scale is hardly appropriate for survey research, there is a 14-item short form with alphas of .88 and .92 for the dominance-isolation and verbal-emotional subscales, respectively (Tolman, 1999). If each of the items were repeated for the behavior of self and partner, as required for the construction of the typology, the scale would consist of 28 items.

A New Coercive Control Measure. Finally, I would like to suggest that it might be useful to consider, as an alternative to the PMWI, a new coercive control scale being developed by Mary Ann Dutton and Lisa Goodman with a grant from the National Institute of Justice (Dutton & Goodman, 2002). The PMWI and other similar scales were developed essentially by compiling lists of the behaviors that battered women reported

³ Formerly known as the Violence Scale.

⁴ “Used force (like hitting, holding down, or using a weapon) to make my partner have sex.”

occurring in their relationships. Dutton and Goodman have approached the task more theoretically, using their analysis of the concept of coercive control to shape the development of scale items.

References

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Appendix B
Psychological Maltreatment of Women Inventory

Dominance-isolation Subscale

My partner accused me of having an affair with another man.

My partner interfered in my relationships with other family members.

My partner monitored my time and made me account for my whereabouts.

My partner tried to keep me from doing things to help myself.

My partner used our money or made important financial decisions without talking to me about it.

My partner was jealous or suspicious of my friends.

My partner restricted my use of the telephone.

Verbal-emotional Subscale

My partner yelled and screamed at me.

My partner treated me like an inferior.

My partner told me my feelings were irrational or crazy.

My partner tried to make me feel crazy.

My partner swore at me.

My partner blamed me for his problems.

Response format: never, rarely, sometimes, frequently, very frequently.

Conceptualization and Measurement of Positive Couple Relationships

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Conceptualizing Positive Couple Relationships

The proposed perspective on the conceptualization and measurement of positive couple relationships builds on earlier research and field work focused on engaging urban, poor, unwed young fathers in the lives of their children and families of procreation (Johnson, 2002; 2001). It is framed in consideration of factors that generally reflect the nature and evolving statuses of couple and parenting relationships among unwed parents. These factors include individual human and social capital qualities that often constitute complex family demographics among unwed parents, the existence and role of multiple partner fertility among unwed parenting relationships, the evolving role of families of origins on the couple relationships of young unwed parents, the observance of cultural norms and harsh economic realities that affect gender and parenting role expectations, gender distrust and non-legal relationship statuses. These factors meet head-on with public policies such as TANF, child support enforcement, health care, child care subsidies, housing assistance, taxes and EITC (Dion et al, 2003) and evolving family policies aimed at mandating traditional patterns of family formation among unwed parents that are perceived as more compatible with positive family and child wellbeing outcomes.

Positive couple relationships among unwed couples are conceptualized as a dynamic process as opposed to a static social status. Positive couple's relationships evolve as a result of individual commitments to mutual expectations and obligations regarding intimacy trust as well as the responsibilities of parenthood. The developmental and socioeconomic statuses of couples who are young, unwed parents, particularly those who are most sensitive to public policies like TANF, child care subsidies, housing assistance and EITC and evolving cultural norms, uniquely shape the quality, stability and durability of the couple relationship (Gibson et al, 2003; Waller, 2002; Johnson, 2002, 2001; Hamer, 2001; Johnson et al, 1999; Roy, 1999; Florsheim et al, 1997). Building and sustaining positive couple relationships among unwed parents mandate that couples focus on the following issues: gaining an understanding of their evolving self-identities in the context of multiple social roles as a partner in couple and as a parent, identify ways to enhance couple communication that enable them to express individual, couple and parenting needs, strengthen paternal connections to their children in instrumental and non-instrumental capacities by building individual and collective human and social capital skills; sustaining supportive relationships with members of the families of origin as well as peers; and building/improving the co-parenting relationships with former partners in order to sustain paternal involvement with children resulting from previous relationships .

In the absence of an established body of empirical, longitudinal research examining the nature of couple relationships among unwed parents, findings

from emerging studies like the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study (FFCWS) and the Time, Love, Cash, Care and Children Study (TLC3) provide the crucial lenses for conceptualizing and measuring positive couple relationships among unwed parents. The composition of cohabiting and non-cohabiting couples and parents, predominately low-income in social status, found in these quantitative and qualitative longitudinal studies more closely reflects the couple relationships, parenting and family life experiences of Americans who are targets of current and emerging public policies encouraging traditional family formation patterns which have been associated to improved individual, family and child wellbeing outcomes. In addition, carefully-constructed field studies aimed at examining parenting and couple relationships among low-income parents within the context of fatherhood and family development programs like the Young Fathers Initiative of Metropolitan Family Services in Chicago and the Father Resource Center in Indianapolis also provide important insight into individual and couple behavior that cannot be viewed from purely social research experimental studies.

Future research engaging these couple and parent relationships will enhance social science research and public policy practice toward better understanding the antecedents to positive couple relationships, multiple-level, intervention strategies aimed at building, strengthening and sustaining positive couple relationships, and pathways by which couple relationships among unwed parents, over time move to more secure and social sanctioned commitments to one another as a couple and to their children.

Measurement in Building and Sustaining Positive Couple Relationships

Assessing the quality and durability among couple relationships can prove difficult. The nature of the relationship among cohabiting couples is fundamentally different from the relationships of non-cohabiting couples. Yet, there are common characteristics and expectations in both statuses that undergird these relationships. Cohabitation is often viewed as baseline characteristic or expectation for assessing relationship quality, especially in terms of its likelihood to evolve into marriage, a traditional, socially sanctioned couple status. Cohabiting couples, at minimum, have made a commitment to not only reside together but to share resources and mutually assume obligations affecting the relationship. In doing so, the intimate relationship is intensified as a result of the shared experiences of the couple.

Yet, a number of cohabiting relationships evolve into non-cohabiting relationships over time in which sustaining contact and involvement with one another as parents is critical because of children resulting from those relationships. For many such couples, the evolution of their relationships not only affects co-residential status but also changes in feelings and emotions between partners in the couple relationship over time. This is especially true among young unwed parents. Sustaining a co-parenting relationship, when the romance and loving feelings are gone, poses a significant challenge if the young parents are more focused on meeting their evolving individual needs than those of their young children. Even as these young parents move into new couple relationships with

other individuals, they are challenged to sustain an evolving relationship with former partners with whom they may share parenting and other family responsibilities. Balancing between a budding new couple relationship with one's partner and a changing co-parenting relationship with a former partner can be daunting. The new couple relationship may not begin as a cohabiting one but may evolve into a cohabiting relationship over time.

In building a positive couple relationship, having a clear sense of self and personal and couple expectations regarding the relationship is critical. Field research findings from the Young Fathers Initiative suggests that a number of the young fathers had difficulty in building and sustaining a couple relationship with the mothers of their children because their social identities as young men, as fathers, and as partners in a couple relationship were still evolving and they were unclear about their personal expectations for themselves as well as their expectations for their relationships. The lack of personal goals and expectations for the couple relationship often results in a lack of structural boundaries within which the couple relationship operates. Relational immaturity, as identified by Gibson and her colleagues, is a major challenge to unwed couples' plans to move from cohabitation to marriage (Gibson, Edin and McLanahan, 2003). Arguably, relational immaturity poses an equally difficult challenge to sustaining positive unwed couple relationships, which are the antecedents to marital relationships. Similarly, recognition of personal expectations for the couple relationship enables each partner in the relationship to offer contributions toward the nature and structure of the couple relationship for subsequent discussion and resolution. It is critical that individuals desiring to build and sustain positive couple relationships have a clear sense of who they are and that they have realistic expectations of what they can obtain and experience in a couple relationship.

The acquisition of individual and collective human capital skills for building and sustaining positive couple relationships cannot be over-emphasized. The acquisition of these skills for low-income couples with children is crucial because the non-financial stressors associated with relationships in general can be exacerbated if financial stressors are chronic (Johnson, 2002; 2001). The individual and collective human capital contributions of partners to the couple relationship not only contributes toward building a sustaining economic base but an interdependent relationship in which the financial obligations are potentially shared by both partners. Evolving gender expectations regarding couple and parenting roles as well as a dynamic economic structure virtually mandate the acquisition of human capital skills for both partners to build and sustain a positive couple relationship.

Enhanced couple communication skills are equally important toward building and sustaining a positive couple relationship. Poor and inadequate couple communication skills were identified as one of the chief problems that plagued the parenting and couple relationships among unwed couples in the early phases of the TLC3 study (Johnson, 2002). Both men and women in the study expressed concern about their partners' inability to communicate about issues of intimacy, personal needs, and couple and parenting expectations. In

addition to reports that some individuals were unable to initiate discussion with their partners about needs and concerns, participants also reported difficulty in drawing their partners into discussions about their relationships. These findings suggest that individual and couple communication is key component to sustaining a positive couple relationship.

Supportive relationships with the couple's families of origin and peer networks that acknowledge and embrace the couple relationship are necessary in order to build and sustain positive couple relationships. Young unwed couples have seldom achieved full economic and emotional independence from their families of origin when their children are born. They often depend upon members of their families of origin for help and support via the provision of instrumental and material support, shelter, advice and counsel, etc. The dependence upon family members and peers for the above can also result in unintended consequences that can affect the relationship quality and duration (Johnson, 2002). It is critical that family members, especially the matriarchs and patriarchs, share the couple's goals for sustaining the relationship. Interference in the affairs of the couple relationship by family members and peers can undermine the relationship.

Among couple relationships where multiple couple fertility exists, disclosure, recognition and support of parents' involvement with their children and the parents of their children is crucial to building positive couple relationships. Disclosure regarding children resulting from previous relationships is crucial to developing trust within the current relationship. Upon disclosure, the quality of couple relationship will be enhanced if the other partner acknowledges and extends support for the paternal/maternal role. It is important that parents be supported by their partners in the current relationship to become and sustain involvement with their children evolving out of previous relationships. Involvement with children outside the couple relationship can exert financial as well as emotional challenges to the current couple relationship that are best addressed by both individuals in the couple relationship. Interacting with the parents of one's children outside the couple relationship can potentially pose the greatest challenge to building trust and fidelity as well as sustaining positive couple relationship that is evolving. On-going involvement with individuals with which the child is a physical reminder of the previous relationship may be difficult for the parent as well as a source of tension in the relationship for the other partner. Creating an environment in which frank and honest communication between partners in the couple relationships occurs strengthens the bonds of the relationship. It will encourage partners to share their concerns and problems more freely and openly and potentially ward off any concerns of trust and infidelity that may be conjured up by on-going involvement with previous partners who are now co-parents.

Limitations of Proposed Measurement

The measurements proposed in this memo are conceptualized for building and sustaining positive couple relationships among low-income populations. While some of the measurements might be appropriate for assessing the quality

of couple relationships among couples of varying socioeconomic statuses, these constructs are designed specifically to address issues and factors that affect couple relationship quality among low-income couples where children may already exist.

The measurements are presented as constructs, not specific scales, questionnaires or indexes that can be tested or administered. Although the measures are framed from research findings based on urban, low-income populations (primarily African American), they have broad utility for other populations as well, particularly racial and ethnic groups who are disproportionately impoverished in the United States. They are conceptualized as largely self-report measures but could be modified for observational purposes as well.

These measures are especially adaptable for prison/jail populations who are also disproportionately poor and people of color. If one of the partners in the couple relationship is incarcerated, then the relationship is not a cohabiting relationship and the absence of that partner may pose numerous challenges to sustaining the relationship. Incarceration is a barrier to paternal involvement in terms of proximity, communication and a barrier to the couple relationship in terms of the relationship with the inmate's partner (Curren and Johnson, 2003). Similar concerns may arise among visiting couples where the "freedom" to cohabit may seem possible for concerns regarding maturity, fidelity, and role performance may be major constraints. As previously stated, these measures are proposed based on empirical research findings based on population samples of unwed parents although the measures are also appropriate for unwed couples without children whose human capital and socioeconomic statuses parallel those specified here. The measures proposed also address issues of co-parenting after relationship dissolution. Helping parents to develop healthy co-parenting relationships with their former partners are not only important to sustain positive involvement with their children, it is also important in developing a positive couple relationship with their new partners.

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MEMORANDUM

TO: Susan Jekielek, Ph.D. / Child Trends
FROM: Katherine Kitzmann, Ph.D., Leslie Nicholson, M.S., Lisa Schum, M.S. / U. of Memphis
RE: Conceptualization and Measurement of Co-Parenting after Divorce
DATE: September 15, 2003

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the upcoming Measurement and Family Demography conference. The conference's focus on defining and measuring positive aspects of marital and other couple relationships is an important one. Here, we focus on the conceptualization and measurement of co-parenting as it occurs after divorce.

Although in the legal sense divorce refers to a single event (i.e., the dissolution of a marriage contract), the family's experience of divorce entails a long process of change leading up to and following the divorce. For many families, this renegotiation of family relationships (Emery, 1994) involves significant shifts in which parents terminate their spousal relationship while continuing to interact for the purposes of childrearing. Child adjustment after divorce is thought to be influenced in part by parents' success in redefining, enacting, and coordinating their new parental roles in the post-divorce environment (Ahrons, 1981). However, longitudinal research suggests that one and a half years after marital separation, only about a quarter of couples can be described as cooperative, and for many couples, high levels of conflict or disengagement interfere with effective co-parenting (Maccoby & Mnookin, 1992).

