

Critical Evaluation and Conceptual Organization of Marital Functioning Measures

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The sheer quantity and diversity of measures of marital functioning reflect the complexity of marital relationships. This paper presents a conceptual/theoretical framework for organizing these measures according to the five core domains of marital functioning (marital quality, marital adjustment, marital satisfaction, sexual satisfaction and intimacy) and those factors that influence these domains (relational, individual and external). The paper defines each of these core domains and influencing factors and discusses their complex interrelationship. For each domain and influencing factor, examples of popular measures that tap the construct or variable are highlighted and critically evaluated. The researcher, clinician, and student should find the framework presented in the paper helpful in terms of making sense of and selecting from the current proliferation of measures.

Fifty-four percent of the American population (15 years and older) is currently married (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2000). However, despite the popularity of this institution, marriage ultimately proves a source of disappointment for many individuals. Social statistics indicate that: a) couple problems are one of the chief complaints from those presenting for individual psychotherapy (Maling, Gurtman & Howard, 1995), b) union dissolution rates are high, ranging from 50% for first marriages to 70% for those who have remarried (Statistics Canada, 2002; US Bureau of the Census, 1999) and c) the rates of coercive behaviors indicating the presence of physical, sexual and psychological violence in close relationships range from 10% to 25% for both physical and sexual violence and up to 75% for psychological violence (Archer, 2000).

Clearly, the need for clinicians and researchers to assess, study and understand close relationships is of paramount importance. Indeed, researchers have devoted considerable attention to factors that make marriages fulfilling and likely to continue (e.g. Gottman, 1994a; Gottman, 1994b). However, given the complex nature of marital relationships, over the years a vast number of variables or constructs concerning them have been identified. This in turn has resulted in an extensive range of measures designed to assess these variables or constructs (Bradbury, 1995). In fact, the number of instruments and procedures that currently exist is so great that they have been chronicled and analyzed in a number of books (e.g. Fredman & Sherman,

1987; Grotevant & Carlson, 1989; Jacob & Tennenbaum, 1988; O'Leary, 1987; Touliatos, Permuter & Strauss, 1990). Furthermore, according to Bradbury (1995), "...the marital and family assessment literature has become a victim of its own success. The number and range of instruments has proliferated to such a degree that practitioners cannot afford to evaluate and select them properly," (p. 459).

The purpose of this paper is to provide clinicians and researchers with a simple framework for "organizing" the various relationship measures that reflect the five core domains of marital functioning inspiring their creation: (a) marital quality, (b) satisfaction, (c) adjustment, (d) intimacy and (e) sexual satisfaction. In addition, there are a number of factors (e.g. commitment, dependence, dissolution, individual characteristics and life events) that influence these five domains; and use of their associated measures can facilitate a greater understanding of marital functioning. The remainder of this paper will define each of these domains and discuss their interrelatedness. According to Sabatelli (1988), any attempt to evaluate a measure requires an elaboration and understanding of the domain on which it is based. However, in the case of marital measures this is particularly complicated as there is a great deal of heterogeneity within them. Thus, the conceptual distinctions between domains have become blurred. The latter is particularly true of marital adjustment, satisfaction and quality. Consequently, domains are likely to be interrelated in complex ways (Bradbury, 1995; Sabatelli, 1988).

Following a discussion of the conceptualization of each of the domains, examples of the more widely used self report measures associated with each one will be presented and critically evaluated. Particular attention will be given to measures that have a solid empirical foundation. While the

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EVALUATION AND ORGANIZATION OF MARITAL FUNCTIONING MEASURES

nature of marital assessment can vary dramatically depending upon the population being served (Bradbury, 1995), this paper focuses on measures that are broadly applicable to a number of research and clinical needs rather than those that have been developed for highly specific populations or problems. Finally, an effort has been made to cover a relatively broad array of measures at the expense of providing a great deal of information on each of them. These parameters are in keeping with those employed by Bradbury (1995) in his discussion of a model of marital functioning and associated measures.

While reviewing this paper the reader may find it helpful to refer to Figure 1 for a graphic representation of the relationship domains and their associated measures, the interaction between the domains, and the factors influencing them.

