

Assessing Couple and Marital Relationships:  
Beyond Form and Toward a Deeper Knowledge of Function

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There is increasing interest in both the public and private sectors to attempt to help more couples enter into and maintain strong and healthy marriages (e.g., Horn, 2003; Ooms, 1998). While there has been a growing marriage movement of sorts in the U. S. since the early 1990s, interest in marriage in the public sector has burgeoned with the passage of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996; the act that changed the welfare system in the U. S. into the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families program (TANF). This act was passed after development of compromise language between the democrat executive branch (President Bill Clinton) and republican legislature.

While little known and less emphasized, TANF included the goal of increasing the number of children living in stable, two parent families. Two of the four foundational goals are explicit in this regard:

- To end dependence of needy parents on government benefits by promoting job preparation, work and marriage
- To encourage the formation and maintenance of two-parent families

Various efforts were begun since the passage of TANF in 1996 that are consistent with these goals. Efforts to achieve these goals are likely to be significantly increased when the law is re-authorized because the current administration is asking for explicit funding for programs at the federal, state, and community levels to foster the TANF goals expressed above. Those efforts will encompass everything from changes in existing programming to make them more marriage friendly, deployment of relationship and marriage education curricula to teach individuals and couples strategies to improve their odds, and policy changes to reduce disincentives to marry.

Here, I will use the terms curricula and program in the manner being used in Oklahoma, with “curricula” referring to relationship/marriage education materials (and related workshops,

classes, resources) and “programs” referring to the specific expression of efforts at whatever level as they are enacted in a community or state (personal communication, Mary Myrick, March, 2003). Hence, a full fledged program effort—for example to help couples in the transition to parenthood—might include both policy changes, changes in existing program implementations with regard to marriage or the possibility of it, and curricula specifically designed to help couples acquire certain skills or knowledge. I will use the term “intervention” loosely here to refer to curricula and programmatic efforts designed to foster healthy marriages that may be evaluated in outcome research.

As public and private sector efforts designed to help couples with marriage accelerate, it becomes increasingly important to gauge the overall effectiveness of the wide variety of efforts that will be attempted. Constructs and variables that may be useful in such evaluations—as well as larger goals of improving basic science understandings of relationships—is the focus of this paper.

### The Concept of “Healthy” Marriage

The public discourse surrounding specific desires to meet these goals has become refined in recent years, as reflected in the words of Wade Horn, under-secretary for the Administration for Children and Families:

We're going to support activities that help couples who choose marriage for themselves develop the skills and knowledge necessary to form and sustain a healthy marriage.

Perhaps the most important two words in this statement are “choose” and “healthy.” Both words deal with important concerns as well as political realities, only one of which is chiefly relevant here: *Healthy*. As stated on numerous occasions by Wade Horn and others, the goal of

these efforts under TANF—as well as other government initiatives to foster healthy marriage, such as being sought by the present administration—is to help couples who are interested in marriage have a better chance of having healthy marriages. This has led to important discussions in a variety of sectors about what a healthy marriage is, and correspondingly, what an unhealthy marriage would be. I will not attempt to resolve such matters here except to note dimensions that I and colleagues such as Howard Markman think could be important in gauging the effects of state and community programs that might result in healthy marriages.

There are a few dimensions that seem obvious based on existing research, which I will argue are foundational to other elements that might be assessed. We believe that sound marriages have two essential types of safety (Stanley, Markman, Whitton, 2002). First, there is the safety of the day-to-day interaction of the relationship, including emotional safety and a sense of positive connection in the absence of chronic fear of criticism, negativity, or danger. This type of safety can be divided further to include safety from physical or psychological injury such as would be inflicted through domestic violence. Second, there is the safety that comes from having a clear commitment to the future that provides an overall sense of security and a reason to believe that it is worth putting effort and investment into the relationship. Hence, three elements of safety are, in my view, foundational to a healthy marriage.

- 1) Interaction safety
- 2) Personal safety
- 3) Commitment safety

In our view, it is easier to specify what an unhealthy marriage is than a healthy one, in large part because it appears to us and colleagues that there is more diversity and mystery on the positive side of couple relationships; whereas couples are strikingly unimaginative in the types of

processes that destroy marriages over time (Markman, Stanley, & Blumberg, 2001; Stanley, Trathen, McCain, & Bryan, 1998). As suggested by Notarius and Markman (1993), Tolstoy may have had it backwards when he suggested in the opening lines of *Anna Karenina* that “All happy families resemble one another, but each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way.” Regardless, we find the concept of safety on multiple dimensions very useful for describing some of the essential elements of successful (or unhealthy) marriages.

***Interaction Safety.*** There is a tremendous amount of evidence that relationships that are characterized by chronic negative interaction can be damaging to adults and the children living with them. Negative interaction includes patterns such as escalation, criticism, invalidation, withdrawal, demand-withdraw, contempt, and so forth.