Research on post-divorce co-parenting is important for several reasons. Sixty percent of divorces involve children (National Center for Health Statistics, 1995), many of whom continue to have contact with both parents through visitation and shared custody agreements. Joint physical custody—in which children divide their time at least 30/70 between the two parents—is an increasingly common arrangement. In addition, an increasing number of divorce agreements are settled through mediation, in which there may be more opportunity to address parenting-related issues than would be the case in agreements settled through litigation. Divorcing couples are now commonly required to develop a parenting plan as part of the divorce agreement, and many divorcing parents are required to attend parenting classes that address the importance of the co-parenting relationship. Finally, two decades of research suggest that child adjustment is associated with the quality of post-divorce co-parenting (Amato, 1993).

Conceptualization of Co-Parenting after Divorce

McHale (1997) has described co-parenting as an “intuitively understood, but not always well-defined, construct in family research” (p. 184). Research interest in the concept of co-parenting has increased substantially in the last two decades. One of the earliest references to this concept defined the co-parental relationship as a relationship between parents that allows them to meet their childrearing responsibilities after divorce (Bohannon, 1970). Co-Parenting has become increasingly prominent in the divorce and family process literature. A search of the PsycInfo database of articles, book chapters, and dissertations related to co-parenting produced 13 references in the 1980s, 58 in the 1990s, and already 42 since 2000. Over time, two notable changes have occurred in this literature. First, there has been a shift away from defining co-

parenting simply as the absence of interparental conflict, toward a definition of co-parenting that includes the presence of positive behaviors such as support and effective negotiation. Second, new efforts are being made to distinguish co-parenting as it occurs in multiple family contexts, including co-parenting between married couples, between single mothers and other adults involved in childrearing, and between couples in two-mother and two-father families.

Although there is conceptual overlap among co-parenting, interparental conflict, and the quality of parent-child relations (McConnell & Kerig, 2002), these are considered distinct constructs. First, co-parenting is not defined simply by the presence or absence of conflict about parenting (although in practice, it is often operationalized by researchers as such). Positive co-parenting is a multi-dimensional construct, defined not just by the absence of conflict but also by the presence of behaviors such as support, a fair division of labor, positive attitudes and feelings, effective communication, and negotiation skills (Van Egeren, 2003). Second, co-parenting is not defined simply by the presence or absence of discrepancies in parents' views on childrearing or parents' behavior when alone with the child. Rather, co-parenting is conceptualized in terms of a range of behaviors, both during triadic interactions when the parents and child are all together and during dyadic parent-child interactions that occur in the absence of the other parent (McHale, 1997; McHale, Kuersten-Hogan, Lauretti & Rasmussen, 2000).

Conceptualizations of post-divorce co-parenting must also take time-related variables into account, including child age and time since divorce. Although many children continue to have contact with the noncustodial parent during the first year or two after divorce, this contact diminishes over time (Furstenberg, 1990), especially in families with lower levels of cooperative co-parenting (Durst, Wedemeyer & Zurcher, 1985). In addition, because most divorced adults remarry, co-parenting must often be coordinated between two sets of parents. Finally, although the quality of co-parenting has been shown to predict adjustment in both younger and older children (McConnell & Kerig, 2002), the specific parenting practices that reflect positive co-parenting may vary in response to the developmental needs of the child (Schum, 2003).

Numerous studies have shown co-parenting characterized by high cooperation and low conflict to predict children's post-divorce adjustment (Amato, 1993; Ellwood & Stolberg, 1993; Lengua, Wolchik & Braver, 1995), even two years after divorce (Hetherington, Cox & Cox, 1982). Interestingly, there has been little investigation of variables that predict positive post-divorce co-parenting. Baum (2003) has suggested that the quality of post-divorce co-parenting is influenced by many variables including which parent initiated the divorce, the extent of divorce-related legal difficulties, family size and socioeconomic status, length of marriage, presence of remarriage, and each parent's adjustment. Together, these results highlight the need to conceptualize co-parenting in terms of developmental processes as they unfold over time, taking into account changes that accompany remarriage and the creation of new stepfamilies.

Measurement of Co-Parenting after Divorce

The above comments make clear that co-parenting is best conceptualized as a multidimensional construct and that the measurement of co-parenting should take into account time-related variables such as the age of the child and time since divorce. Nevertheless, researchers commonly operationalize co-parenting in terms of a single dimension, namely the presence or absence of interparental conflict. In addition, most measures of post-divorce co-parenting do not yet distinguish co-parenting as it occurs in families of younger vs. older children. In addition, for the most part these measures do not yet distinguish co-parenting during the transition to divorce from co-parenting as it occurs after divorce (and as it occurs during the transition to remarriage and step-parenting). These developmental issues are important both for understanding continuity and change in co-parenting over time, and for developing interventions that would target co-parenting behaviors appropriate for the child's age.

Parent self-report measures are the most common means of assessing the post-divorce coparental relationship. Of these, Ahrons' (1981) Quality of Coparental Communication Scale is the most commonly used. Only one child-report measure of co-parenting after divorce was identified in the literature, Stolberg's (1997) Co-Parenting Behaviors Questionnaire (CBQ). There are currently no observational methods specific to assessing post-divorce co-parenting, which is unsurprising given the many practical impediments to conducting research on divorced couples. Nevertheless, observational methods may provide a helpful complement to questionnaire measures in evaluations of the effectiveness of court-ordered parenting classes and other interventions for families of divorce. McHale's (1995) Coparenting and Family Rating System (CFRS), developed for research on married families, may provide a foundation for the development of a rating system appropriate for evaluating co-parenting in the post-divorce context. Together, parent self-reports, child self-reports, and observational measures provide a useful array of assessment tools. In the sections below we provide more information about three measures that exemplify each of these approaches to the assessment of co-parenting.

Parent Self-Report

The Quality of Coparental Communication Scale (Ahrons, 1981) is a 10-item self-report measure in which divorced spouses indicate the frequency with which they agree with their former spouse about parenting issues. The items appear in **Appendix A**. Each item is rated on a 5-point Likert-type scale, ranging from *never* to *always*. The measure is composed of two subscales: Coparental Conflict (four items reflecting conflict, hostility, tension, and disagreements) and Coparental Support (six items reflecting accommodation, helpfulness, and resourcefulness). The Conflict subscale (reversed) and the Support subscale are combined to represent the parent's perceptions of the quality of the co-parenting relationship, with higher scores indicating low conflict and high support.

Ahrons (1981) reported adequate internal consistency, with Cronbach alphas of .88 for the Conflict scale and .74 for the Support scale. Evidence for validity comes from research showing total scores to be correlated about .5 with clinician ratings of interparental conflict and support (Ahrons, 1981), as well as research showing the Conflict and Support subscales to be correlated with parallel subscales of McHale's (1997) self-report co-parenting scale. Scores on

the Quality of Coparental Communication scale have also been shown to predict parents' shared decision making and parent-child involvement (Ahrons, 1983; Ahrons, 1993; Bowman & Ahrons, 1985) and children's post-divorce adjustment (Dozier, Sollie, Stack & Smith, 1993).

The Quality of Coparental Communication Scale is a brief, divorce-specific measure that is easily administered, making it useful for clinicians and researchers. The items reflect a combination of questions about specific behaviors (e.g., frequency of arguments about parenting) and questions about perceptions of the co-parental relationship (e.g., support and tension). Further psychometric work, including norms for clinical and community populations of divorced spouses, would improve this scale's utility.

Child Self-Report

The Co-Parenting Behavior Questionnaire (CBQ) is a child-report measure of parenting behaviors and competencies specific to the post-divorce environment (Stolberg, 1999). Construction of the measure was tied closely to theoretical conceptions and empirical findings in post-divorce child adjustment and parenting, and was based on rigorous psychometric analysis. On this measure children rate the frequency of 76 parenting behaviors using a 5-point scale ranging from *almost never* to *almost always*. These items reflect 12 subscales: Parental Conflict, Triangulation, Parental Communication, Parental Respect, Father's Warmth, Father-Child Communication, Father's Monitoring, Father's Discipline, Mother's Warmth, Mother-Child Communication, Mother's Monitoring, and Mother's Discipline. Example items from each of these subscales are presented in **Appendix B**.

Alpha coefficients for the 12 subscales have been reported as ranging from .82 to .93 (Mullett & Stolberg, 1999), and short-term test-retest analyses have shown Spearman's rho coefficients ranging from .47 to .83 (Schum, 2003). Factor analysis and cross-validation procedures (Mullett & Stolberg, 1999; Schum, 2003) showed that the 12 co-parenting subscales reflect four higher-order factors: Parental Hostility, Parental Cooperation, Mothering, and Fathering. Norms for the 12 subscales and 4 higher-order scales were developed based on a standardization sample of 470 children ages 10-18 with divorced parents (Schum, 2003). Scores on the CBQ have been shown to account for 15-36% of the variance in measures of child behavior problems, self-esteem, anxiety, and depression (Macie & Stolberg, 2002).

The strengths of the CBQ include its rigorous psychometric analysis and the availability of norms for community samples. A standardized instrument of co-parenting has strong research and clinical potential. At this stage in standardization, however, the usefulness of the CBQ has limits. Norms based on a clinical sample would improve score interpretability, particularly when used in a clinical context. Furthermore, the standardization of a parent-report version would provide informative supplemental data about the post-divorce familial triad.

Observational Ratings

The Coparenting and Family Rating System (CFRS) is an observational rating system based on structural family theory (Minuchin, 1974), used to rate the interactions of families with infants, preschoolers, and elementary school age children (McHale, Kuersten-Hogan & Lauretti,

2001). Although this scale has been used in research on a variety of family forms, it has not yet been used to describe co-parenting in the post-divorce context. We describe the CFRS in order to provide ideas about the use of observational ratings for such a purpose.

CFRS coders use five-point Likert-type scales with behavioral anchors to rate videotaped triadic family interactions during a variety of tasks. The five basic scales are Cooperation, Coparental Competition, Verbal Sparring, Coparental Warmth, and Child-Centeredness (McHale et al., 2000). The quality of mother-child and father-child interactions are also coded to assess overall family warmth and discrepancies between each parent's level of engagement during the triadic task. An example of one CFRS code is presented in **Appendix C**. With appropriate training, coders show adequate inter-rater reliability, with intraclass correlations of .64 to .87 (McHale et al., 2001). CFRS ratings have been found to be correlated with frequency of father-infant play, discrepancies in parents' views about parenting, interparental conflict, and scores on the Family Environment Scale (McHale et al. 2001). CFRS ratings have also been shown to predict toddlers' happiness, warmth, and approach behaviors (Lauretti, Connell, Hill & Mchale, 1999), and older children's anxiety and externalizing problems (McConnell & Kerig, 2002).

Despite being time- and labor-intensive, the CFRS appears to be a useful tool for conducting observational research on co-parenting in community samples of intact families. Although this measure was not developed for use with divorced parents, it provides a foundation for the development of observational coding systems specific to the post-divorce context.

Concluding Comments

This brief review highlights the interdependence of conceptual and measurement issues related to co-parenting in the context of divorce. Although researchers have attempted to distinguish co-parenting from other family processes, at this point there is no consensus on what constitutes co-parenting. This means that measures often assess different co-parenting domains, making it difficult to compare results across studies. An important next-step in this literature will be to include multiple measures (including data from multiple informants) in a factor analysis, as a way to identify (or test for) meaningful components of the co-parenting construct.

A second concern is that although co-parenting is generally conceptualized in terms of family systems theory, there are no well-developed theoretical models of the mechanisms that would explain links between co-parenting and child outcomes (as is the case, for example, in the literature on interparental conflict). Such models will necessarily shape how co-parenting is operationally defined and measured in future research. Part of this work will depend on attention to co-parenting as it occurs in the context of various family forms. This will require the "translation" of measures for use in multiple contexts.

This review has described several measures of co-parenting that show evidence of reliability and validity. Ideally, one or more standardized measures will emerge that can be used both for research as well as clinical purposes. These tools will be especially useful for assessing the effectiveness of interventions for divorced families, particularly interventions that use active teaching methods to coach parents on specific co-parenting skills (Buehler, Betz, Ryan, Legg, & Trotter, 1992).

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Appendix A: Quality of Coparental Communication

Coparental Conflict Scale

1. When you and your former spouse discuss parenting issues how often does an argument result?
2. How often is the underlying atmosphere one of hostility or anger?
3. How often is the conversation stressful or tense?
4. Do you and your former spouse have basic differences of opinion about issues related to child rearing?

Coparental Support Subscale

1. If your former spouse has needed to make a change in visiting arrangements, do you go out of your way to accommodate?
2. Does your former spouse go out of the way to accommodate any changes you need to make?
3. Do you feel that your former spouse understands and is supportive of your special needs as a custodial (or non-custodial) parent?
4. When you need help regarding the children, do you seek it from your former spouse?
5. Would you say that your former spouse is a resource to you in raising the children?
6. Would you say that you are a resource to your former spouse in raising the children?

This measure was developed for the Binuclear Family Study (Project # R01 MH 34397) NIMH Research Grant, Postdivorce Relationships: The Binuclear Family. Each item is rated on a 5-point Likert-type scale, ranging from *never* to *always*. Items were made available by Constance Ahrons (personal communication, September 11, 2003).