Domains of Marital Functioning

Marital Satisfaction

Definitions of marital satisfaction are theoretically grounded in social exchange and equity theories (Vaughn & Matyastik Baier, 1999). According to Walster, Walster and Berscheid (1978), inequitable exchanges cause distress and detract from satisfaction with one's relationships. Giving more to a relationship than one receives leads to feelings of unfairness and resentment, whereas receiving more than one gives leads to feelings of guilt and shame. Consequently, an imbalance of either type leads to dissatisfaction. Indeed, Kamo (1993) found that relationship satisfaction increases when the relationship is perceived as fair. Satisfaction measures typically tap an individual's attitudes toward his or her partner and the relationship (Roach, Frazier & Bowden, 1981). The unit of analysis is the individual (i.e., the individual's attitudes or feelings), and the object of analysis is the individual's subjective impression rather than objective accounts of the relationship (Vaughn & Matyastik Baier, 1999).

Measures of Marital Satisfaction

The Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS).

The RAS (Hendrick, 1988) is a unifactorial measure of global relationship satisfaction and focuses on: how well the partner meets the other's needs, how well the relationship compares to others, regrets about the relationship, how well the individual's expectations have been met, love for partner, and problems in the relationship (Hendrick, Dicke & Hendrick, 1998). Using the RAS is advantageous due to its brevity and the fact that it does not confound attitudes and behaviors. Also, the seven-point scale permits evaluation of subtle variations in satisfaction across a wide spectrum. In terms of shortcomings, the RAS is unable to unearth specific areas of distress and cannot clearly distinguish

between satisfied and dissatisfied individuals due to the absence of cut-off scores.

Marital Satisfaction Scale (MSS).

The MSS (Roach et al., 1981) was designed specifically to measure satisfaction. Roach et al. (1981) wanted to develop a uni-dimensional measure of an individual's subjective attitude toward the marriage relationship. Initially, a 73-item Likert-type scale was developed; content was derived from the marital literature and the author's experiences as a therapist. Several evaluative studies allowed the measure to be refined and reduced to a final 48-item version.

The authors of the MSS have been praised for developing a unidimensional assessment tool that captures an individual's subjective evaluation of their relationship. However, the content of the scale has been criticized. Not all items evoke affect or opinion related to satisfaction with the marriage for example "I'm afraid of losing my spouse to divorce," "I feel competent and fully able to handle my marriage," "My spouse and I agree on what is right and proper conduct" (Sabatelli, 1988).

KANSAS Marital Satisfaction Scale (KMSS).

The KMSS (Schumm et al., 1986) consists of three items and was designed as a short and direct assessment of marital satisfaction, including both satisfaction with spouse and the marriage relationship. The scale is praised for its direct focus on relationships as a whole and its validity (Sabatelli, 1988). It also appears able to accurately assess marital satisfaction while maintaining brevity (Schumm et al., 1986). The authors of the test acknowledge its fallibility due to socially desirable responding and the tendency for distribution of responses to the scale to depart significantly from what is normal in terms of skewness and kurtosis.

ENRICH Inventory.

The ENRICH Marital Satisfaction Scale (EMS) is made up of two of the subscales of the ENRICH (Evaluation and Nurturing Relationship Issues Communication and Happiness) Inventory, which is a multidimensional measure of marital satisfaction (Fowers & Olson, 1993). The EMS Scale is a 15-item measure that includes the Idealistic Distortion (5 items) and Marital Satisfaction (10 items) subscales from the original ENRICH Inventory. Each of the 10 Marital Satisfaction items represents a marital relationship area that Fournier et al. (1983) deemed important and that was assessed by the full ENRICH Inventory. The Idealistic Distortion scale serves as a marital conventionalization scale, correcting the Marital Satisfaction scale score by capturing the extent to which the respondent portrays the marriage in an unrealistically positive light. The EMS Scale provides a score for each individual as well as a couple

score. The EMS Scale provides a broad sampling of the important domains of marital satisfaction and appears to provide a psychometrically sound means of measuring marital satisfaction (Fournier et al., 1983). It also includes an assessment of marital conventionalization, which can aid in the recognition of overly positive evaluations of marriage and/or denial of problems. Lastly, there is a readily available couple consensus score. In short, the EMS Scale is a brief measure that reflects many of the strengths of the full length ENRICH Inventory.