- Negative patterns of interaction strongly differentiate happy couples from unhappy couples (e.g., Birchler, Weiss, & Vincent, 1975; Christensen & Heavey, 1990; Fincham & Beach, 1999; Gottman & Notarius, 2000; Johnson, et al., 2002; Stanley, Markman, & Whitton, 2002).
- Negative patterns of interaction are one of the best discriminators of which couples will go on to experience chronic distress, break up, or divorce (e.g., Gottman, 1993; Gottman & Krokoff, 1989; Heavey, Christensen, Malamuth, 1995; Karney & Bradbury, 1995; Markman & Hahlweg, 1993).
- Negative patterns of interaction are associated with a variety of negative outcomes for children, including mental health risks, decrements in school performance, and various forms of acting out behavior (e.g., Cummings & Davies, 1994; Emery, 1982; Grych & Fincham, 1990).
- Negative patterns of interaction are associated with negative mental health outcomes for

adults, such as depression and anxiety (e.g., Beach & O'Leary, 1993; Fincham, Beach, Harold, & Osborne, 1997; Halford & Bouma, 1997).

There is therefore compelling evidence that chronic, negative interaction and poorly managed conflict places adults and children at risk. A healthier marriage would be characterized by lower levels of such negativity. An unhealthy marriage would be marked by higher, chronic levels. As will be discussed later in this paper, reductions or prevention of such patterns would be one kind of evidence that interventions were being effective in promoting healthier marriages and family relationships.

Beyond negative interaction being a hallmark of an absence of interaction safety, positive dimensions such as supportiveness and friendship would go a long way toward fostering a day-to-day sense of being safe and well connected in a marriage (see discussion of these and other dimensions below).

***Personal Safety.*** The obvious may not need to be stated, but domestic violence puts adults—and especially women and children—at greatly increased risk for mental health problems, health problems, and death (Straus & Gelles, 1990). Healthy marriages, and interventions designed to foster them, could be expected to help prevent domestic violence in ongoing or future relationships, reduce the likelihood for ongoing violence in relationships where there have been incidents, and reduce the number of such relationships people remain in, especially those relationships characterized by the most serious and dangerous forms of domestic violence.

***Commitment Safety.*** Marriage can be fundamentally construed as a long-term investment, and in many ways, functions like one (Stanley, 1998; Stanley, Lobitz, & Dickson,

1999). It is the expectation of longevity that makes the day-to-day investment and sacrifice that characterizes good marriages rational. In contrast, having no clear sense of a future favors relationships with increased pressure for performance in the present, with score-keeping being the logical outgrowth (Murstein & MacDonald, 1983; Stanley et al., 1999). While data directly addressing the effects of long versus shorter term views are thin, and causality is no doubt in both directions, the existing evidence suggests that couples do best when they have a longer time horizon for their relationships (Amato & Rogers, 1999; Stanley & Markman, 1992; Waite & Gallagher, 2000; Waite & Joyner, 2001). Simply put, couples do best when they have a clear sense of us with a future: couple identity with a long-term view (Stanley & Markman, 1992). This does not mean that it makes sense for all couples to have a future. Some relationships are destructive and would be better ended than continued. I believe that the average couple with reasonable potential in marriage will do best if they are able to maintain the protective benefits that come from commitment.

### Variables and Constructs

I will cover a variety of variables and constructs that have potential in the evaluation of healthy marriage interventions. The list I will cover is certainly not exhaustive, but it is useful for portraying the potential of measurement that now exists. I would not expect that all studies or even most would attempt measurement of all of these constructs, but I do think the constructs presented here are exemplars of what can be assessed to advance knowledge by assessing dynamics and outcomes at a level of richness beyond the simplicity of knowing about mere satisfaction or relationship stability.

Following the presentation of what I think are some potentially important variables, I will present a brief discussion. Following that, I have attached an appendix of information related to

measures that are available based on work in our lab or based on information I have solicited from psychological marriage research colleagues.

### The Movement Toward Larger Meanings and Depth in Marital Research

While great changes have been occurring in the public policy arena, major changes have also been taking place in the field of marital research. There are many that could be discussed but one that is most relevant here is the growing interest in a range of constructs that get at what I have called the big or larger meanings of marriage and relationship dynamics (Stanley & Markman, 1998). Whereas the early days of marital research were dominated by a focus on marital satisfaction, the focus shifted in the mid 1970s to a sustained, intense and productive focus on communication and conflict (led by researchers such as Robert Weiss, John Gottman, Howard Markman, and Clifford Notarius); a focus some now consider to have been extreme to the exclusion of other important constructs (e.g., Fincham, 2003). However, beginning in the mid 1980s, and greatly accelerating into the 1990s and beyond, the focus at least among psychologically trained marital researchers shifted dramatically toward constructs that are richer, and that have potential to elucidate important aspects of how couples form and function. Hence, such constructs as support, commitment, attachment, acceptance, and forgiveness are regular features of the landscape of basic research on marriage and family relationships. Such constructs have become available for use in intervention research. Such dimensions also move research closer to a broader conception of marriage that has the potential to get at deeper values and beliefs that affect marriages and how people behave in them (e.g., Fowers, 2000, 2001). Furthermore, we on our team believe such dimensions are both important and quite measurable among couples from a variety of backgrounds such as across wide differences in economic status, ethnic and cultural backgrounds, etc.