Appendix B: Example Items from the Co-Parenting Behavior Questionnaire (CBQ)

| Scale | Example Item |
|------------------------------|--|
| Conflict | When my parents talk to each other, they get angry. |
| Triangulation Scale | When my parents argue, I feel forced to choose sides. |
| Parental Respect/Cooperation | My mom wants me to be close to my dad. |
| Co-parental Communication | My parents talk to each other about my problems. |
| Father's Warmth | My dad likes being with me. |
| Mother's Warmth | I feel that my mom cares about me. |
| Father Monitoring | When I leave the house, my dad knows where I am and who I am with. |
| Mother Monitoring | My mom knows who my friends are and what they are like. |
| Father Discipline | I have rules to follow at my dad's house. |
| Mother Discipline | When I do something wrong, my mom talks to me about it. |
| Father-Child Communication | I talk to my dad about my problems. |
| Mother-Child Communication | My mom and I have friendly talks. |

From Stolberg, A.L. (1999). *The Co-parenting Behavior Questionnaire*. Unpublished instrument, Virginia Commonwealth University. Each item is rated on a 5-point scale, ranging from *almost never* to *almost always*. Items were made available by the author (personal communication, September 12, 2003).

Appendix C: Example Code from the Co-Parenting and Family Rating System (CFRS)

Co-Parenting Rating #1: Active competition between parents.

Competition is a variable that was developed to reflect non-verbal behavior that sends mixed messages to children; parents' verbalizations may help in the assignment of a ranking, but verbal antagonism in and of itself is *not* competition. Most partners show low levels of overt competition; when it occurs, it tends to be subtle. However, a few partners will clearly try to out-do one another during certain games, suggest changing games when it appears the child is enjoying herself in an activity with the other parent, pick up the child and move her physically closer to him or her, respond to the other parent's request to come play a game by suggesting an alternative activity, begin bouncing a ball, clanging a bell, animating a puppet or doll, or engaging in some new behavior as a ruse to distract the child from what she is doing with the other parent (a non-verbal equivalent of "I'm bored, come play with me"), mocking an activity suggested by the other parent, and so on. In most families, within a 30-45 minute play session, such activities may occur once or twice. In such cases, scores of "2" or "3" (not "1," which literally reflects absolutely no instances of competition) are appropriate.

"4"s and "5"s are reserved for families for whom coders are convinced of an underlying theme of competitiveness or desires to be "the most important one" to the child during the play session. Parental agendas clearly seem to be at odds, and parents actively try to sway the session in their direction. Scores of "4" go to parents who demonstrate these tendencies, but occasionally attempt to curb their tendencies by turning activities over to the other parent in a seemingly genuine way ("why don't you and day play that for a while"). "5"s go to parents who are primarily interested in being the director and relatively uninterested in stepping aside for the other. To be clear: a family receiving a "5" need not jockey for control through an entire session, or even for most of it. However, it is quite clear from the earliest moments of the session that competing agendas are the modus operandi.

1. Absolutely no instances of competition.
2. One brief instance of one parent overriding the other, drawing the child's attention away from the other, suggesting a game switch, etc. Otherwise, session is free of competition.
3. Two such instances in an otherwise unremarkable session.
4. More than two episodes of jockeying for control, but with some mild awareness and attempts to countermand this proclivity.
5. Excessive jockeying with no such insight.

From McHale, J. P., Kuesten-Hogan, R., & Lauretti, A. (2001). Evaluating coparenting and family-level dynamics during infancy and early childhood: The Coparenting and Family Rating System. In P. K. Kerig & K. M. Lindahl (Eds), *Family Observational Coding Systems: Resources for Systemic Research* (pp. 166-167). Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Religion and Healthy Marriages

Memo Prepared for Report on Conceptualization and Measurement
of Healthy Marriages and Positive Relationships

Daniel T. Lichter, Christie D. Batson, and Leanna M. Mellott
September 23, 2003

September 23, 2003

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Dear Kris:

This is a response to your request for thoughts and suggestions about how best to conceptualize and measure “healthy marriages.” My understanding is that you will summarize this material for inclusion in a report presented at the upcoming conference on “Measurement and Family Demography” in Washington, DC. Thank you for the opportunity to become involved in this effort. I have enlisted the assistance of Christie Batson and Leanna Mellott, who also have co-signed this letter. Both are completing their Ph.D’s in Sociology at The Ohio State University, and are very interested in this topic.

For the many reasons discussed below, we believe it is more important than ever to consider religion and religiosity in current debates over marriage promotion, and in the conceptualization of healthy marriages. While religion is neither a necessary nor sufficient condition for a successful relationship or marriage, we believe that the social science community can no longer relegate religion or spirituality to the backwaters of scholarship on marriage. Religion is a guiding force in the lives – including married lives -- of most Americans. In this letter, we will provide some background discussion on this issue, especially as religion relates to welfare policy. We will outline some of the major reasons why religion may be a key component to building and maintaining healthy marriages. We then provide an inventory of measures of religiosity (behavior and beliefs), as well as measures of marital quality, that are included in current nationally representative family and demographic surveys. Finally, we briefly discuss next steps for better measurement of religiosity, especially as it relates to the strengthening of marriages and families.

The topic of “healthy marriages” is obviously an important one from a public policy standpoint. As you know, one of the main goals of the 1996 Temporary

Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) is to increase self-sufficiency among low-income mothers by “encouraging the formation and maintenance of two-parent families.” The states have not done much in this regard. The Bush administration has now proposed setting aside \$300 million annually for marriage promotion demonstration programs and evaluation under the legislation to reauthorize Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). The revised goal is "to encourage the formation and maintenance of *healthy* two parent married families and responsible fatherhood" (our emphasis). The House passed “The Personal Responsibility, Work, and Family Promotion Act of 2003” (H.R. 4) in February 2003. The legislation will greatly expand the government’s role in marriage formation by mandating that all states establish marriage targets and specific programs to promote marriage. Much of the money will be for marriage education and program evaluation. DHHS’s Assistant Secretary of Planning and Evaluation, Wade Horn, has consistently emphasized the importance of “healthy marriage” for children’s well-being; the goal should not be one of simply increasing the nation’s marriage rates. For policy makers and researchers, the obvious question is: What is a “healthy marriage”?

Our view is that any discussion of “healthy marriage” and positive intimate relationships needs to consider the role of religion and religiosity. According to some (Browning and Rodriguez 2002), marriage is a “multidimensional institution that historically has been seen to have natural, contractual, social, and religious dimensions.” Marriage is viewed not only as a private decision made by individuals, but as a public good that has positive consequences for families, children, and society as a whole. Religious organizations in particular are increasingly concerned about the state of marriage in the United States. This makes good sense. The majority of Americans identify themselves as members of a particular religious denomination, express a belief in God, and regularly attend religious services. Some estimates suggest that 80 percent of America’s weddings are performed by clergy in churches, synagogues, and mosques. Faith-based groups are central to many recent efforts in preparing individuals for marriage and providing support to those already married. Religion clearly should be examined more closely as a contributing factor in maintaining a healthy and positive relationship. To many Americans, marriage is a “sacred covenant.” It is much less clear what the government’s role should be in this regard.

A report released by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services outlines the various approaches taken to promote healthy marriage (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services 2002). Many of these programs have some voluntary religious component. For example, Florida and Minnesota offer reductions in marriage license fees if couples complete pre-marital education programs, which may be provided by religious institutions. In 2001, South Carolina set up a commission to develop policies to support marriage and family, including faith-based mentoring programs (Gardiner et. al. 2002). The state of Oklahoma announced that \$10 million in federal welfare block grant funds would be used to encourage healthy, stable marriages as a means of reducing divorce and unwed childbearing. In 2000, the leaders of almost every religious denomination in Oklahoma joined together to pledge their commitment to work toward preparing couples for the complexities of marriage. To date, 800 faith leaders in 66 of the state’s 77 counties have signed a marriage covenant to encourage more pre-marital

counseling/education (Gardiner et. al. 2002). Other programs, including Families Northwest in Washington, strive to educate members of the clergy on the various needs of the members of their congregations, while the Marriage Savers organization seeks to develop mentoring relationships between couples in congregations.

Researchers have recognized the potential role of religion in supporting family well-being and marital stability and adjustment (Abbott et al. 1990; Robinson and Blanton 1993; Filsinger and Wilson 1984). The organizational aspects of religion must be separated from religious beliefs, values, and expression. Many studies show that religiosity is associated with better mental health, greater well-being, and less stress (Williams 1991). Religious beliefs are thought to provide a sense of meaning or personal identity, or to enhance self-efficacy in the face of stressful life events that might otherwise induce a sense of anomie. Some argue that religion fosters a sense of optimism and reduces depression and its effects (Idler 1987). Religious beliefs may provide an individual with a basis for explaining or even resolving problematic situations. Thus, one's religious beliefs (e.g., beliefs in a loving God and a hereafter) may help sustain an individual in stressful situations and, organizationally, provide them with a network of faith-based social support.

Indeed, because the relationship between religiosity and well-being (mental health, physical health, marital stability, etc) may operate through a network of social support, we argue that social scientists should examine how these networks influence individuals' decisions regarding marriage and relationships. According to a social comparison model, individuals evaluate their attitudes and beliefs by comparing them to those of others (Bryant and Conger 1999). Such comparisons provide a standard on which individuals base their decisions. Thus, network members and social support systems can prove to be valuable sources of strength and information for individuals facing difficult or problematic relationships. The faith community may influence marital and cohabiting relationships by helping partners acquire knowledge about each other, serving as standards of comparison or sending messages of disapproval for particular relationships. Some studies suggest that individuals who perceive greater support from friends and family for their relationship report higher subsequent commitment (Sprecher and Felmlee 1992). These findings demonstrate that positive feedback from social group members is a critical factor in relationship outcomes. They also suggest the need for additional studies of the effects of faith-based social support on relationship formation, relationship quality, and relationship.

Abbott et al. (1990) suggest that Judeo-Christian traditions emphasize self-sacrifice, self-control, and forgiveness, all of which may contribute to improvements in marital quality. These values are recognized by the subjects themselves, who report that their religions teach them skills that improve their communication, allow them to resolve family conflicts, and increase their commitment to and support of family members (Abbott et al. 1990; Robinson and Blanton 1993). Studies show that faith institutions provide a venue for prosocial behavior, such as volunteerism, which may also reinforce positive interactions between spouses (Lichter, Shanahan, and Gardner 2002). Finally, participation in religious activities or organizations may provide couples with an outlet

for dealing with stress and conflict. While couples may not be comfortable in seeking outside help for problems within their relationships, they may trust their clergy or other members of their congregations to provide counseling or other assistance (Abbott et al. 1990). These studies, however, rely on small convenience samples and are aimed toward an audience of practitioners, rather than academic researchers. In addition, Robinson and Blanton (1993) suggest that religion is not the “overriding factor” that influences marital quality. Rather, religion influences such factors as intimacy, commitment, and communication, which, in turn, benefit the marital relationship. Likewise, Waite and Lehrer (2003) suggest that religion influences other aspects of marriage, such as the upbringing and education of children, the cultivation of social relationships, and even the place of residence for couples. Mahoney, Pargament, Tarakeshwar, and Swank (2001) echo this view. Their meta-analysis of the literature on the links between religion and marriage suggests that individual religiosity is consistently associated with commitment within marriage.

A recent study using data from the Fragile Families and Child Well-Being Study (Wilcox and Wolfinger 2002) is a step in the right direction in examining the association between religious behavior and beliefs about personal relationships. The findings of this study suggest that attendance at religious services is associated with a higher probability of marriage among women with a nonmarital birth. Much of this relationship appears to operate through “the beliefs and behaviors fostered by religious institutions” (Wilcox and Wolfinger 2002, p. 22). These may include a normative commitment to marriage and a lack of conflict over issues of fidelity. However, this analysis is limited to mothers in urban areas. Mothers who marry prior to the births of their children also are not asked about their religious participation until after they have married, making it impossible to determine causality in this relationship. Nonetheless, this study is important in its recognition of both the normative and behavioral aspects of religious participation that may influence entrance into marriage. Obviously, the government cannot legislate religious behavior and beliefs, even if it indirectly benefits couples. But, as some observers suggest, it can help faith-based organizations better serve the faithful and the broader community through outreach.

Future research should consider the possibility that religion and religiosity not only affect the likelihood of marriage, but the quality and stability of marriage. Unfortunately, current nationally representative data sets are limited in their measurement of marital quality and religious behavior and beliefs. For example, the 2000 wave of the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth-1979 includes a series of questions on the frequency of various events between the respondent and his/her spouse or cohabiting partner (See Appendix A). The survey’s questions on religion include the religious denomination in which respondents and their spouses or partners were raised, their current religious affiliation, and their frequency of attendance at religious services. However, such questions do not address larger issues, such as the value that individuals place on the marital relationship, the commitment that partners feel toward one another, major relationship problems, such as distrust or a lack of respect for one’s partner, and the role of religion in the lives of respondents and their spouses. Although not yet released, the 2003 National Survey of Families and Households will allow for a greater

understanding of relationship quality by examining such issues as fairness between spouses, amount of time spent together, frequency and topic of disagreements, and their overall chances of divorce (see appendix). Again, however, the data on religiosity is limited.