Marital Adjustment

Marital Adjustment measures were developed to provide a richer view of marriage than that which is provided by simple satisfaction measures (Spanier, 1976). Marital adjustment typically refers to those processes that are presumed necessary to achieve a harmonious and functional marital relationship (Sabatelli, 1988). Bradbury (1995) describes it as the ways in which individuals and couples deal with their differences of opinion and individual or marital difficulties and transitions. A well-adjusted relationship is typically described as involving frequent interaction between partners, open communication, infrequent disagreement on important marital issues, and the ability to resolve disagreement when they do occur (Spanier, 1976). For adjustment measures, the unit of focus is the dyad. Measures of marital adjustment target the individual's account of the relationship in an effort to gain insight into marital functioning. Unlike satisfaction measures, which are designed to illicit the individual's subjective perspective, adjustment measures attempt to gain a more objective perspective. It is assumed that respondents, completing adjustment measures, are reporting on the types of behaviors that characterize their marital interactions without presumably passing judgment on them (Sabatelli, 1988). However, it has been noted that the conceptualization and operationalization of marital adjustment is confounded by the fact that satisfaction with the relationship and/or partner can also be included as a component of marital adjustment (Locke & Wallace, 1959; Spanier 1976; Spanier & Cole 1976). Hence, when satisfaction is conceived of as a component of adjustment, the measure's focus is on both the dyad and the individual, and the measure's object of analysis becomes both the objective aspects of dyadic interaction and the subjective impressions of the relationship (Sabatelli, 1988).

Measures of Marital Adjustment

The Locke-Wallace Short Marital Adjustment Test (LWMAT).

The LWMAT (Locke & Wallace, 1959) has been in use since 1959. It assesses marital adjustment, which Locke (1951) defined as a couple's ability to avoid and/or resolve conflict so that both partners feel satisfied with the marriage

and each other. This 15-item measure assesses the spouses' happiness with each other and marriage, the degree of agreement on marital issues (i.e., sex, affection, philosophy of life), the experience of companionship, and the ability to constructively resolve conflicts. (Locke & Wallace, 1959). Despite being in use for several decades, however, the measure has limitations. First, there is a tendency for individuals' to respond in socially desirable ways. Second, the LWMAT was calculated on the basis of a sample made up only of well or poorly adjusted couples, compromising its reliability. Finally, the conceptualization of adjustment may be outdated, for example, in response to the item dealing with companionship and recreation, the highest level of adjustment is assigned to those individuals who report that both spouses generally prefer to "stay at home" rather than be "on the go."

Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS).

The DAS was developed by Spanier (1976) for use with married and cohabiting couples. Spanier (1976) defined adjustment as a process, the outcome of which is reflected by problematic differences and tensions between the couple, as well as dyadic satisfaction, cohesion and consensus on important matters. The DAS measure consists of 32 items derived from an original pool of 200 items. Arriving at the final version of the scale involved a content review by a panel of judges, an item analysis, and factor analysis. The DAS yields a total score and four sub-scores each reflecting a dimension of adjustment, namely, dyadic satisfaction, dyadic consensus, dyadic cohesion and affectional expression.

The validity of the DAS has been questioned as it involved discriminating between couples in therapy and normal controls. The overall dyadic adjustment score might also be biased as the measure includes subscales of differing lengths and items of different response categories. Finally, there is a tendency to elicit subjective and global impressions due to the inclusion of both evaluative and descriptive items (Sabatelli, 1988).

However, there are several factors that support the ongoing use of the DAS. First, the DAS has a massive database collected on it and has proved to be a useful, reliable and valid measure in a number of studies (Heyman, Sayers & Bellack, 1994). Second, because the DAS asks about specific content areas, it provides a useful indicator of areas that are causing particular difficulty (Heyman et al., 1994). Finally, Sabourin and colleagues (2005) have recently developed an abbreviated form of the DAS called the DAS-4. This was psychometrically sound, as effective as the original DAS, less contaminated by socially desirable responding and less time-consuming to administer.

Marital Satisfaction Inventory.

EVALUATION AND ORGANIZATION OF MARITAL FUNCTIONING MEASURES

The Marital Satisfaction Inventory (MSI) was developed by Snyder (1979). It is an objective self-report measure designed to assess an individual's attitudes and beliefs regarding specific areas of his or her marriage. Although the measure's name implies that it taps satisfaction, it aims to provide insight into the adjustment quality of a relationship. The MSI consists of 280 true/false items that fall into one of 11 subscales covering 10 different dimensions of marital and family life including: global distress, affective communication, problem solving communication, time together, disagreement about finances, sexual dissatisfaction, role orientation, family history of distress, dissatisfaction with children, and conflict over child rearing. The MSI also contains a conventionalization scale. The items comprising this validity scale reflect the tendency of subjects to distort their appraisals of their marriages in socially desirable direction. No composite or total satisfaction score is derived. The test was designed so that nine of the scales can be given to couples who have no children. Snyder (1979) created the measure by combining test items on an intuitive basis and refining them through deriving the scales' internal consistencies, item-to-total scale correlations, and correlations of each subscale with the global measure of satisfaction. Because Snyder (1979) was concerned with creating an inventory useful for clinicians, the MSI can provide therapists with a comprehensive picture of the problem areas experienced by the couple. However, Sabatelli (1988) raises concerns about the content validity of the inventory. There is a tendency for some scales to correlate highly with the global distress measure and there is an absence of data on scale inter-correlations.