### Moderators and Outcomes

It is important to distinguish between two types of variables in addressing the types of measures that may be useful in efforts to assess couple or individual functioning. Some variables are best thought of as moderators of effects while others are best thought of as outcomes upon which effects might be demonstrated. Before addressing these categories in some detail, I want to point out that there are doubtless many important moderators and outcomes that we do not know about or that have never been tested or measured in related studies. Further, some variables might in one study be conceptualized as moderators and in others as outcomes. I am not attempting to address the complexity of potential mediators here, though many of the constructs I will discuss might be important in any number of roles.

I will also not attempt a review of the literature on outcome research on various couple curricula. Those are available (Carroll & Doherty, 2003; Giblin, Sprenkle, & Sheehan, 1985; Guerney & Maxson, 1990; Halford, Markman, Kline, & Stanley, 2003; Sayers, Kohn, & Heavey, 1998; Silliman, Stanley, Coffin, Markman, & Jordan, 2001; Stagner, Ehrle, Kortenkamp, & Reardon-Anderson, 2003). I will focus my comments about measurement in this context on specific constructs based on my experiences, and experiences with key colleagues, conducting outcome and basic relationship research.

My focus is on variables that have either been used in research assessing relationship education outcomes or that might profitably be used in such evaluations. Many of these same variables might also be of use in broader assessments of comprehensive, community program outcomes—as well as in larger survey based research designed to answer basic science questions about the nature of, and changes in, relationships and family structure in the U. S. For example,

negative interaction and interpersonal commitment can be assessed as outcomes in relationship education research (and frequently has been) but could also be assessed on a broader scale in community or statewide surveys (e.g., Oklahoma Statewide Baseline Survey; Johnson, Stanley, Glenn, Amato, Nock, Markman, & Dion, 2002).

### Possible Moderators

I use the word possible because it is apparent that we are only in the earliest stages of knowing what moderators are likely to matter most in studying interventions related to marriage. Yet, there are reasons to believe that certain moderators deserve careful attention. Moderators are important in this context because they represent variables that might impact the effectiveness of interventions but which may be relatively unalterable in their own right (e.g., religiosity, see below). Hence, moderators such as those discussed here are associated with risk but many of them are also relatively *static* and unchanging. This is in contrast to risk factors that are more *dynamic* and, therefore, can plausibly be changed as a matter of intervention (Stanley, 2001). We (I and Howard Markman) think static, moderator variables are less interesting as targets of intervention but are of central interest as possible determinants of who might benefit most from which types of interventions. It is useful to note that in many cases, what we call static risk factors such as parental divorce express their risk in the present through a dynamic risk, such as poorer communication skills or a diminished sense of commitment in marriage. Hence, even where the static risk helps in understanding a couple's overall risk, changes to risk are usually going to only occur on dynamic dimensions.

Moderators in this context can also be conceptualized as risk and protective factors that might make interventions either especially needed or less relevant. Many potentially interesting moderators have not been tested, or if tested, have not been found as yet to affect outcomes; or if

they have, have not been shown by replication to be robust in affecting outcomes. I am not covering here some moderators that should obviously be measured in any intervention evaluations, such as education, income, economic potential, ethnicity, and so forth. I am presuming that the need for adequately measuring such important variables is obvious to any researchers working in this area. In fact, there is a great need for significant efforts to advance our knowledge base of how racial and ethnic differences interact with risk dimensions in this field (e.g., personal communication, Shalonda Kelly at Rutgers, October 23, 2003, with whom I am chairing an upcoming symposium at the Association for the Advancement of Behavior Therapy entitled “Marital Interventions with Low Income or Minority Couples: New Research and Emerging Perspectives”). I am focusing here on existing measurement opportunities, but noting before I move to those themes the need for much more basic research directed toward understanding how to better understand racial and ethnic differences in couple formation and function.