In keeping with the limitations of existing nationally representative data, Mahoney et al. (2001) find that most studies on the links between religion and marriage include only a single indicator of religiosity, such as frequency of attendance at religious services. They suggest that stronger relationships are found when researchers consider the “personal relevance of religion” (Mahoney et al. 2001, p. 568). For example, Mahoney, Pargament, Jewell, Swank, Scott, Emery, and Rye (1999) find that individuals’ views on the sanctity of marriage, including the perception that marriage has sacred qualities and is a manifestation of God, are associated with increased marital adjustment and lower conflict. Hatch, James, and Schumm (1986) examine the role of spiritual intimacy, such as a belief that one’s spouse shares the same views of God and a feeling of closeness with one’s spouse during worship. While not directly related to marital satisfaction, spiritual intimacy operates indirectly through emotional intimacy, such as a belief that one’s spouse understands their feelings.

In sum, in light of the recent focus on marriage promotion, and the role played by faith-based organizations in these programs, we recommend that social scientists more systematically consider the role of religious activity and beliefs in cohabiting and marital unions, the stability of unions, and relationship quality. Previous studies using nationally representative data typically focus on a small number of religious measures, such as frequency of participation in religious activities. Furthermore, many studies examine religiosity and relationship quality at only one point in time, rather than taking a longitudinal or life course approach. Two notable exceptions include the work of Booth et al. (1995) and Call and Heaton (1997). Both of these studies use nationally representative data from two time points. For example, Call and Heaton (1997) find that higher levels of church attendance at the time of the initial interview reduce the likelihood of divorce by the time of the second interview. Booth et. al (1995) find little evidence that changes in religious activity influence marital relations, but limitations to this study should be addressed in future work. For example, the two time periods are only four years apart, and the study does not consider factors that may influence both religiosity and marital quality, including the presence and age of children, educational attainment of spouses, and income. These variables, as well as the possibility of indirect relationships between religion and marriage, must be considered in future studies.

If we are to understand “healthy marriages” and “positive relationships” we can no longer overlook the role of religiosity and spiritual belief in individuals’ views of marriage, their feelings and commitment toward their spouses, and their overall family functioning. Although the government cannot promote particular religions or religious beliefs, it can learn from the kinds of values and beliefs instilled by the faith community, which may be transferred to marriage education programs. Thus, we recognize the possibility that religiosity and spirituality may play an important role in shaping relationship quality (albeit positively or negatively). As such, it is our responsibility as

social scientists to examine this relationship without preconceptions regarding the role of religion in family lives.

I hope this discussion is useful to you as you grapple with the issue of “healthy marriage.” Let us know if you have additional questions or issue to consider.

Sincerely,

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Leanna M. Mellott
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APPENDIX A. Measures of Religiosity and Relationship Quality using NLSY-79 (2000) and NSFH 2003.

NLSY79 (2000 wave)

| SUBJECT | VARIABLES | RESPONSES | UNIVERSE |
|-----------------------------|--|---|--|
| Relationship Quality | | | |
| | How often do you and your spouse/partner... | | |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Calmly discuss something? • Laugh together? • Tell each other about your day? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Almost every day • Once or twice a week • Once or twice a month • Less than once a month | Females who are married or in cohabiting relationships |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have arguments about chores and responsibilities? • Have arguments about your children? • Have arguments about money? • Have arguments about showing affection to each other? • Have arguments about religion? • Have arguments about leisure or Free time? • Have arguments about drinking? • Have arguments about other women? • Have arguments about his/her Relatives? • Have arguments about your relatives? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Often • Sometimes • Hardly • Never | Females who are married or in cohabiting relationships |
| | Respondent's degree of happiness with marriage or relationship | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very happy • Fairly happy • Not too happy | Females who are married or in cohabiting relationships |

NLSY79 (2000 wave)

| SUBJECT | VARIABLES | RESPONSES | UNIVERSE |
|----------|--|---|-----------------|
| Religion | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In what religion was respondent raised? • In what religion was spouse/partner raised? • What is respondent's present religion? • What is spouse/partner's current religion? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protestant • Baptist • Episcopalian • Lutheran • Methodist • Presbyterian • Roman Catholic • Jewish • Other (specify) • None | All respondents |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Frequency of respondent's attendance at religious services in past year • Frequency of spouse/partner's attendance at religious services | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More than once a week • About once a week • 2-3 times a month • about once a month • several times a year or less • not at all | All respondents |

NSFH 2003 (to be released late Fall 2003)

| SUBJECT | VARIABLES | UNIVERSE |
|---------------|---|--|
| Relationships | | |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Life now compared to if were married • Satisfaction with dating relationship • Views about marriage and relationships | Unmarried (not cohabiting) respondents |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Likelihood of marriage • Satisfaction with relationship • Fairness in relationship • Time spent together • Disagreements and arguments • Life now compared to if separated • Trouble in relationship • Chances of relationship ending • Views about marriage and relationship | Currently cohabiting respondents |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Satisfaction with relationship • Fairness in relationship • Time spent together • Disagreements and arguments • Life now compared to if separated • Trouble in marriage • Chances of relationship ending | Currently married respondents |
| Religion | | |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Religious preference • Frequency of attendance at religious services • How religious respondent considers self to be | |

Conceptualization and Measurement of Positive Marital and Marital-Analogous Relationships
Among African American Couples

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Data from the 2000 United States Census indicate that 16% of African American males, as compared to 60% of White males, were married; whereas 37% of African American females as compared to 57% of White females were married. This marriage gap has been attributed to sociocontextual conditions that impact on African Americans that specifically reduce their likelihood of marrying as well as threatening the quality and stability of their marriages (Billingsley & Morrison-Rodriguez, 1998; Lawson & Thompson, 1994). Although much of the attention focused on African Americans' marriages has concentrated on these conditions, few attempts have been made to identify the processes that foster happy, satisfying marriages or long-term intimate relationships. For example, scientists know little about the conditions that promote marital success among African American couples (Goodwin, 2003; Murry, 2000). What factors are associated with marital transitions and adjustment among newlywed African American couples? To what extent do various social stressors, such as racism and discrimination, influence African Americans' marital relationships? What factors predict long-term marital outcomes? All of these normative issues have been studied less frequently in African American and other couples of color than in White couples. We therefore must draw on the few available studies to present this overview of the literature that may inform the conceptualization of positive marital and marital-analogous relationships among African American couples.

Several structural factors have been implicated in the declining marriage rates among African Americans (Tucker & Mitchell-Kernan, 1995). These factors both affect relationship development and create challenges for maintaining relationships (Murry, 2000). One of the few studies on newlyweds that included African American couples revealed that income was related to couples' perceptions of marital self-efficacy positively for African Americans but negatively for Whites (Veroff, 1989). Veroff (1989) also found that premarital cohabitation was negatively associated with marital happiness for African Americans but not for Whites. Veroff specified that income has less of an effect on marital happiness among Whites because they exhibit greater career proneness than do African Americans, due to better employment and educational opportunities. Further, Veroff (1989) notes that cohabitation has more of an effect on marital happiness for African Americans because it carries a different meaning for them than it does for Whites. The interpretations of these findings are similar to other race-comparative studies. When statistical differences emerge between African Americans and Whites, Whites are used as the reference group to ascertain whether African American couples are functioning optimally. Race-comparisons studies, although providing useful information, contributes little to understanding what variations in relationship patterns and processes that occur within each group.

In their efforts to identify factors associated with marital stability among African American couples, Clark-Nicolas and Gray-Little (1991) suggested that personal resources such as education and financial stability are important in understanding how African American couples' relationships fare over time. Education increases one's opportunities for employment and financial security. Financial stability provides a sense of fulfillment and comfort; it also increases the time and energy that can be used to nurture marital and family relationships.

Hatchett et al. (1994) found marital instability, tension, and conflict among newly married African American couples to be associated with economic anxiety. African Americans' marriages were at greatest risk when husbands reported heightened anxiety about their ability to provide for their families. In contrast, marital instability among White couples in early marriage was correlated with marital processes, life events, and role interference. Pinderhughes (2002) contends that ubiquitous financial anxiety may lead some African American men to leave their marriages to escape the fear and anxiety about their inability to provide for their families. What can be concluded from these studies is that relationship quality and stability of African American couples is directly linked to financial and economic issues.

Ray (1988) identified African American married couples' ways of coping with family financial matters. Effective financial managers developed strategies for working out their own money problems, intertwined with respect and the ability to negotiate and resolve conflict. In general, skills that promote success in married African American couples' relationships include discussing important issues in a loving manner, having satisfying sexual relations and intimacy, managing frustrations, and becoming friends. This sense of male/female togetherness may also enhance couples' marriage by increasing African American husbands' sensitivity to gender inequality issues (Collins, 1990; Kane, 1992). African American families' economic conditions and husbands' provider role anxiety may be important predictors of marital difficulties and stability.

Some researchers contend the need to consider how racism cascades through families that may in turn impact intimate relationship quality (Murry et al., 2001). Racism remains a major challenge confronting African American families and constitutes a primary source of family stress (Bowman, 1985; Clark et al., 1999; DuBois, 1967; Peters & Massey, 1986; Pinckney, 1993) that affects relationship quality. Psychological distress in both spouses may induce negative emotionality that compromises their relationship, which becomes less satisfying and more conflicted (Beach, Smith, & Fincham, 1994; Brody et al., 1994; Conger et al., 1992; Davila, Bradbury, Cohan, & Tockluk, 1997; Karney & Bradbury, 1995). Hayes' (1988) study of African American couples showed significant associations among race-related experiences, work-related stressors, successful marital relationships, and coping processes. African American couples who develop skills to manage racism, bigotry, workplace stressors, and social pressures experience relatively high levels of marital satisfaction. Intimate partnership quality can buffer the effects of stress on African American women's psychological functioning (Feagin & Sikes, 1994; Vincent et al., 1979). Murry and colleagues (2001), for example, found that women who reported experiencing several racist incidents and also reported a warm, supportive, satisfying relationship with an intimate partner were less likely to report depression or anxiety.

Given the odds of success, how do African American marriages survive? In a discussion of African American couples in stable marriages, Staples and Johnson (1993) highlighted the significance of adherence to the customs of the couples' African heritage. Aldridge (1991) identified understanding, honesty, warmth, open communication, sharing, respectability, independence, listening skills, support, and maturity as central to building and maintaining high-quality relationships between African American men and women. Strength and resiliency are also linked to emotional support from extended family and friends, with whom couples can interact socially and elicit help in solving problems (Cutrona, Russell, Brown, & Murry, 1999). Orbuch et al (1998) noted that African American wives in stable

marriages were sensitive to their husbands' anxiety about threats to their power and position in the family. The wives successfully managed this situation by engaging in collaborative problem solving as part of an equal partnership and assuring their husbands that their contributions to family life were significant and valued. Carolan and Allen (1999) found that stably married husbands expressed appreciation of women's independence and strength. The couples reported compatibility in their openness to new experiences and collaborative decision making; they described their relationships as not only friendships but also partnerships. Conner (1996) obtained similar findings: Communication, sharing of responsibilities, and friendship were the most significant correlates of marital success.

In the following section, we describe briefly the psychometrics of traditional measures used to assess marital stability and satisfaction, including data quality and reliability across relationship status (marital or marital analogous), gender, and socioeconomic status.

Methods

Database. The assessment of positive relationships among African American couples was implemented using the second wave of data from the Family and Community Health Study (FACHS; Conger, Cutrona, Gibbons, & Simmons, 1998), a multi-site, three-wave panel study of neighborhood and family effects on health and development. Participants in this large-scale study of African American children and their caregivers included 897 families, 475 in Iowa and 422 in Georgia. Each family included a child who was 10 or 11 years old when recruited; families with children of this age were chosen for study because systematic analyses of developmental and family processes among this population are rare.

Sample. Couples who were either married or cohabiting with the target children's biological mothers acting as primary caregivers were selected for the present analyses. This subsample included 286 couples. For simplicity of expression, the women in these couples will be called "wives" and the men will be called "husbands" regardless of their legal marital status. The wives' and husbands' mean ages were 38.4 years and 40.2 years, with averages of 13 years and 12.7 years of education, respectively. Length of time in the relationship averaged 9.65 years ($SD = 7.8$) with a mean per capita income ranging from \$9,950 to \$50,000. An average of 2.63 children resided in the households.

Measures

Relationship quality comprised satisfaction, happiness, warmth, and stability. *Relationship happiness and satisfaction* were measured using items developed for the FACHS project: "How happy are you with your relationship with your partner?" and "How satisfied are you with your relationship with your partner?" The items correlated at .79. *Relationship warmth* was measured using a 9-item scale developed by Conger et al. (1988) for the Iowa Youth and Families Project; it includes items such as "Help you do something that was important to you." "Tell you he/she love you." Cronbach's α s were .92 for wives and .91 for husbands. *Relationship stability* was measured using a 5-item scale that Booth, Johnson, and Edwards (1983) developed. Sample items include, "Within the last 3 months, have you suggested the idea of ending the relationship?" "Discussed ending the relationship with a friend?" and "Thought the relationship might be in trouble?" Cronbach's α s were .88 for wives and .86 for husbands.

Procedures

To evaluate the psychometric properties of the relationship quality measures with a sample of rural African American couples, we examined data quality and the reliability and validity of each indicator.