Marital Quality

There are two distinct approaches to the conceptualization and operationalization of marital quality (Sabatelli, 1988). The first is to treat marital quality as a hybrid concept reflecting both marital adjustment (i.e., good communication and the absence of conflict) and marital satisfaction (i.e., a high degree of satisfaction with the relationship and the spouse) (Lewis & Spanier, 1979). This blends adjustment and satisfaction into a broader and more inclusive construct. When marital quality is conceived of in this way, measures assess both objective and subjective aspects of the relationship, and both the dyad and the individual are the foci of analysis. The above results in a measure of marital quality closely resembling what has historically been presented as a measure of adjustment (Sabatelli, 1988). The second way in which marital quality is conceptualized and operationalized is as reflecting an individual's global evaluation of the marriage relationship (Fincham and Bradbury, 1987; Norton, 1983). This allows inferences to be drawn about how respondents view their relationships. However, this formulation of marital quality is highly similar to conceptualizations of marital satisfaction. According to Sabatelli (1988), when some researchers refer to an individual's global evaluations or attitudes toward their partner

or relationship they mean marital satisfaction while others are describing marital quality.

Measures of Marital Quality

The Quality of Marriage Index (QMI).

The QMI (Norton, 1983) is a six item measure of marital quality defined as a person's subjective evaluation of the relationship as a whole, specifically how good it is. The six items that comprise the scale were derived from a 20-item pilot questionnaire that was administered to 430 married couples and then subjected to item and factor analyses. One of the measure's strengths is that it provides a direct way of evaluating an individual's global assessment of their marital relationship. However, there is a lack of extensive data supporting the measure's validity.

Marital Intimacy

Gilbert (1976) defined intimacy as a deep verbal and nonverbal exchange between two individuals, which conveys both acceptance and commitment to the relationship. According to Van den Broucke and colleagues (1995), intimacy is a dyadic phenomenon and defines the degree of connectedness between two partners. Intimacy includes affective, cognitive and behavioral aspects (Van den Broucke, Vandereycken & Vertommenand, 1995) and consequently, measures of intimacy can be grouped according to which concept they primarily reflect (Prager, 2000). Marital intimacy can be conceived of as a process (i.e., a characteristic way of relating between two partners that develops over time), and it can also refer to the relatively stable higher-order relationship qualities that emerge from this process (Van den Broucke et al., 1995). Intimacy can be regarded as an important domain of marital functioning, has been cited as an important component in marital relationships (Berman & Lief, 1975), and is considered one of several interpersonal dimensions of close and prolonged relationships (Waring, Tillman, Frelick, Russel & Weiz, 1980). Furthermore, intimacy is dynamically related to the other four core domains of marital functioning (i.e., marital satisfaction, marital quality, marital adjustment and sexual satisfaction). Research has found intimacy to be positively related to satisfaction and commitment in close relationships (Prager, 1995). There is also evidence that intimacy is the primary dimension that determines marital adjustment (Waring, McElrath, Mitchell & Derry, 1981). In terms of sexual satisfaction, Lawrence and Beyers (1995) and Oiggins and colleagues (1993) found that relationship characteristics such as intimacy are related to level of sexual satisfaction. Sexuality is regarded as a core composite of intimacy (Hames & Waring, 1980; Waring, McElrath, Mitchell & Deary, 1981).

Measures of Marital Intimacy

Marital Intimacy Questionnaire (MIQ).

The MIQ (Van de Broucke et al., 1995) is a 56-item self-report questionnaire that measures five factor-analytically derived dimensions: intimacy problems, consensus (generally exemplifying cognitive and behavioral aspects of intimacy), openness (including authenticity), affection, and commitment. Its strengths include a strong conceptual link with a marital intimacy theoretical model, high face validity, reasonable length, and the fact that it is easy to administer and score by hand. It also allows for identification of the current strengths and weaknesses with regard to the couple's intimacy. However, the test authors acknowledge the need for additional validation studies as well as an assessment of the scales' predictive validity (Van de Broucke, et al., 1995).