***Family Background.*** There is evidence that a number of family background variables add to the risks for couples in marriage. For example, parental divorce experienced as a child is associated with subsequent risks for relationship problems in adulthood (Amato & Booth, 1997; Amato & DeBoer, 2001). As another example, there is evidence that exposure to violence between parents as a child is associated with negative affect and communication in engaged, male adults (Halford, Sanders, & Behrens, 2000). In one longer term study of premarital education, couples defined as high risk on these dimensions of family background did better taking a fully developed skills and cognitive based curricula (an Australian adaptation of a PREP model with a strong self-monitoring and regulation focus) than couples receiving a bibliotherapy oriented, eclectic curricula (Halford, Sanders, & Behrens, 2001). Low risk couples taking the

eclectic, less intense curricula fared somewhat better. Such findings on moderators related to family background have not, as yet, been replicated.

Some variables that I think would be interesting to measure as moderators are quite simple. For example, I do not know if anyone has ever done this, but it might be informative to ask program participants how many successful marriages they have seen, such as in their immediate families, extended families, and their communities. How are people affected in their own aspirations and risk based on what they have witnessed? What have they learned from what they have witnessed?

***Premarital Cohabitation.*** Cohabitation prior to marriage or instead of marriage has become prevalent, with profound implications for the structure of families and the context for childbearing in the U. S. (Casper & Bianchi, 2001; Smock, 2000). There is a vast amount of evidence that couples who live together prior to marriage are, on average, at greater risk not lower risk for marital distress (e.g., Cohan & Kleinbaum, 2002; DeMaris & Rao, 1992; Stanley, Whitton, & Markman, in press; Thomas & Colella, 1992). Further, evidence in our lab suggests that the clearest increased risk is for the couples who began to live together prior to having become engaged (Kline, et al., in press). Based on this, we conducted preliminary analyses that showed that higher risk couples (those cohabiting prior to engagement vs. those cohabiting after engagement or only after marriage) made the greatest gains terms of communication quality from PREP (Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program; Markman, Stanley, & Blumberg, 2001) as a premarital education curricula (analyses by Galena Kline presented in Stanley, Markman, St. Peters, et al., 2001).

***Religiosity.*** While there has been some overall lessening in the degree to which religious faith and practice affects public life in the U. S., there is little doubt that religious beliefs and

backgrounds continue to exert a strong influence on the relationship decisions as well as marital prospects of many couples. Religious faith and practice affects couples decisions about cohabitation prior to marriage (Axinn & Thornton, 1992; Lillard, Brien, & Waite, 1995; Stanley et al., in press), and is associated with marital quality and/or stability (e.g., Call & Heaton, 1997; Lehrer & Chiswick, 1993; Heaton & Pratt, 1990; Johnson et. al, 2002; Stanley & Markman, 1992). Further, active co-involvement together of partners in their beliefs and the practice of faith is strongly associated with marital quality (Mahoney, Pargament, Jewell, Swank, Scott, Emery, & Rye, 1999). Religious dissimilarity among partners is a known risk factor in marriage (e.g., Heaton & Pratt, 1990).

Preliminary analyses in our lab showed that less religious males (therefore higher risk males) increased substantially in negative interaction from pre to post intervention when taking naturally occurring premarital education curricula whereas less religious males taking PREP showed reductions in negativity. In other words, higher risk, less religious males faired more poorly, at least in the short run, when taking premarital education such as is typically offered in communities compared to taking PREP (Stanley, Markman, St. Peters, et al., 2001).

Richer constructs related to religious beliefs and marriage are being studied by Annette Mahoney and colleagues at Bowling Green State University. Such constructs might be profitably used in some evaluations of healthy marriage interventions. One very good example of this is her “sanctification of marriage” measures. These are designed to assess the degree to which a couple holds religious beliefs that marriage, and especially their marriage, is of particular spiritual significance (Mahoney et al., 1999). As can be easily imagined, not only may such beliefs be protective in the present for some couples, such beliefs would add to the motivation and investment partners might make to build and sustain their marriage during tough times because

they have attached marriage goals to higher order, transcendent meanings.

***Attachment Security.*** Attachment theory has received a great deal of attention in the past 10 to 15 years in applications to understanding adult romantic relationships (e.g., Cassidy & Shaver, 1998) and models of intervention (Johnson, 1996). I am not aware of a study that has examined attachment insecurity as a possible moderator of relationship intervention effects, but I know of one that is under way in the marital therapy field (Susan Johnson, personal communication, October 14, 2003). There are compelling reasons to believe that attachment security and insecurity could be important moderators of outcomes. Compared to happily married individuals or those who divorce, people who are most likely to remain in unhappy marriages over time are those who tend to score lower on attachment security (Davila & Bradbury, 2001). Davila and Bradbury argue that attachment is a potentially important risk factor for which interventions targeted at increasing security would be particularly warranted. One could predict, for example, that interventions that boost a mutual sense of commitment between partners might be particularly potent for those who have chosen a partner well, but struggle with strong feelings of insecurity in relationships.