Data quality. We used two procedures to examine each measure's data quality. First, we observed the distribution of responses to confirm variation and to evaluate skewness. We then determined missing data rates for each measure.

Reliability. We tested the internal consistency of the items comprising each measure using Cronbach's alpha and item correlations. To the extent that items group well in a given administration, the measures display high internal consistency/reliability (Pedhazur, Pedhazur, & Schmelkin, 1991).

Validity. We determined the measures' correlations with other domains of relationship quality and the extent to which scores correlated between husbands and wives.

Results

Data Quality

Distribution of responses. Scores for relationship satisfaction, happiness, and stability were concentrated in the higher ranges, indicating that wives were satisfied and happy with their intimate relationships and viewed the relationships as stable. The distribution of scores assessing warmth was more variable, with the highest scores in the middle to high ranges. In general, husbands' mean scores for each relationship quality measure were slightly higher than those of wives. The skewness values for each measure were negative, ranging from -.49 to -1.25 for wives and -.51 to -1.77 for husbands; this indicated that distributions were skewed toward higher scores (see Table 1). Kurtosis values reflected noticeable differences between wives' and husbands' responses, with the greatest difference in marital stability: Husbands' reports were higher on this measure than were wives' reports (2.61 and .56, respectively). The kurtosis values were low, suggesting less skew and less of a peak for the satisfaction, happiness, and warmth measures for both husbands and wives.

[Table 1]

Missing data. We have included notes regarding non-response on each of the distribution tables (See Tables 2-9). The non-response level for wives is 0; husbands' non-response rates range from 54 to 65 cases, resulting in complete responses for 232 to 221 cases.

[Tables 2-9]

Prospective Validity.

Intercorrelations of relationship quality measures within and between respondents.

Correlations of relationship quality measures for wives and husbands are presented in Tables 10-11. Correlations among wives' reports show moderate to high positive associations. The strongest association emerged between relationship satisfaction and relationship happiness ($r = .80$), followed by the associations of wives' reports of partner warmth with happiness and with satisfaction ($r = .63$ and $r = .60$, respectively). In addition, wives' report of relationship stability was moderately related to relationship satisfaction ($r = .59$) and with partner warmth ($r = .48$).

Results of bivariate analyses of husbands' reports also show moderate to high positive associations. As with wives, the strongest relationship emerged between relationship satisfaction and happiness ($r = .78$), followed by the associations of husbands' reports of warmth with satisfaction and with happiness ($r = .49$ and $r = .46$, respectively). Each measure was also significantly and moderately related to relationship stability ($r = .49$, satisfaction; $r = .46$, happiness; $r = .42$, warmth). In general, patterns emerging for husbands and wives regarding factors correlated with marital stability were similar for measures of warmth, satisfaction, and happiness.

[Tables 10-11]

Reliability/internality consistency. Relationship happiness and satisfaction were each measured with single items. Internal consistency values for the remaining measures, relationship warmth and relationship stability, are shown in Tables 10 and 11 for wives and husbands, respectively. In general, the two measures have high values: .92 for wives' reports of partner warmth and .88 for their reports of relationship stability, and .91 for husbands' reports of partner warmth and .86 for their reports of relationship stability. Comparisons of bivariate correlations between husbands' and wives' reports are shown in Table 12. Moderate positive associations emerged between and among each of the measures, with the strongest correlation between both spouses' reports of partner warmth ($r = .38$), followed by wives' reports of partner warmth and husbands' reports of relationship happiness ($r = .37$), and wives' happiness and husbands' relationship stability. The correlations ranged from .22 to .38, all $ps < .001$. We also examined the associations of income with each measure. None attained significance, but a trend emerged for wives' reports of relationship stability and income ($r = .19, p < .10$).

[Table 12]

Summary and Discussion

The four measures of relationship quality appear to have good psychometric properties and as such show promise in assessing positive domains of African American couples' relationships. There were no missing data for wives, but a significant amount for husbands across each scale, suggesting that husbands may be more reluctant than wives to respond to questions about relationship quality. Couples' perceptions of relationship quality were moderately interrelated. Differential effects emerged for several indicators, however, suggesting a need to study relationship quality from both husbands' and wives' perspectives (Goodwin, 2003; Karney et al., 1994). Although we had anticipated that family income would be significantly related to various measures of relationship quality, no associations emerged. Using similar indicators of marital stability, satisfaction, and happiness, Goodwin (2003) found similar patterns in her study of newly married African American couples.

Other studies have shown these measures' predictive utility for several domains of family life and functioning. Murry and colleagues (2001) found that relationship quality mediated the association between stressor pileup and wives' psychological distress; a stable, satisfying, and happy relationship buffered wives from the negative effects of stress on mental health, which in turn fostered positive parent-child relationship quality. In a study of early marital instability, Hatchett and colleagues (1995) found this measure to account for 68% of the variance in marital instability, mostly linked to parents' education, husbands' worries about money, husbands' disapproval of wives' friends, husbands' drinking or drug use, marital processes, destructive arguing, role inflexibility, life events, role interference, and husbands' overall marital well-being. Based on these findings and those emerging from the present study, we recommend the measures of the four indicators used in the present study as adequate assessments of relationship quality for African American couples.

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Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for each Relationship Quality Measure

| Measure | Mean | SD | Skewness | Kurtosis |
|-----------------|-------|------|----------|----------|
| <i>Wives</i> | | | | |
| Satisfaction | 3.94 | .99 | -.631 | .060 |
| Happiness | 4.82 | 1.08 | -.703 | .751 |
| Warmth | 18.13 | 4.36 | -1.245 | .557 |
| Stability | 27.65 | 6.31 | -.498 | -.546 |
| <i>Husbands</i> | | | | |
| Satisfaction | 4.13 | .81 | -.526 | -.548 |
| Happiness | 5.08 | .85 | -.508 | -.367 |
| Warmth | 18.63 | 2.21 | -1.773 | 2.605 |
| Stability | 27.95 | 6.03 | -.640 | -.360 |

Table 2. African American Wives' Relationship Satisfaction

| Category | Frequency | Cumulative Frequency | Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|----------|-----------|----------------------|---------|--------------------|
| 1 | 3 | 3 | 1.0 | 1.0 |
| 2 | 10 | 13 | 3.5 | 4.5 |
| 3 | 79 | 92 | 27.6 | 32.2 |
| 4 | 103 | 195 | 36.0 | 68.2 |
| 5 | 91 | 286 | 31.8 | 100.00 |
| Total | 286 | 286 | 100.00 | 100.00 |

Table 3. African American Husbands' Relationship Satisfaction

| Category | Frequency | Cumulative Frequency | Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|----------|-----------|----------------------|---------|--------------------|
| 2 | 8 | 8 | 3.4 | 3.4 |
| 3 | 50 | 58 | 21.6 | 25.0 |
| 4 | 92 | 150 | 39.7 | 64.7 |
| 5 | 82 | 232 | 35.3 | 100.00 |
| Total | 232 | 232 | 100.00 | 100.00 |

Note. Originally total was 286 with 54 missing values.

Table 4. African American Wives' Relationship Happiness

| Category | Frequency | Cumulative Frequency | Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|----------|-----------|-------------------------|---------|-----------------------|
| 1 | 1 | 1 | .3 | .3 |
| 2 | 4 | 5 | 1.4 | 1.7 |
| 3 | 14 | 19 | 4.9 | 6.6 |
| 4 | 96 | 115 | 33.6 | 40.2 |
| 5 | 82 | 197 | 28.7 | 68.9 |
| 6 | 89 | 286 | 31.1 | 100.00 |
| Total | 286 | 286 | 100.00 | 100.00 |

Table 5. African American Husbands' Relationship Happiness

| Category | Frequency | Cumulative Frequency | Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|----------|-----------|-------------------------|---------|-----------------------|
| 2 | 2 | 2 | .9 | .9 |
| 3 | 5 | 7 | 2.2 | 3.0 |
| 4 | 63 | 70 | 27.2 | 30.2 |
| 5 | 83 | 153 | 35.8 | 65.9 |
| 6 | 79 | 232 | 34.1 | 100.0 |
| Total | 232 | 232 | 100.00 | 100.0 |

Note. Originally total was 286 with 54 missing values.

Table 6. African American Wives' Relationship Stability

| Category | Frequency | Cumulative Frequency | Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|----------|-----------|----------------------|---------|--------------------|
| 5 | 3 | 3 | 1.0 | 1.0 |
| 6 | 2 | 5 | .7 | 1.7 |
| 7 | 3 | 8 | 1.0 | 2.8 |
| 8 | 6 | 14 | 2.1 | 4.9 |
| 9 | 2 | 16 | .7 | 5.6 |
| 10 | 1 | 17 | .3 | 5.9 |
| 11 | 4 | 21 | 1.4 | 7.3 |
| 12 | 5 | 26 | 1.7 | 9.1 |
| 13 | 2 | 28 | .7 | 9.8 |
| 14 | 8 | 36 | 2.8 | 12.6 |
| 15 | 6 | 42 | 2.1 | 14.7 |
| 16 | 13 | 55 | 4.5 | 19.2 |
| 17 | 10 | 65 | 3.5 | 22.7 |
| 18 | 23 | 88 | 8.0 | 30.8 |
| 19 | 24 | 112 | 8.4 | 39.2 |
| 20 | 174 | 286 | 60.8 | 100.0 |
| Total | 286 | 286 | 100.00 | 100.00 |

Table 7. African American Husbands' Relationship Stability

| Category | Frequency | Cumulative Frequency | Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|----------|-----------|----------------------|---------|--------------------|
| 10 | 1 | 1 | .5 | .5 |
| 11 | 3 | 4 | 1.4 | 1.8 |
| 12 | 4 | 9 | 1.8 | 3.6 |
| 13 | 2 | 11 | .9 | 4.5 |
| 14 | 7 | 18 | 3.2 | 7.7 |
| 15 | 5 | 23 | 2.3 | 10.0 |
| 16 | 17 | 40 | 7.7 | 17.6 |
| 17 | 11 | 51 | 5.0 | 22.6 |
| 18 | 20 | 71 | 9.0 | 31.7 |
| 19 | 18 | 89 | 8.1 | 39.8 |
| 20 | 133 | 222 | 60.2 | 100.0 |
| Total | 286 | 286 | 100.00 | 100.00 |

Note. Originally total was 286 with 54 missing values

Table 8. African American Wives' Relationship Warmth

| Category | Frequency | Cumulative Frequency | Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|----------|-----------|-------------------------|---------|-----------------------|
| 11 | 1 | 1 | .3 | .3 |
| 12 | 1 | 2 | .3 | .7 |
| 13 | 2 | 4 | .7 | 1.4 |
| 15 | 2 | 6 | .7 | 2.1 |
| 16 | 1 | 7 | .3 | 2.4 |
| 17 | 4 | 11 | 1.4 | 3.8 |
| 18 | 16 | 27 | 5.6 | 9.4 |
| 19 | 10 | 37 | 3.5 | 12.9 |
| 20 | 8 | 45 | 2.8 | 15.7 |
| 21 | 8 | 53 | 2.8 | 18.5 |
| 22 | 14 | 67 | 4.9 | 23.4 |
| 23 | 9 | 76 | 3.1 | 26.6 |
| 24 | 11 | 87 | 3.8 | 30.4 |
| 25 | 9 | 96 | 3.1 | 33.6 |
| 26 | 19 | 115 | 6.6 | 40.2 |
| 27 | 21 | 136 | 7.3 | 47.6 |
| 28 | 16 | 152 | 5.6 | 53.1 |
| 29 | 10 | 162 | 3.5 | 56.6 |
| 30 | 19 | 181 | 6.6 | 63.3 |
| 31 | 13 | 194 | 4.5 | 67.8 |
| 32 | 16 | 210 | 5.6 | 73.4 |
| 33 | 10 | 220 | 3.5 | 76.9 |
| 34 | 20 | 240 | 7.0 | 83.9 |
| 35 | 15 | 255 | 5.2 | 89.2 |
| 36 | 31 | 286 | 10.8 | 100.0 |
| Total | 286 | 286 | 100.0 | 100.0 |

Table 9. African American Husbands' Relationship Warmth

| Category | Frequency | Cumulative Frequency | Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|----------|-----------|-------------------------|---------|-----------------------|
| 10 | 2 | 2 | .9 | .9 |
| 11 | 2 | 4 | .9 | 1.8 |
| 16 | 1 | 5 | .4 | 2.2 |
| 17 | 6 | 11 | 2.6 | 4.7 |
| 18 | 9 | 20 | 3.9 | 8.6 |
| 19 | 11 | 31 | 4.7 | 13.4 |
| 20 | 5 | 36 | 2.2 | 15.5 |
| 21 | 7 | 43 | 3.0 | 18.5 |
| 22 | 8 | 51 | 3.4 | 22.0 |
| 23 | 5 | 56 | 2.2 | 24.1 |
| 24 | 6 | 62 | 2.6 | 26.7 |
| 25 | 11 | 73 | 4.7 | 31.5 |
| 26 | 15 | 88 | 6.5 | 37.9 |
| 27 | 15 | 103 | 6.5 | 44.4 |
| 28 | 11 | 114 | 4.7 | 49.1 |
| 29 | 15 | 129 | 6.5 | 55.6 |
| 30 | 11 | 140 | 4.7 | 60.3 |
| 31 | 13 | 153 | 5.6 | 65.9 |
| 32 | 13 | 166 | 5.6 | 71.6 |
| 33 | 6 | 172 | 2.6 | 74.1 |
| 34 | 19 | 191 | 8.2 | 82.3 |
| 35 | 10 | 201 | 4.3 | 86.6 |
| 36 | 31 | 232 | 13.4 | 100.0 |
| Total | 232 | 232 | 100.00 | 100.00 |