Miller Social Intimacy Scale.

The Miller Social Intimacy Scale (MSIS) aims to assess the level of social intimacy currently experienced in a marriage, dating relationship, or friendship (Miller & Lefcourt, 1982). Despite the fact that intimacy is not operationally defined, item analysis indicates that intimacy is conceptualized as involving frequent self-disclosures and confiding, intense feelings of affection, closeness, and empathy (Sabatelli, 1988). The 17 items that make up this self-report inventory were selected from an initial pool of 30 items that were subjected to inter-item and item-to-total correlations. Sabatelli (1988) praises the measure for its thoughtful construction and the efforts made to demonstrate its validity. However, since items were derived from content analysis of interviews with students about intimate relationships the content validity of the scale may be compromised.

Personal Assessment of Intimacy in Relationships.

The Personal Assessment of Intimacy in Relationships (PAIR; Schaefer & Olson, 1981) distinguishes between intimate experiences and intimate relationships, and assesses the degree to which each partner experiences intimacy in five different relationship areas: emotional intimacy, social intimacy, sexual intimacy, intellectual intimacy, and recreational intimacy. Individuals are asked to respond to a 5-point Likert scale regarding how they currently experience the relationship and how they would like to experience the relationship. This is particularly helpful clinically as it highlights the gap between the current reality of the relationship and expectations, which may themselves be unrealistic. The scale was created through the item and factor analysis of a large pool of items reflecting various types of intimacy. This process resulted in six items for each of the five intimacy dimensions, as well as a conventionality subscale. The PAIR provides valuable information on how intimacy experiences differ from expectations.

Weaknesses of the measure include that there is a conceptual difference between expectations and ideals that the PAIR neglects to clarify. Also, although the measure could be used for research purposes by computing total scores from the subscale scores, Schaefer and Olson (1981) do not advocate this. They regard the measure's strength as its ability to provide a profile of intimacy experienced across various dimensions. It is therefore their contention that a total score would be meaningless.

Sexual Satisfaction

According to Schwartz and Rutter (1998), sex is one of the most intimate behaviors in which couples engage and one that can serve as a barometer for the entire relationship. Sexual satisfaction impacts marital functioning because it is related to marital satisfaction. Frequency, quality of sex, and sexual satisfaction have been found to be associated with general relationship satisfaction (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1977; Call, Sprecher & Schwartz, 1995; Donnelly, 1993; Cupach & Comstock, 1990; Edwards and Booth, 1976; Greeley, 1991; Lawrence & Byers, 1995; Oggins, Leber & Veroff, 1993). Prospective studies reveal that sexual problems and/or sexual dissatisfaction predicts later relationship dissolution (Edwards & Booth, 1994; Oggins et al., 1993; Veroff, Douvan & Hatchett, 1995; White & Keith, 1991). Consequently, understanding and assessing a couple's functioning may necessitate the use of one of the many measures of relationship and/or individuals' sexual functioning. One of the challenges faced by measures of sexual satisfaction is how to tap both the psychological and physiological elements of sexuality (Young, Denny, Luquis & Young, 1998).

*Measures of Sexual Satisfaction**Golombok-Rust Inventory of Sexual Satisfaction.*

The Golombok-Rust Inventory of Sexual Satisfaction, also known as GRISS (Rust & Golombok, 1985), is a short measure of sexual dysfunction for heterosexual couples. It contains 28 items covering seven major areas: frequency, satisfaction, interest, dysfunctions, anxiety, communication and touching. There are two subscales for males (Impotence and Premature Ejaculation) and two subscales for females (Anorgasmia and Vaginismus). It provides overall scores for the quality of sexual functioning within a relationship for men and women separately. The initial test items were generated by sex therapists at the Maudsley Hospital Sexual Dysfunction Clinic. The final test items were selected following several statistical analyses. The GRISS is a highly reliable measure of sexual dysfunction, discriminates well between those with and without sexual problems and appears sensitive to changes that result from planned interventions.

EVALUATION AND ORGANIZATION OF MARITAL FUNCTIONING MEASURES

Factors Influencing Marital Functioning

From the preceding discussion it is clear that there is considerable overlap in the conceptualization and operationalization of the domains of marital functioning, particularly marital satisfaction, adjustment and quality. Clinicians and researchers who wish to gain an even greater understanding as to the exact causes underlying poor marital functioning can turn to one of the various measures of marital complaints that have been developed, such as the Areas of Change Questionnaire (Birchler & Webb, 1977), the Lovesickness Scale (Ryder, 1973), or the Marital Comparison Level Index (Sabatelli, 1984). They could also consider employing marital measures related to those factors that influence marital functioning (i.e., commitment, dependence, dissolution potential, individual characteristics, and life events). The remainder of this paper mentions briefly each of these factors and their associated measures.