***Commitment.*** Commitment might be assessed as an outcome related to the evaluation of marriage enhancement curricula and government programs, but we have thus far seen few effects on these dimensions in our own outcome research (Stanley, et al., 2001; Stanley, et al, 2003). Yet, basic research using measurement of commitment has yielded an impressive array of meaningful results (see Jones & Adams, 1999). My hunch is that commitment variables can function as moderators of program outcomes with certain populations.

Commitment has been often measured in terms of either commitment to the institution of marriage or simply an intention to marry. For some years now, there have been measures of this

rich construct (or set of constructs) that have helped researchers advance understanding of couple dynamics with regard to commitment (e.g., Johnson, Caughlin, & Huston, 1999; Rusbult & Buunk, 1993; Stanley & Markman, 1992). Generally, commitment theory makes an important distinction between forces that draw people together and motivate sustaining connection and forces that increase the costs of leaving. In our own work, we call the higher order level of these constructs dedication and constraint. I will briefly elaborate on commitment related sub-constructs.

Partners who share a stronger level of dedication (or interpersonal commitment) tend to have a stronger sense of couple identity, or a “we-ness” that pervades how they approach life. They also are more likely to say they have a strong desire for a future together, or long-term view. Dedication is also characterized by placing the needs of the partner and relationship at a higher priority as well as a willingness to sacrifice for one another (Stanley & Markman, 1992; Whitton, Stanley, & Markman, 2002). In contrast, constraint forces answer the question of why some people remain in relationships that they are unhappy in or might prefer to leave.

Constraints can take many forms (Stanley & Markman, 1992). Those we have developed measures for include concern for children’s welfare, morality of divorce, social pressure, structural investments (financial investments, commingling resources, etc.), and termination procedures (the difficulty of the steps to end the relationship; Johnson, et al., 1999).

Intersecting both the concept of dedication and constraint is the matter of alternatives. Alternatives to the present relationship have played a particularly prominent role in theories such as exchange theory, where Thibaut and Kelley (1959) hypothesized about the comparison level for alternatives as a key determinant of one’s satisfaction and probability of exiting relationships. Alternatives in that conception function as a type of constraint, in that if one perceives their

alternative quality to be less than what they currently have, they are more constrained.

Alternatives play an equally important role in understanding dedication, in the degree to which one is seriously evaluating alternative relationships or partners—termed alternative monitoring in this literature (Leik & Leik, 1977). Many findings indicate that increased alternative monitoring is consistent with lower levels of commitment (dedication) and higher levels of dissatisfaction in the present relationship (D. J. Johnson & Rusbult, 1989; Stanley & Markman, 1992; Stanley et al., 2002).

In general, one could predict that higher levels of dedication would be associated with greater gains from interventions, holding other variables related to relationship quality constant, while high levels of constraint with lower levels of dedication might be associated with poor prognosis for gains in quality. We in our lab as well as others have good measures of such constructs.

There are many other potential moderators relevant to healthy marriage and relationship education interventions, such as substance abuse, forms of domestic violence, economic status, and mental health. Mental health and domestic violence could also be conceptualized as outcomes in some efforts.

### Outcomes

Many outcomes have been assessed in order to detect effects of relationship education interventions. Others I list have, to my knowledge, not been used but might profitably be studied in future research.

***Satisfaction.*** The most universally used outcome in studies of relationship and marriage education outcomes is, not surprisingly, global relationship satisfaction. This is an important outcome variable because it matters to people. It is, however, a variable that is not very

theoretically interesting because it tells you almost nothing about the dynamics in a relationship or mechanisms of change. Nevertheless, it remains an important outcome to assess, and likely one that would figure in most peoples' definitions of healthy marriage in that chronic and significant marital unhappiness would not be seen by most as healthy. There is evidence in many studies that couples can gain or preserve satisfaction for at least short periods of time as a result of taking various relationship education curricula (see Carroll & Doherty, 2003; e.g., Markman, Floyd, Stanley, & Storaasli, 1988; Wampler, 1990). On the other hand, probable ceiling effects in some samples make it hard to detect short-term differences in measure of global adjustment and satisfaction (see Hahlweg & Markman, 1988), making it important to include measures of other dimensions that may be more sensitive to change.

***Negative and Positive Interaction.*** Despite 30 plus years of outcome studies on relationship education curricula, there are debates about effects as well as strategies (e.g., Gottman, Coan, Carrere, & Swanson, 1998; Stanley, Bradbury, & Markman, 2000). Nevertheless, what seems relatively non-debatable is the evidence suggesting that couples can learn to communicate less negatively and more positively, and that such effects can be lasting (e.g., Giblin, Sprenkle, & Sheehan, 1985; Hahlweg & Markman, 1988; Hahlweg, Markman, Thurmaier, Engl, & Eckert, 1998; Markman, Renick, Floyd, Stanley, & Clements, 1993; Stanley et al, 2001). Generally, such effects have been much more clearly demonstrated when objective coding of couple interaction has been used, though we have recently seen strong self-report communication effects in research on young Army couples who, compared to premarital couples, have more room for movement upward on such measures (Stanley et al., 2003). It is less clear, and a focus of ongoing research, the ways in which such changes directly translate into other positive outcomes for couples and families. Overall, the assessment of interaction—and

especially negative interaction—is crucial for efforts to assess the effects of healthy marriage intervention efforts.