Note. Originally total was 286 with 54 missing values

Table 10.
Correlations, Means, and Standard Deviations for Measures of Relationship Quality of African American Wives.

| Study Variables | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
|------------------------------|------|------|-------|-------|
| <u>Wife Report</u> | | | | |
| 1. Relationship Satisfaction | 1.00 | | | |
| 2. Relationship Happiness | .80 | 1.00 | | |
| 3. Partner Warmth | .60 | .63 | 1.00 | |
| 4. Relationship Stability | .59 | .61 | .48 | 1.00 |
| <u>M</u> | 3.94 | 4.82 | 27.65 | 18.13 |
| <u>SD</u> | .90 | .99 | 6.06 | 3.43 |
| <u>α</u> | | | .93 | .88 |

Note: $p < .01$ for all correlations

Table 11.
Correlations, Means, and Standard Deviations for Measures of Relationship Quality of African American Husbands.

| Study Variables | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
|------------------------------|------|------|-------|-------|
| <u>Husband Report</u> | | | | |
| 2. Relationship Satisfaction | 1.00 | | | |
| 2. Relationship Happiness | .78 | 1.00 | | |
| 3. Partner Warmth | .64 | .63 | 1.00 | |
| 4. Relationship Stability | .49 | .46 | .42 | 1.00 |
| <u>M</u> | 4.1 | 5.0 | 27.95 | 18.60 |
| <u>SD</u> | .90 | .99 | 6.06 | 3.43 |
| <u>α</u> | | | .93 | .88 |

Note: $p < .01$ for all correlations

Table 12.
Intercorrelations, Means, and Standard Deviations of Relationship Quality Indicators of African American Couples

| Study Variables | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
|--------------------------------------|------|------|------|------|
| <hr/> | | | | |
| <i>Wife Reports</i> | 1.00 | | | |
| 1. Relationship Satisfaction | | | | |
| 2. Relationship Happiness | | 1.00 | | |
| 3. Partner Warmth | | | 1.00 | |
| 4. Relationship Stability | | | | 1.00 |
| <hr/> | | | | |
| <i>Husband Report</i> | .29 | .29 | .31 | .19 |
| 5. Relationship Satisfaction | | | | |
| 6. Relationship Happiness | .33 | .30 | .37 | .22 |
| 7. Partner Warmth | .29 | .29 | .38 | .19 |
| 8. Relationship Stability | .28 | .36 | .32 | .34 |
| <hr/> | | | | |
| Note: $p < .01$ for all correlations | | | | |
| <hr/> | | | | |

MEMORANDUM

TO: Kris Moore, Child Trends
FROM: Steve Nock, University of Virginia
DATE: July 10, 2003
SUBJECT: Conceptualization and Measurement of Healthy
Marriages and Positive Relationships

I am pleased to offer my thoughts on how a healthy marriage and/or positive relationship might be conceptualized and measured. My comments and suggestions are drawn from extensive work I have done over the past twenty-five years on this subject. My specific comments (below) and measurement suggestions draw heavily from an article I wrote in 1995.¹ As I will detail, my view focuses on the twin pillars of satisfactory and enduring relationships, commitment and obligation.

As a preface to my comments, I note that my primary concern is the well being of children. I am convinced that the best arrangement for producing happy and healthy children is a stable two-parent family, especially when the parents are married. I take my guide for this memo from the statement from the participants at the first Counting Couples workshop about “the need to better understand why family change occurs and the consequences it has for the well-being of families, couples, and children.”² The change I am most concerned with is divorce or dissolution of a relationship. Finally, I am primarily concerned with developing strategies that are suitable public policy objectives. While there are many emotional and/or affective dimensions of a relationship that are desirable, most are probably beyond the reach of policy. I say this based upon empirical research I have conducted for the past five years on various public policies, especially covenant marriage, designed to promote healthy marriages.³ Therefore, I do not dwell on the public (i.e., policy) promotion of emotional quality in relationships because this objective is both contentious and politically unfeasible. I believe it is

¹ Nock, Steven L. 1995. Commitment and Dependency in Marriage. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 57 (May): 503-514.

² Letter from Child Trends soliciting memoranda on conceptualizing ‘healthy marriage’ and ‘positive relationship’ 6/3/03.

³ see, for example, Sanchez, L, S. Nock, and J. Wright, 2001 “The Implementation of Covenant Marriage Legislation in Louisiana”, *Virginia Journal of Social Policy and the Law*. 9 (Fall) No. 1:192-22; Hawkins, Alan, S. Nock, J. Wilson, L. Sanchez, and James Wright. “Attitudes about Covenant Marriage and Divorce: Policy Implications from a Three-State Comparison.” *Family Relations*. 51:166-75.

currently impossible to define what a happy or gratifying relationship should be. I leave this challenging task to members of the clergy and therapeutic professionals who deal with people on an individual-by-individual or couple-by-couple basis. My concern, simply, is how to promote stable two-parent households.

Conceptualize healthy marriage and/or positive couple relationship.

A healthy marriage (or relationship) is one in which partners are *sufficiently committed* to their union to sustain the relationship in those times when love and affection cannot.

Commitment is not the same thing as happiness (marital/relationship quality, or gratification.) Though the two are (empirically) related, commitment is a more powerful force in producing stable and gratifying relationships. I believe that healthy marriages are those that can withstand periods of disaffection, or unhappiness. I believe this because my research has convinced me that gratifying and enduring marriages almost always include such moments. Recent longitudinal research indicates that very unhappy couples that *do not* divorce typically, and quite successfully resolve their unhappiness over the course of five years.⁴ I ask *what sustains and unites couples during those times?* The answer, I believe, is a shared commitment and sense of obligation to one's partner.

Defining Commitment. Commitment is why people engage in a consistent line of activity.⁵ Over thirty years ago, sociologist Howard Becker suggested that two elements characterize commitment as a source of consistency. First, an individual does something that *creates* an interest in his or her following a consistent line of action. That is, some interest that was initially unrelated to a particular line of action is now linked to it because of something the person has done. Second, the individual *becomes aware* that his or her continued action has implications for the originally extraneous interest(s). When a person marries, for example, this action creates a stake in the continuation of the union. If it fails, there will be consequences that would not have occurred absent the marriage. The marriage created an interest that had not previously existed (e.g., love, security, or tangible property elements.) Many such interests are created by the marriage and are threatened by its termination. But each partner must perceive such potential threats.

In a marriage or other intimate relationship, the routines of daily life (what Becker called "side bets") cumulatively create a series of interests that were once

⁴ Waite, Linda J., Don Browning, William J. Doherty, Maggie Gallagher, Ye Lou, and Scott M. Stanley, 2002. *Does Divorce Make People Happy?* New York: Institute for American Values.

⁵ Becker, Howard S. 1960. Notes on the concept of commitment. *American Journal of Sociology*, 66: 32-40.

either nonexistent or were extraneous to the marriage, but are now a conspicuous element of it that make ending the relationship costly.

The "side bets" that build a sense of commitment also figure centrally in the New Home Economics; a microeconomic perspective on the family that treats the household simultaneously as both producer and consumer. Economist Gary Becker (1981) asserts that marriages are less subject to dissolution the longer they persist because of the accumulation of "marital-specific capital."⁶ Should separation be thought to cause a reduction in either or both spouse's well being, this serves to reduce the likelihood of it happening. Examples of marital-specific capital include children (or, more accurately, parenthood,) the extensive division of labor that develops in a marriage, the standard of living produced by pooling resources, and the intangible bonds of love and affection. To the extent that such benefits would decline, or are anticipated to decline if the relationship ended, they constitute marital-specific capital.

Commitment involves both dedication and constraints⁷ Stanley and Markman describe dedication as the desire to maintain or improve the relationship, to sacrifice for it, invest in it, and link both personal goals and the partner's welfare to it. Constraints refer to those things that bind individuals to their relationships despite personal dedication (similar to the notion of "barriers" in Levinger's theory of divorce.⁸) As Stanley and Markman note, "constraints are a major, perhaps the major, determinant of relationship stability." (1992, p.596). Thus, constraints, barriers, or side-bets all refer to those interests that develop over time to create a stake in the persistence of the relationship.

Therefore, the anticipated costs of ending a relationship are central for understanding why it persists. Knowing such "exit costs", at least as they are perceived, would tell us a great deal about the degree of commitment to a relationship. Were an individual to perceive absolutely no costs to terminating a relationship, we could describe that person as having virtually no commitment to it. This observation suggests a method of defining and measuring commitment. Commitment varies to the extent that an individual perceives costs to terminating a relationship. And those costs are the consequence of extensive inter-dependencies. It is this basic idea that guides the approach outlined below.

In a relationship in which there is dependency, one spouse presumably accrues benefits that would be less available should that person be alone. If the

⁶ Becker, Gary S. 1981. *A Treatise on the Family*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. p 224.

⁷ Scott M. Stanley and Howard J. Markman 1992. Assessing commitment in personal relationships. *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 54: 595-608.

⁸ Levinger, George. 1976. A social psychological perspective on marital dissolution. *Journal of Social Issues*, 32: 21-47.

ongoing arrangement is possible only as a result of combined contributions, then each partner is more-or-less dependent on the other. Dependencies unite couples by creating perceived exit costs. That is, dependencies produce commitment.⁹ As noted, those dependencies include tangible aspects of a standard of living (income, labor force attachment, etc.), the complex division of labor that emerges in an ongoing relationship, and the intangible benefits of affection, love, and parenthood.

In a series of investigations¹⁰, I discovered that these various types of dependencies each influence the amount of commitment expressed by either husbands or wives. But for both partners, the overwhelmingly most important factor in producing commitment is the imagined commitment of the partner. When individuals are asked what they believe would be the consequences of ending the relationship for their partner, these responses are the single most important factor in commitment. I take the imagined commitment of one's partner (i.e., the imagined exit costs for one's partner) as an indication of obligation to that person.

I have found that commitment correlates modestly with various measures of marital quality, as expected. But it is a stronger predictor of divorce than marital quality is in longitudinal panel data.

There are two measures required to capture the magnitude of commitment and the source of it. Both were developed for the National Survey of Families and Households.¹¹ First is the imagined consequence of ending a relationship (commitment) and second, the imagined consequences for the spouse of ending the relationship (obligation). These two measures are clearly correlated ($r=.60$ for wives, $.69$ for husbands) but when each partner reports on his or her *own* commitment, the two partner's reports correlate much less ($r-.30$ for men, $.32$ for women). Husbands and wives, that is, do not accurately know one another's level of commitment. But the imagined commitment (obligation) of one's spouse correlates strongly with one's own commitment. Clearly, men and women believe that the consequences of ending a relationship are similar for both partners.

⁹ see Nock, Steven L. 1998. *Marriage in Men's Lives*. New York: Oxford University Press.

¹⁰ Analyses summarized in this memorandum were based on the first wave of NSFH (n = 4,662 married individuals as 2,331 couples for whom each spouse was interviewed) as well as the first and second waves of original data collected in my evaluation of covenant marriage in Louisiana (n = approximately 1,200 individuals as 600 couples in which each partner completed interviews)

¹¹ <http://www.ssc.wisc.edu/nsfh/home.htm>. Alpha reliabilities vary depending on samples. However, these two measures routinely generate alphas in the range of .79 to .83.

Measuring Commitment. The two measures rely on identical self-report questions. The are:¹²

1. Even though it may be very unlikely, think for a moment about how various areas of your life might be different if you separated. For each of the following areas, how do you think things would change?

- a. your standard of living
- b. your social life
- c. your career opportunities
- d. your overall happiness
- e. your sex life
- f. being a parent

1=Much worse, 2=Worse, 3=Same, 4=Better, 5=Much better

2. How about your husband/wife? How do you think these various areas of life might be different for him/her if you separated? (Same questions and responses)

These measures have several advantages. First, they are self-administered and very short. Second, they are suitable for those studies in which both partners are enrolled (an ideal design) thereby permitting the researcher to investigate the degree of shared commitment. They have high internal consistency over a range of designs (telephone interviews, self-administered, face-to-face). Finally, they are ideal for modeling change in panel designs.

Based on my research using these measures, both with NSFH and my own original panel data from newly married couples, I am convinced that these simple measures are sufficient to capture much of the complex mix of elements uniting or dividing couples. As such,, they take us closer to the primary objective stated at the outset of this memorandum: *viz.* “the need to better understand why family change occurs.”

¹² In Wave 2, NSFH added “Your leisure time”, and “Your friendships” and rephrased item “a” as “Your economic security” and item “c” as “Your job opportunities.”



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Healthy Marriages and Positive Couple Relationships: Conceptualization and Measurement

By David H. Olson and Luke Knutson

I. Conceptualization of ‘healthy marriage’ and/or positive couple relationship

A healthy marriage can be conceptualized as a loving, committed relationship where both partners are satisfied with their relationship. Two cornerstones of a happy marriage are strong communication and conflict resolution skills. Without these skills, couples will continue to have difficulties throughout their marriage and their happiness and satisfaction levels will steadily decline. Healthy marriage also requires the ability to maintain balance in their lives. This includes maintaining closeness and flexibility and a shared leadership pattern.