Relational Influencing Factor – Commitment

Commitment has not typically been included as a variable in the research examining marital functioning (Dean & Spanier, 1974), however, several studies have highlighted its association with pro-relationship maintenance acts. These include the tendency to accommodate rather than retaliate when a partner behaves badly (Rusbult, Verette, Whitney, Slovik & Lipkus, 1991), willingness to sacrifice desirable activities when conflicting with a partner's preferences (e.g., Van Lange et al., 1997), and tendencies toward relationship-enhancing illusions (e.g., Martz et al., 1998). In addition, Rusbult, Martz and Agnew (1999) found that both commitment and commitment-inspired maintenance behaviors have been shown to be associated with couple wellbeing (i.e., tendency to persist in the relationship and marital adjustment). Given the above, level of commitment appears to be associated with healthy functioning in ongoing relationships.

Measures of Marital Commitment

Lund Commitment Scale.

The Lund Commitment Scale (1985) assesses respondents' thoughts about the likelihood of their relationship continuing, the degree to which respondents pursue alternative relationships, respondents' perceptions of the costs involved in terminating their relationship, and respondents' feelings of desire and obligation for continuing the relationship. Respondents are also asked how committed their partner is to the relationship and how likely their partner is to continue in it. The nine items in the scale were derived from item, factor and reliability analyses. The scale is unidimensional (item loadings range from .29 to .81). Criticisms of the measure include the fact that items within the scale were derived from students' responses to open-ended questions

about commitment rather than being based on conceptualizations of commitment. Indeed, the current conceptualization of commitment underlying the Lund Commitment Scale confounds personal commitment with perceptions of partner commitment; the latter is not a reflection of an individual's interest in maintaining the relationship despite being statistically related.

Broderick Commitment Scale.

Beach and Broderick (1983) created a single item measure of commitment that involves the individual being read a definition of commitment and then rating his or her level of commitment on a scale from 0 to 100. The primary criticism of the BCS is that it is a single item measure and therefore cannot fully represent the theoretical concept of commitment or discriminate among its nuances. Also, it is harder to deduce the measurement properties of a single item measure.

Relational Influencing Factor - Marital Dependence

The investment model suggests that dependence produces the psychological experience of commitment (Rusbult, 1980; 1983). According to Drigotas and colleagues (1999) dependence is a structural property and describes the extent to which an individual needs a relationship, whereas commitment is a subjective experience occurring on a daily basis. The degree to which a person is dependent on a relationship typically follows from the presence of distinct obstacles that increase the cost of terminating the relationship. Examples include the quality of alternative relationships, the experienced degree of indebtedness to the partner, personal belief systems about divorce, and structural features (i.e., community pressures, economic considerations) (Sabatelli, 1988).

Measure of Marital Dependence

Marital Alternatives Scale (MAS).

The MAS (Udry, 1981, 1983) assesses two factors contributing to dependence: respondents' perceptions of how much better or worse off they would be without their present spouse and how easily the spouse could be replaced with one of comparable quality. The MAS consists of 11 items focusing on individuals' perceptions of their alternative relationships and their expectation about the quality of their general situation following dissolution. Respondents are instructed to suppose that their spouse were to leave this year. With this in mind, they are to decide whether they think it would be impossible, possible, probable, or certain, to find another spouse as good as the existing one, to be able to take care of themselves, and to be better off economically. The measure may be confounded with a more global perception of the quality of the marital relationship.

Relational Influencing Factor - Dissolution Potential

Measures of dissolution potential address the degree to which people are thinking about separation and are planning or acting on these thoughts. These measures can be thought of as providing insight into how uncommitted individuals are in their marriage and allow researchers to make inferences about the potential instability of a relationship (Sabatelli, 1988).

Measures of Dissolution Potential

Marital Status Inventory (MSI).