Most curricula for couples used in relationship and marriage education target communication processes, whether or not other dimensions are also targeted. Programs such as Couple Communication (Miller, Wackman, & Nunnally, 1976) target communication almost exclusively whereas a program like PREP targets communication, conflict, negative affect management, and dimensions such as commitment, friendship, spirituality, expectations and core beliefs (Markman et al, 2001; Stanley, Blumberg, & Markman, 1999). Relationship Enhancement (Guerney, 1977) targets communication and empathy but has demonstrated effects on various dimensions (Ridley, Jorgenson, Morgan, & Avery, 1982).

Negative interaction may play a particularly important role in evaluating efforts to increase the number of couples living in healthy marriages. It is not that positive interaction is not important (Karney & Bradbury, 1995), but negative interaction is believed to be both particularly salient to couples (for damaging positive connection; Gottman, 1994; Notarius & Markman, 1993) and is strongly associated with negative outcomes for both adults and children as detailed earlier. Evaluations of healthy marriage efforts should include one or more measures of negative interaction.

There are many ways to measure interaction, including brief self-report (e.g., Stanley et al., 2002), theoretically derived self-report, such as demand-withdraw patterns (Christensen & Heavey, 1990; Heavey, Larson, Christensen, & Zumtobel, 1996), and objective coding of couple interaction (see Heyman, 2001 for a review; e.g., Gottman, 1993; Gottman & Notarius, 2000; Julien, Markman, & Lindahl, 1989; Kline, Julien, Baucom, Hartman, Gilbert, Gonzales, et al., in press; Markman & Notarius, 1987). Objective coding of couple interaction may be too expensive

and cumbersome and expensive to deploy in most contexts, but it can be done and the payoff can be great. Brief measures can function well, yielding findings that have remarkable overlap with these findings from much more rigorous, objectively coded couple interaction research (see Stanley et al., 2002). However, it has also been our experience that objective coding is more sensitive to change, especially in the short-run with couples who are generally very happy such as with premarital couples. In fact, effects are often not detected with premarital couples using only self-report measures where objective coding may reveal substantial changes (e.g., Stanley, et al., 2001). We have detected significant, short-term differences in interaction using self-report measures in a study of young married couples in the Army (Stanley et al., 2003) who comprise a sample less impacted by the kinds of ceiling effects typical with premarital couples. In essence, researchers would need to consider the relative strengths and weakness of using objecting coding of interaction, and be aware that in some contexts, detection of effects may be compromised to rely solely on self-report measures. In situations where it is not feasible to using objective coding with the entire sample, researchers might consider having randomly selected sub-sample of participants complete the more complex procedures (personal communication, Howard Markman, October 2003).

***Relationship Confidence.*** I believe that confidence in the future viability of a relationship, and in the ability of the couple to handle what life dishes out, will become one of the most important variables to study in understanding basic couple formation processes, couple dynamics, and outcomes resulting from efforts to help couples build healthy marriages. There is relatively little research on this construct, though we have begun to regularly assess it in various aspects of our work. Others have focused on the specific efficacy that a couple may have when it comes to handling conflict well (Doherty, 1981; Notarius & Vanzetti, 1984).

Confidence is important for many reasons. As hypothesized by Doherty (1981) with regard to problem solving efficacy, confidence may be directly related to persistence over time in efforts to maintain or improve the quality of a relationship. Confidence may also play an important role in decisions couples make about whether or not to cohabit or marry.

We have assessed confidence in terms of both efficacy for handling issues in life well, but also general confidence in the future of the relationship. In basic research, we have found this variable to strongly differentiate couples who began cohabiting prior to engagement versus after engagement or after marriage; differences with important theoretical meaning in our theories of cohabitation risks (Kline et al., in press). In outcome research with premarital couples, we have not found short-term effects on confidence, which we believe is likely due to ceiling effects (Stanley et al., 2001). In our research with young married couples in the Army, we have found strong short-term effects, with couples taking PREP showing increases in confidence from pre to post intervention, and being maintained one month later (Stanley, et al., 2003). We also have a paper in preparation showing how female relationship confidence prior to marriage is associated with depressive symptomatology for women in the first year of marriage.