This definition is based on the “National Survey of Marital Strengths” of 21,501 married couples who took the ENRICH Couple Inventory. The results of the study are reported in the book *Empowering Couples: Building on Your Strengths (2000)* by David Olson and Amy Olson-Sigg. The results can also be found on the web site at: www.lifeinnovations.com

II. ENRICH Marital Inventory

A. Brief description of ENRICH

The ENRICH (ENriching Relationship Issues, Communication and Happiness) Marital Inventory is a comprehensive couple assessment. The inventory consists of thirty background items (i.e. age, occupation, ethnicity), and 165 items covering 20 relationship categories. There are 14 couple relationship scales and each scale (except Idealistic Distortion) contains 10 items.

- Marriage Satisfaction
- Idealistic Distortion (7 items)
- Personality Issues
- Communication
- Role Relationship
- Spiritual Beliefs
- Couple Closeness
- Couple Flexibility

- Conflict Resolution
- Leisure Activities
- Children & Parenting
- Financial Management
- Sexual Relationship
- Family & Friends

The *Marriage Satisfaction scale* is the most direct measure of overall couple satisfaction. The scale contains ten items, each item tapping an important area of the relationship.

The ENRICH couple inventory also contains an *Idealistic Distortion scale* (seven items), which measures the level of idealism in a couple relationship. In the computerized (165-item) version of ENRICH, an individual's score on idealism is used correct an individual's scores on the ENRICH scales. The advantage of controlling for idealism is that it provides a more accurate assessment of satisfaction.

An article by Fowers and Olson entitled *ENRICH Marital Satisfaction Scale: A Brief Research and Clinical Tool*, (1993) describes the combination of both the Marriage Satisfaction scale and the Idealistic Distortion scale to make up a brief version of ENRICH. The items and scoring of the 17-item version of ENRICH are attached in an Appendix.

B. Psychometric Information

An important strength of the ENRICH Inventory is the strong psychometric properties. High levels of reliability and validity have been found for the inventory making it a valuable tool for research as well as clinical use.

Each of the scales in ENRICH have been assessed for alpha reliability and test-retest reliability (Olson, 2000). High reliability coefficients were found for both internal consistency (.75-.90, n=1,542; average=.82) and test-retest (.77-.92, n=115; average=.86).

Good evidence of concurrent validity was found for *ENRICH Marital Satisfaction* and the *Locke-Wallace Marital Adjustment Scales* with correlations of .73 for individual scores and .81 for couple scores.

Fowers and Olson (1989) did a study assessing the discriminant validity of the scales and it also included a cross-validation. Discriminant analysis was carried out to determine if the scale could correctly classify satisfied from dissatisfied couples. Using individual scores, 92.9% of the validation group and 91.7% of the cross-validation group were correctly classified. Using couple scores, 91.2% of the validation group and 90.1 percent of the cross-validation group were correctly classified. These analyses suggest that ENRICH has an excellent capacity to discriminate between happy and unhappy couples.

C. Distribution of the scales/items for Research and Clinical work

The ENRICH Couple Inventory is used for both couple research and counseling with couples. The copyright on the ENRICH Marital Inventory is owned by Life Innovations, which distributes the instrument to researchers.

For counselors and clergy to use this scale, they must attend a day PREPARE/ENRICH training workshop, or complete the self-training process if they have a Master's degree. About 50,000 counselor and clergy in the United States are trained to use ENRICH clinically with couples.

D. National Norms across broad spectrum of couples

The ENRICH couple inventory has been used with a wide spectrum of couples of varying education, ethnicity, and income. Norms are available based on over 100,000 married couples. However, it has not been used with very low income (poverty levels) or very low education levels (below high school).

E. Five Couple Types based on ENRICH & Replication with African-American Couples

Using scores from 12 ENRICH scales, a couple typology identifying five couple types has been created and validated (Olson and Fowers, 1993). The couple types were created using cluster analysis based on the positive couple agreement scores (PCA). The five types of couples (listed from most to least satisfied) are Vitalized, Harmonious, Traditional, Conflicted, and Devitalized (see Figure 2). These types are indicative of satisfaction level and rate of divorce.

This couple typology was replicated by Allen and Olson (2001) using a sample of 450 African-American married couples who took ENRICH. The same five couple types were found in African American compared to the national sample which was predominantly European-American (see Figure 1).

F. Creation of Individual Scores and Couple Scores:

From ENRICH, both *individual and couple scores* are available. The individual revised scores (REV) are corrected for idealism. ENRICH also provides couple scores for each relationship area. This score describes the couple's level of Positive Couple Agreement (PCA). The more a couple agrees with positively worded items, or disagrees with negatively worded items, the higher the PCA score.

III. Advantages and Limitations of ENRICH

One of the main advantages of ENRICH is its ability to provide a thorough, comprehensive picture of the couple relationship. ENRICH also provides scientifically reliable and valid results in describing the couple's strength areas and growth areas.

Another unique advantage of the ENRICH Inventory is the variety of scores that are presented. The ENRICH Computer Report lists individual scores for both partners on each relationship area. To produce a more accurate score, the individual scores are corrected downward based on their Idealistic Distortion score. The individual scores give the counselor a better understanding of how each partner views the relationship in that area.

ENRICH also provides couple scores for each relationship area. This score describes the couple's level of Positive Couple Agreement (PCA). The more a couple agrees with positively worded items, or disagrees with negatively worded items, the higher the PCA score.

The Couple Typology is another advantage of ENRICH. Research by David H. Olson and colleagues has identified five types of married couples. The five types of couples (listed from most to least satisfied) are vitalized, harmonious, traditional, conflicted, and devitalized. These types are indicative of satisfaction level and rate of divorce. Each couple that completes the ENRICH Inventory is assigned the couple type that is most closely associated with their pattern of Positive Couple Agreement scores.

The Couple and Family Map is also a strength of the inventory. The map is a graphic portrayal of a couple's type of relationship and Family-of-Origin based on their levels of closeness and flexibility. The map plots four locations which indicate both partner's views of the current relationship and of family of origin.

ENRICH is limited by the fact that it has not been used extensively with people in poverty. Although ENRICH has been used with a wide range of populations, its use could be expanded to include an even more diverse spectrum of couples.

IV. Commentary on using ENRICH with other populations

A. Low-income:

Although ENRICH has been used with couples from a variety of income levels, the frequency of low-income couples taking ENRICH is minimal.

B. Race/ethnicity/linguistic groups:

The majority of couples who take ENRICH are Caucasian, but ENRICH has been used with couples from a wide array of ethnic

backgrounds. ENRICH has been shown to be valid for African-American couples in a research paper by Allen & Olson.

C. Prison/jail populations:

ENRICH has been utilized with prison/jail populations but we do not have the reference.

D. Cohabiting and visiting couples

While ENRICH is designed for use with married couples, another variation of the inventory is available for cohabiting couples called PREPARE-CC. The layout and design of PREPARE-CC mirrors ENRICH except many of the items are tailored toward couples who are living together.

E. Couples with and without children

ENRICH contains a specific, ten item category called *Children & Parenting*, but couples without children can skip this section of the inventory.

F. Couples co-parenting after relationship dissolution:

ENRICH does not contain items specifically pertaining to co-parenting after dissolution. However, there is another similar couple inventory called PREPARE—MC (Marriage with Children) which is specifically designed to be used with step-families.

G. How ENRICH has been found in research to be related to:

We have not done specific studies using ENRICH to child well-being, parenting or overall family functioning

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For more details and copies of the studies, go to the website at:
www.lifeinnovations.com.

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The Conceptualization and Measurement of Relationship Quality: Insights from a Qualitative Study of Cohabiting Young Adults

**Memo prepared for “Measurement Issues in Family Demography” Conference
(Draft: August 2003)**

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Introduction

Our task was to examine our newly-gathered data from in-depth interviews with cohabiting young adults to address issues relevant to conceptualizing and measuring relationship quality. Specifically, we were asked to comment on what our qualitative data on couples who are living together but are unmarried might tell us about conceptualizing and measuring “healthy relationships.”

Let us say something first about our study, Cohabitation and Marriage in America (CMA). We are gathering data in three stages: (1) in-depth interviews with 115 young adults (late teens through mid-30s) who are currently cohabiting or have very recently cohabited; (2) 18 focus groups with young adults that are race/ethnic (White, Black, Latino) and gender homogenous, allowing us to explore race/ethnic and gender differences; (3) 60 interviews with both partners (interviewed separately) in dating, cohabiting, and married couples. We have completed the first stage, including much of the data analysis, and are in the midst of the second. Hence, this memo is based on data from the first stage.

Our sample consists of young adults living in the Toledo, Ohio area, drawn from the working, lower-middle, and middle classes; it includes White, Black, and Latino men and women. The educational breakdown is as follows: less than high school (11.4%), high school (25%), some college (44.7%); college graduate or more (18.4%). The vast majority of our respondents are currently employed (82%), although a few are enrolled in school full time, and some are both employed and enrolled in school part time. Yearly couple incomes range from approximately \$15,000 to \$50,000, with most reporting combined incomes in the \$20,000 to \$40,000 range.

Note that we purposefully set out to study “average” young Americans -- the working and middle classes --- rather than the privileged or the low income population. The latter are receiving attention in the qualitative work associated with the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study and the Three City Study (Burton, Hurt, and Avenilla 2002; Gibson, Edin, and McLanahan 2003; McLanahan and Garfinkel 2000; Reichman et al. 2001; Winston et al. 1999). Additionally, our data differ from these other studies in that we did not restrict our sample to cohabitators with children; a range of parenthood statuses is represented in our data (e.g., no children, biological children with current partner, biological children with past partner).

Our analyses identify three themes that are relevant to relationship quality and whether the union leads to marriage. They are: (1) the effects of financial constraints on relationship quality; (2) the impact of financial constraints on whether and when to marry; and (3) infidelity. While other issues relevant to relationship quality, stability, and marriage were also raised (i.e., emotional maturity), these seem particularly salient to the matter of healthy relationships and space limitations preclude a comprehensive analysis. We discuss each in turn, providing illustrative quotes throughout.

Economic Circumstances and Relationship Quality

While not typically referenced in the demographic literature, there is a body of research focusing on marriage that attempts to identify pathways linking forms of economic distress to measures of marital quality and stability (e.g., Clark-Nicolas and Gray-Little 1991; Conger et al. 1990; Fox and Chancey 1998; Johnson and Booth 1990; see Voydanoff [1990] and White and Rogers [2000] for reviews). While effects are not always large, studies suggest that perceived economic hardship has negative effects on relationship quality and is positively related to thoughts of divorce; that employment uncertainty and low income are associated with psychological distress among husbands and wives; and that husbands’ job insecurity has a significant positive effect on wives’ reports of marital conflict and thoughts of divorce.

One study of farm families, for example, suggests that economic hardship is related to thoughts of divorce, with about half of this effect due to depression (Johnson and Booth 1990). Another, focusing on black married couples, finds that perceived economic adequacy -- as measured by adequacy of income for food, clothing, medical, care, leisure, and monetary surplus left at month’s end -- is a significant predictor of marital satisfaction (Clark-Nicolas and Gray-Little 1991). Conger and colleagues (1990) find that economic pressures have indirect associations with couples’ evaluation of the marriage by promoting hostility in interactions and inhibiting supportive behavior of husbands towards wives. As stated by the authors of one study, “Feelings of economic uncertainty and job insecurity appear to affect both men and women in their most intimate environments” (Fox and Chancey 1998:747-48).

Our interviews with cohabitators support these findings, suggesting that financial constraints are perceived and felt as a source of relationship conflict that affects relationship quality. As these quotations illustrate, some cohabitators report that money, or lack thereof, is problematic for their relationships and the sense of a stable future.

I: When you started living together how long did you think the relationship was going to last? I mean were you certain at all about your future?

R: No.

I: Not at all?

R: We had problems, you know, arguments and stuff.

I: What kinds of things generally speaking that you argued about?

R: Uh just...how we're going to pay for these bills and stuff like that...

[White male fast food crew trainer, age 33]

He doesn't work enough, sometimes. He like, you know, he won't go to work for four days, so his paycheck will be half of what it should be. And then he'll want to pay his bills, before he gives, gives me the money that I, I need. And that pisses me off.

[White female computer technician, age 32]

Just finances, pretty much, is about the only instability in the relationship.

[Hispanic male dry wall hanger, age 28]

When asked about the main source of conflict in her relationship, one cohabitor had this to say:

R: Money.

I: Money. Okay. Does that mean like choices in what each other spends it on?

R: Oh no. Just 'cause we don't have enough...to pay all the bills at one time.

[White female medical worker, age 27]

Notably, in the event that financial circumstances improve and stabilize, relationship quality is impacted in a positive way:

Well, I think things stabilized quite a bit too with when I started working for the railroad.

It stabilized us a lot more. We were making better money...it wasn't an up and down, it was a constant. It's a stable job, it was a stable company.