The MSI (Weiss & Cerreto, 1980) is based on the assumption that the termination of a marriage unfolds as a series of discrete acts. Given its theoretical orientation, the MSI employs a Guttman scale, with the scale's items reflecting a progression from simply thinking about separation or divorce to actively preparing by establishing financial independence from spouse. Weiss and Cerreto (1980) acknowledge that the measure does not address the dissolution potential of a relationship directly, since there could be discrepancies in spouses' scores. What the measure does provide is an assessment of the degree to which an individual has thought about or acted on terminating his or her relationship. A limitation of the MSI lies in its failure to take into account when and how often the divorce thoughts and behaviors occur. The outcome of this is that judgment about dissolution potential of an individual may be based upon thoughts or behaviors that have occurred several years in the past (Sabatelli, 1988). The measure may be best suited to those research situations in which changes in relationships over time are being investigated.

Marital Instability Index (MII).

The Marital Instability Index (MII: Booth, Johnson and Edwards, 1983; Booth, Johnson, White and Edwards, 1985) is designed to assess a couple's predisposition to dissolve an existing marriage. Specifically, it measures the degree to which divorce is being contemplated and uncovers evidence of behavior that indicates a high probability of marital termination. Initially constructed and refined via item and factor analyses, the measure consists of 14 items. Individuals are asked questions about their own as well as their spouses' thoughts and feelings. The MII is a carefully constructed measure based upon a firm conceptual and methodological foundation. Rather than being a measure of an individual's likelihood to terminate the marriage, the MII is clearly designed to assess the dissolution potential of a relationship. In terms of criticism, asking an individuals to report on one's spouse's thoughts and behaviors is problematic, as one may not know if one's spouse thinks that the relationship is in trouble.

Individual Influencing Factors - Individual Characteristics

Many longitudinal studies of marriage have examined the stable demographic, historical, personality and experiential factors that individuals bring to marriage and how these factors influence marital outcome. Such characteristics include educational experiences and attainment, peer interactions, dating history, sexual development, medical history and experiences in the family of origin (e.g. parental separation and divorce, family conflict, sibling relationships and financial hardships). When assessing/investigating a marital dyad, the clinician and researcher should remain conscious of these factors and their associated measures. One of these is the Relationship Questionnaire (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991), which is based on Bowlby's theory of attachment and assumes that individuals' very early experiences in close relationships will shape the nature and development of subsequent relationships in adulthood. Another is the Five-Factor Model of Personality which can be helpful in assessing and understanding relationships since personality factors such as neuroticism, extraversion, openness to expression, agreeableness, and conscientiousness influence relationship satisfaction and intimacy (White, Hendrick and Hendrick, 2004).

External Influencing Factors - Life Events and Circumstances

Stressful events, developmental transitions, and chronic or acute circumstances that couples encounter can impact on marital wellbeing. Indeed, studies focusing on these variables highlight how the events and environmental conditions to which couples are exposed can affect the quality and stability of marriage (Bradbury, 1995). The Social Readjustment Rating Scale (Holmes & Rahe, 1967) is an example of a measure that can be used to assess this.

Conclusion

Marriage remains a popular institution despite the likelihood of divorce and high rates of dissatisfaction among married individuals. Consequently, there is a great need for clinicians and researchers to assess, study, and understand close relationships. However, due to the complex nature of marriage there are a vast and diverse number of measures of marital functioning. This paper has attempted to provide the researcher, clinician and student with a simple framework for conceptually organizing these measures and understanding their complex interconnectedness. Five core domains of marital functioning were presented, namely; marital quality, satisfaction, adjustment, intimacy, and sexual satisfaction. In addition, a number of individual, relational, and external factors (i.e., commitment, dependence, dissolution, individual characteristics, and life events) that influence these five

EVALUATION AND ORGANIZATION OF MARITAL FUNCTIONING MEASURES

domains were considered. Finally, a number of measures relating to the core domains and factors were presented and critically evaluated. This theoretical paper should prove a point of departure for those seeking to select a measure of marital functioning for research or clinical use.