***Positive Connection.*** Beyond measuring satisfaction, there has been surprisingly little measurement in both basic couples' research as well as outcome research on factors more directly related to the positive connection or bond between partners in marriage. This is a noteworthy lack given how important dimensions such as friendship and fun likely are to the maintenance and healthy of marriages in our culture. Such dimensions have drawn increasing attention in curricula (Jordan, Stanley, & Markman, 1999; Markman, Stanley, & Blumberg, 1994; 2001; Stanley, Trathen, McCain, & Bryan, 1998) as well as in theories of marital success (Gottman, Ryan, Carrere, & Erley, 2002). It does not appear to be difficult to effectively measure

such dimensions (e.g., Stanley et al., 2002). In two large sample surveys using measures such as single items assessing friendship and fun in marriage, we have observed that females' tendencies to be thinking about divorce are more associated with the lack of positive connection in marriage whereas males' tendencies to be thinking about divorce are associated more with the levels of negative interaction (Johnson, et al, 2002; Stanley, Whitton, & Markman, 2002). Such findings provide preliminary evidence that different intervention targets and outcomes might have differential importance to males and females, and therefore would be important to assess in outcome evaluations of healthy marriage initiatives.

***Divorce Proneness.*** Many studies suggest that people can reliably report the degree to which they have been thinking about, talking about, or planning to divorce. Valid and brief measures exist for measuring this precursor to divorce (Booth, Johnson, & Edwards, 1983; Weiss & Cerreto, 1980). These types of measures are especially valuable because they are sensitive to shifts toward divorce without necessarily having to have knowledge of (or long enough outcome data to measure) actual dissolution of marriages.

***Domestic Violence.*** It is important to measure domestic violence when evaluating interventions to support or help couples develop healthy marriages. Domestic violence is clearly a widely agreed upon hallmark of unhealthy marriage. Domestic violence can be measured with longer, multidimensional measures (e.g., Conflict Tactics Scale, Straus, 1979) or simple one or two item measures asking if, for example, a person has pushed, shoved, or hit their partner in the past year. It would be very valuable in this field not only to regularly assess outcomes related to domestic violence, but to attempt measurement of typologies of domestic violence. It is well accepted among marital researchers that there are differing types of domestic violence, and that there are implications of types for prevention, treatment, and safety potential (Holtzworth-

Munroe & Stuart, 1994; Holtzworth-Munroe, Meehan, Herron, Rehman, & Stuart, 2000; Johnson, 1995; Johnson & Ferraro, 2000). The issues and complexity of this topic exceed what I will cover here, but I believe there would be great value to having reliable and valid measures of types of domestic violence that could be economically employed in outcome research with couples. This is especially true since there is reason to believe that some types of domestic violence are dynamic risks (and therefore changeable) while others are likely static, chronic, and extremely dangerous.

***Forgiveness.*** Forgiveness as a process in adult, romantic relationships has received a great deal of attention in recent years because of funding from the Templeton Foundation for researchers to study it. There are various examples of advances in the study and understanding of forgiveness as a dyadic process (e.g., Fincham, 2000; McCullough, Worthington, & Rachal, 1997). Measures have been developed that could be used in outcome research (Gordon & Baucom, under review). Gordan, Baucom, and Snyder found in a preliminary study that couples changed in expected directions on forgiveness as a result of treatment for marital infidelity (Gordon, Baucom, & Snyder, 2003). Forgiveness might be a very important outcome to measure in interventions designed to address the needs of couples who are struggling with high degrees of gender distrust, such as has been found in couples in the Fragile Families research project (Edin, England, & Linnenberg, 2003).

***Sacrifice.*** Another construct that is garnering attention these days is sacrifice in romantic relationships. Quite apart from the pejorative connotation the word sacrifice sometimes evokes, there is a clear evidence that sacrifice measured in various ways differentiates relationships. A greater willingness to sacrifice, satisfaction with sacrifice, and behavior of sacrifice without holding a sense of personal loss are all associated with higher quality, happier, and better

functioning relationships and marriages (Stanley & Markman, 1992; Van Lange, Rusbult, Drigotas, Arriaga, Witcher, & Cox, 1997). We have evidence that suggests there may be very important differences in how commitment to a long-term future with a partner intersects with a willingness to sacrifice without resentment for males versus females (Whitton, Stanley, & Markman, 2002; Whitton, Stanley, & Markman, under review). Specifically, males' willingness to perform daily sacrifices without experiencing personal loss is highly associated with their commitment to a future whereas it is far less associated for females. Such findings could explain, in part, why male behavior may be highly regulated by the institution of marriage (the strongest emblem of having a commitment to a future together) whereas women may tend to give their best to men regardless of marital status. A male's willingness to sacrifice in appropriate ways for his female partner may be a very useful dimension upon which to carve an understanding of healthy relationships and marriage vis-à-vis gender dynamics.