[White male railroad conductor, age 30]

How Money Shapes the Decision to Marry

Numerous studies using nationally representative survey data have demonstrated that the occurrence and stability of marriage are linked to good economic circumstances. Those with higher education and better economic prospects are more likely to become married, to stay married, and to have children within marriage (e.g., Carlson, McLanahan and England 2002; Goldstein and Kenney 2001; Lichter, et al. 1992; Mare and Winship 1991; Oppenheimer 2000; Raley and Bumpass 2003; Smock and Manning 1997; Smock, Manning, and Gupta 1999; Sweeney 2002; Xie, et al., 2003). Recent estimates by Raley and Bumpass (2003), for example, suggest that 60% of marriages among women without high school degrees will end in separation or divorce, compared to one third for college graduates.

There are also several studies indicating that, among cohabiting couples, marriage is more likely when economic circumstances are good. Male partners' earnings and education are positively associated with the transition to marriage (Smock and Manning 1997; see also Manning and Smock 1995; Oppenheimer 2003; see Sassler and McNally [2003] for an exception). Analyzing young adults' transitions into their first coresidential unions, Clarkberg (1999) finds that relative income -- how well an individual is doing relative to others in similar circumstances -- has substantially stronger positive effects on marriage than on

cohabitation, leading her to conclude that marriage may be perceived as requiring better economic circumstances than marriage. Oppenheimer (2003) concludes that cohabitation provides a fallback strategy for men whose careers aren't established; she finds that men working less than full-time year-round may start a relationship, but, compared to steady workers, that relationship is more likely to be a cohabitation than a marriage.

We probed cohabitators about what needs to be "in place" to decide to marry, as many report that they would like to marry. Indeed, a very common theme was finances, suggesting the reasons why marriage appears to cost more than cohabitation, although both usually involve setting up an independent household. Sometimes finances were referenced in a general sense – that one needs to be economically secure to marry.

I don't really know 'cause the love is there uh...trust is there. Everything's there except money.

[Black male, recently unemployed, age 29]

I: Ok. How then, like what would have had to been in place for you to have gotten married?

R: Money.

I: Ok. Tell me a little bit about what does that mean?

R: Money means um...stability. I don't want to struggle, if I'm in a partnership, then there's no more struggling, and income-wise we were still both struggling.

[Black female store supervisor and college student, age 36]

I wasn't grown up at that point. Um, I needed, I certainly, you know, needed more growing up. Ah. School was not finished, but I never really considered that an im-, an impediment, but the financial situation certainly was one.

[White male information systems manager, age 33]

Frequently, however, the reference was quite specifically to the cost of a wedding, even a modest one.

Well, it crossed my mind. Um...I always said I just couldn't afford it. If I could afford it, I probably would be married by now.

I: Ok. So, you just said you couldn't afford it?

R: Right.

I: Ok.

R: You can't get married for free.

I: Ok. But you could go down to the justice of the peace, you could have a simple church wedding, you could, I mean...

R: But that's the poor people way.

[Black male, recently unemployed, age 29]

I: What are the kinds of things that needed to be in place for you to get married?

R: Um, we wanted one of our education's to be done at least. Basically just trying to get caught up on some bills...and be able to afford a wedding.

[White male assistant production supervisor, age 27]

R: I think that getting married is really not going to change our relationship that much. So, I don't have a thought about it. I mean he gave me a ring, he asked me to marry him a long time ago. We talked about getting married, it's just we don't have anyone to pay for the wedding and I don't want to go downtown. So, it's on us....

I: What would have to be in place for you two to finally get married? You said you couldn't pay for it.

R: Money, it's just money.

I: Nothing else?

R: Nothing else.

[Hispanic female homemaker, age 25]

It takes a lot of money and a lot of resources and things to do that. I mean I didn't think we could afford it. We were, I was just starting at the railroad, we were still getting things together and, I didn't know where we were gonna get like five thousand dollars for a wedding. I mean, weddings are expensive!

[White male railroad conductor, age 30]

I: Um, tell me a little bit, when you started living together, what were your ideas, or your feelings about marriage?

R: Well, I mean we have a plan to get married, but uh, it just costs so much nowadays to get married.

[White male construction worker, age 27]

R: Well, The one thing was that at some point it was kind of like this, this is my idea... "lets go down town and get married if you want to get married and then in a couple of years we'll have a ceremony if you want to have a ceremony." And her thing was "No, I don't want to do that. I want to go back home I want to have this big ceremony with my mother by my side." You know and both of us were kind of like "I'm not doing that, that's completely out of the question." My thing was "we just can't afford it, your mother doesn't have any money. It's not like she's going to pay for anything I'm going to pay for this and we can't afford it. You know. So, no we can't do it." Then her thing was "Well, no, I'm not going down to the court house and getting married." You know, and that was about the extent of our conversation.

[Black male carpenter, age 36]

I: Um, and what were his views on marriage?

R: He always said that he wants to marry me and that he wants a big wedding and you know he wants the whole nine yards but right now we can't really afford it because now after I graduate there's all these student loans I have to pay back.

[Hispanic female administrative assistant at social service agency, age 29]

These young adults, unlike their more privileged counterparts, are unable to rely on parents to absorb the cost of a wedding.

Infidelity

The issue of infidelity was frequently raised by respondents in our interviews. When asked what would be the “deal breaker” of the relationship – that is, lead to a break-up – roughly half of respondents without probing immediately mentioned “cheating” or “infidelity.” The following excerpts are typical:

Oh, like cheating, things like that. Basically cheating is the biggest one, we've both said that a thousand times. Pretty much anything else we can work through, and we've had to work through things before, but I think any type of, you know, cheating....

[White male college student, age 28]

I: What would be a deal breaker? What would cause you to send him packing?

R: For me to leave him? Well, if he cheated on me.

I: Infidelity. Anything else?

R: Not really, no. That's it.

[Hispanic female homemaker, age 25]

Similar responses include “cheating would be an end to our relationship,” “if I found out he was with someone else,” “if she cheated on me, I would end it,” “if he was cheating on me, that would make me leave,” “infidelity would end the relationship,” “if I ever caught her with another man” and so on.

Actual instances of infidelity were revealed in a significant minority of interviews (approximately one-quarter), sometimes in reference to a past cohabiting relationship but at least as often in the current one. It is also significant that more than half of these instances are self-reports – that is, the respondent revealed that he or she had been unfaithful. Treas and Gieson (2000), drawing on nationally representative data, report lower levels of infidelity among cohabiting respondents – about 12% (see also Waite and Joyner 2001). However, the authors are cognizant that infidelity is likely underreported despite the use of highly trained interviewers. Also, it could well be that semi-structured in-depth interviews, as opposed to close-ended survey questions, are better equipped to uncover instances of suspected or actual infidelity.

Moreover, while we cannot of course argue that our results are generalizable, it is important to underscore that they are consistent with results from another qualitative study: the Time, Love, Cash, Care, and Children (TLC3) Study associated the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study (Edin, England, and Linnenberg 2003; Reed 2003). Edin et al. (2003) similarly report that infidelity is commonly viewed as a reason for break-ups and that approximately 40% of mothers suspect or fear that the father of their child has been unfaithful; about 20% of the fathers suspect the same about the mothers. When asked whether their partners had indeed cheated, about 20% of the mothers and 5% of fathers report that they had, sometimes but not always confirmed by the partner. Our data show a similar gender difference with about 2/3rd of reports involving men’s infidelity.

Given our samples differ in that the TLC3 focuses on new unmarried parents, we believe the prominence of concerns about infidelity, and that it is commonly recognized as a source of relationship instability, in both studies is notable.

Conclusions and Implications

In this memo, we have focused on issues relevant to the stability of cohabiting unions and the transition to marriage; these are key issues as research suggests that relationship stability and marriage are positively correlated with the wellbeing of adults and of children.

First, our study of young cohabiting men and women suggests that relationship quality, stability, and the transition to marriage are impacted in important ways by financial circumstances. Although we are studying young adults who are largely employed and would generally be considered part of the working and lower middle classes, we find that many are just “getting by” and have not accumulated the savings that would allow them to marry with a ceremony and modest reception.

These results help to clarify why cohabitation is perceived as costing less than marriage: many young adults in our study, quite simply, have difficulty affording a wedding. By and large, they also come from modest backgrounds and parents’ footing the bill does not appear to be an option. There is also a belief among many respondents that one should have attained a measure of financial security prior to marrying. Quantitative research has examined the factors that predict marriage among cohabitators, including economic factors (educational attainment, employment, and income). However, it has been difficult with existing surveys to get a grasp on the mechanisms by which these variables exert effects and precisely why people seem to perceive cohabitation as requiring fewer economic resources than marriage.

Second, we would stress that our results imply that financial difficulties have indirect effects on relationship stability and the transition to marriage via conflict and relationship quality. Thus, we would argue that measures of perceived economic adequacy would enhance demographers’ ability to understand relationship stability and the transition to marriage (see Clark-Nicolas and Gray-Little [1991] for examples of such measures).

Finally, our data suggest that measures of known or suspected unfaithfulness on the part of the partner and actual infidelity on part of self are important potential measures of relationship quality and stability. A policy implication is that relationship skills and education interventions designed to strengthen relationships need to directly confront the issue of infidelity.

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APPENDIX A
Example of Memo Solicitation



4301 Connecticut Avenue, N. W., Suite 100
Washington, DC 20008
Phone (202) 362-5580
Fax (202) 362-5533

Month, Day, 2003

Dear colleague-

We are writing you as a professional with expertise on couple relationships in the hope that you will be interested in the following opportunity to share your knowledge. We are organizing a session on defining and measuring a “healthy marriage” and “positive relationship” for an upcoming conference, “Measurement and Family Demography”, which is sponsored by the NICHD Family and Child Well-being Research Network and the Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics.

Our plan for this session is to commission a number of short (about five pages, single-spaced) memos on this topic from you and about a dozen other professionals representing a variety of disciplines and perspectives. We will prepare a summary of the memos that we receive, as well as compile existing and suggested new measures of a “healthy marriage” and “positive relationship” into a compendium. These will be made available to conference participants and to researchers and agencies planning surveys and evaluation studies. Specific guidelines for the memos are provided in an attachment to this letter.

The Measurement and Family Demography conference, which will be held in November 2003, is a follow-up to a conference held in December of 2001 “Counting Couples: Improving Marriage, Divorce, Remarriage, and Cohabitation Data in the Federal Statistical System.” The first Counting Couples workshop assembled professionals from a variety of backgrounds to discuss the current state of data on couples and to consider ways to improve the measurement and collection of information about couples. Participants at this conference agreed that the Federal statistical system can and should improve the measurement of family structure and transitions and also emphasized “the need to better understand why family change occurs and the consequences it has for the well-being of families, couples, and children.”

We are approaching this task from the perspective that, while a number of measures of relationship quality exist, the definition of a “healthy marriage” or “positive relationship” can benefit from further conceptual clarification. Further, current measures could more adequately address diversity in relationship experiences, as well as cultural and age group differences¹.

¹ Some examples of relationship types include 1) dating, 2) “visiting” relationship (romantically involved, but living apart), 3) cohabiting, but not romantic, 4) cohabiting and intimate, 5) single mother (never married, but the father is

Since Federal statistical data are used in the policy arena for many purposes, we think that attention to such detail is warranted. Therefore, we invite your knowledge about what we do and *don't* know about measuring healthy marriage and relationship quality.

Please RSVP to this request within two weeks from the date of receipt and let us know whether you will be able to participate in this important collaboration by preparing a memo. We would ask to have your memos by August 15, 2003, or before. If this deadline is not possible, please let us know so we can consider a revised deadline.

When we receive your memo, we will pay you \$500 to thank you for sharing your time and expertise, assuming that you complete the memo by the agreed upon deadline.

Finally, if you would like to attend the November conference in Washington, D.C., please contact the meeting coordinator, Wainani Au, at wjau01@hotmail.com.

We are very enthusiastic about this collaboration, and hope you are, too. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to call or email; our contact information is listed below.

Sincerely,

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supporting the child), 6) single mother (without father support), 7) engaged, 8) married parents, 9) married step-parents, 10) separated or divorced co-parents, and 11) extended family household – in particular, grandparents.

ATTACHMENT 1:

SPECIFIC GUIDELINES FOR MEMO ON THE CONCEPTUALIZATION AND MEASUREMENT OF HEALTHY MARRIAGES AND POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS

- Conceptualize ‘healthy marriage’ and/or ‘positive couple relationship’
- Provide or suggest new or existing measures for the compendium
 - New measures can be suggested
 - Short, medium, and/or long versions of measures are appreciated
 - Self-report and observational measures are appropriate
 - Psychometric information, if available, will be very useful
 - The distribution of the scales/items, if available, will be very useful, as would tabulations by poverty/income, gender, race or education, if available
- Discuss the advantages and limitations of your suggested measure(s)
- Comment on or discuss measurement for the following (or other) sub-populations, depending upon your expertise:
 - Low-income populations
 - Race/ethnicity/linguistic groups
 - Prison/jail populations
 - Cohabiting and visiting couples
 - Couples with and without children
 - Couples co-parenting after relationship dissolution
- Discuss how your suggested measures have been found in research to be related to child well-being, parenting, or overall family functioning, if possible
- Please send us related articles or citations to published papers
- Please write no more than a 5-page, single-spaced memo (not including references, tables or appendixes)
- Attach relevant measures, questions, items or protocols as appendixes to your memo