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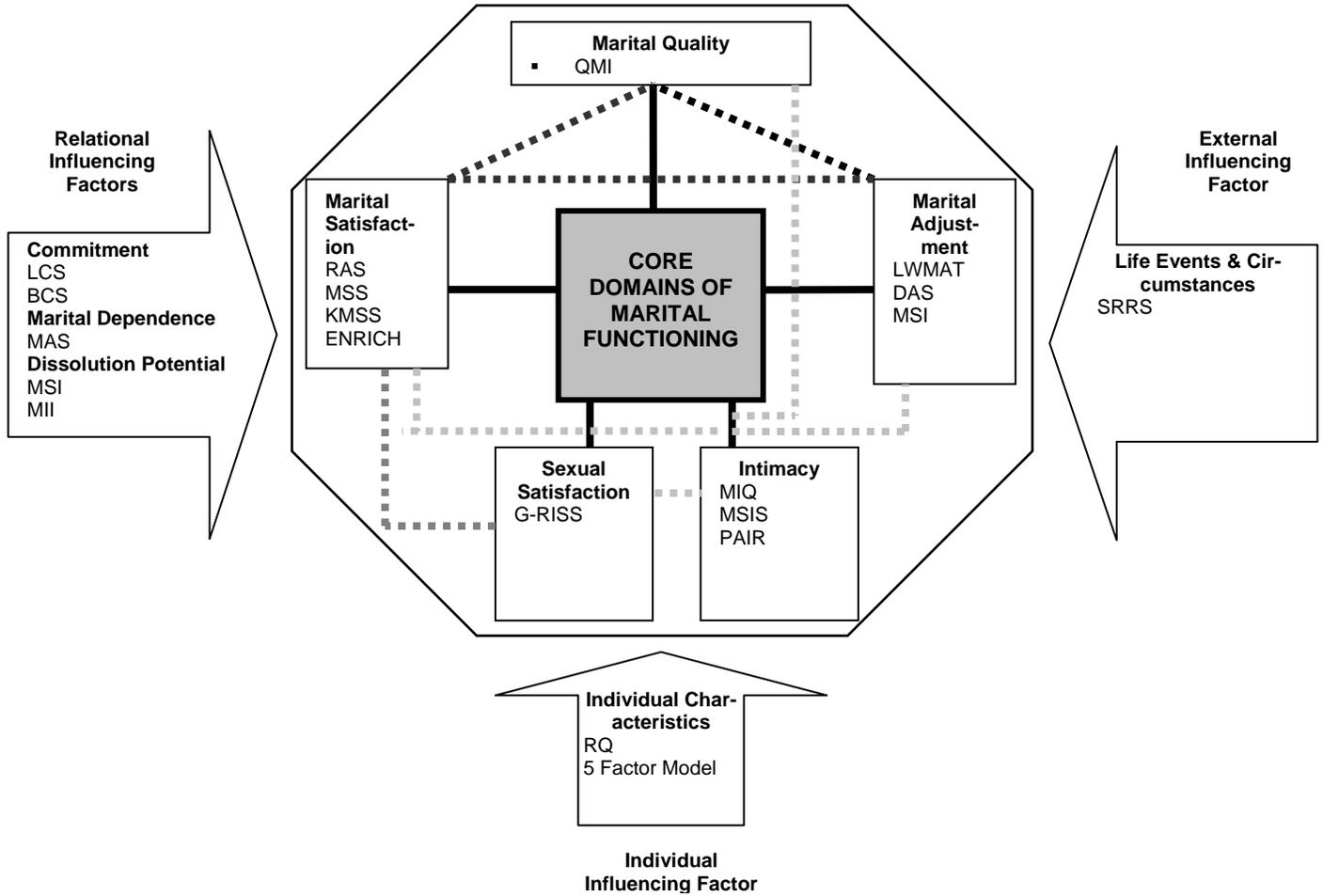
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EVALUATION AND ORGANIZATION OF MARITAL FUNCTIONING MEASURES

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Figure 1
Domains of Marital Function and Influencing Factors – Interrelationship and Associated Measures



Relationship domains and associated measures (in rectangles), the interaction between them (hard and dotted lines), and factors influencing them (arrows).

RAS – Relationship Assessment Scale
 MSS – Marital Satisfaction Scale
 KMSS – KANSAS Marital Satisfaction Scale
 ENRICH – Evaluation and Nurturing Relationship Issues Communication and Happiness
 LWMAT – The Lock-Wallace Short Marital Adjustment Test
 DAS – Dyadic Adjustment Scale
 MSI – Marital Satisfaction Inventory
 QMI – Quality of Marriage Index
 MIQ – Marital Intimacy Questionnaire

MSIS – Miller Social Intimacy Scale
 PAIR – Personal Assessment of Intimacy in Relationships
 GRISS – Golombok-Rust Inventory of Sexual Satisfaction
 LCS – Lund Commitment Scale
 BCS - Broderick Commitment Scale
 MAS – Marital Alternatives Scale
 MSI – Marital Status Inventory
 MII – Marital Instability Index
 RQ – Relationship Questionnaire
 SRRS – Social Readjustment Rating Scale