***Social and Spousal Support.*** Support is another dimension receiving attention from a number of researchers (e.g., Cutrona, 1996; Dehle, Larsen, & Landers, 2001; Fincham, 2003; Pasch & Bradbury, 1998). Not only is supportiveness plausibly and actively linked to marital health, supportive behaviors can likely be taught through relationship education, including efforts to teach people how to meet the specific needs for support of their partners. This dimension may take on added importance in the context of research on interventions targeted at fragile family type couples, where the perceived supportiveness of the male (by the female) is one of the better discriminators of which couples go on to marry (Carlson, McLanahan, & England, 2003).

***Attributions.*** There is increasingly knowledge about the ways attributions affect relationships. For example, Bradbury and Fincham (1992) found that maladaptive attributions for

marital difficulties were related to less effective problem solving, more negative behavior overall in communication, and a greater tendency to reciprocate negatively, especially for wives. While attributions have not, to my knowledge, been studied in outcome research, some curricula do target negative interpretations (e.g., PREP; Markman et al., 2001), which are one kind of maladaptive attribution. Testing and refining the ability to modify how people think when it comes to attributions they make about their partners would be a solid goal for future work.

***Miscellaneous Outcomes.*** There are variety of outcomes that can be measured that are straightforward, simple, yet important to assess, especially in evaluations of specific relationship education efforts centered around teaching curriculum. I will list some of the more obvious variables to assess:

- *Program satisfaction.* Do people like it? Do people feel it is valuable? Generally, program satisfaction is very high with most well conducted curricula, but such measures would still be very valuable in determining relative satisfaction with various offerings among different types of couples.
- *Most useful aspects/components of relationship education curricula.* Participants can provide valuable information on what aspects of educational programming they took part in was most and least useful to them (Center for Marriage and Family, 1995; Silliman & Schumm, 1989; Stanley et al., 2001; Stanley et al., 2003; Sullivan & Anderson, 2002).
- *Barriers to participation.* It is crucial to assess perceived and experienced barriers to taking part in programs designed to help participants and couples in their relationships and marriages. Knowledge of barriers can help program leaders plan more effectively for meeting the needs of those they are trying to help (Stanley et al., 2003). Barriers may be especially important to assess for the most disadvantaged participants.

- *Connection with other resources.* I and Howard Markman have come to believe that one of the most effective things that programs designed to help couples can do is to help participants learn of *other* programs and resources that may help them function well in life (Stanley, 2001; Stanley, Markman, & Jenkins, 2002). People who are able to walk in one door (such as to a relationship education class) might need to know more about other doors that they could walk through: e.g., substance abuse treatment, mental health treatment, couples' counseling, economic supports and training, and domestic violence treatment or prevention services. They may even need other resources more or more intensely, but the door they were able to walk through was the relationship education door. We should be careful to not bar that door but rather, use it as an opportunity to connect people with multiple needs to multiple resources. We have written a self-referral tool to help people reflect on other services that may be of use that can be given to all participants in various kinds of efforts. It is being used widely now in Oklahoma.

One study found that those who took part in premarital education from military chaplains were subsequently more likely to make use of counseling when it was needed (Schumm, Silliman, & Bell, 2000). There is evidence coming out of Louisiana that a similar effect might be one of the most potent outcomes from participation in the covenant law structure (Steve Nock, personal communication, September 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2003). Program leaders should take advantage of the point of contact that their efforts provide with the participants by making them aware of other resources in the community that may be of use or need. Evaluators can assess whether such secondary benefits of participation in marriage and relationship interventions occur, and for whom.

- *Program leader characteristics.* Characteristics of program leaders, especially leaders of

education efforts, will likely play an important role in gains participants make (Stanley, Markman, St, Peters, & Leber, 1995). Therefore, it will be useful to measure in some studies the characteristics of leaders so that analyses of fit and effects related to matching or training can be determined. For example, based on extensive experience over the past two decades, we believe that the most important curricula adaptations for couples from diverse backgrounds generally need not to occur as much at the level of the core content in programs such as PREP, but at the level of the metaphors, stories, examples, and teaching methods based on the culture of the participants involved.

#### The Special Case of Attitudes and Beliefs: Moderators or Outcomes?

Healthy marriage interventions could encompass many efforts, including premarital education, marriage education, relationship education, policy changes, and interventions designed to help couples on other dimensions that may directly impact their odds of marital success, such as economic development. It is also clear that some efforts will be directed at educating people directly about beliefs and attitudes related to marriage and family. Efforts targeting beliefs might be more controversial than those such as helping couples handle conflict more constructively or to protect and preserve positives. This is because policy makers may not always agree on what the best or most accurate beliefs might be. For example, high school relationship and marriage education classes can teach youth about risk factors for marital distress. That is not controversial. Somewhat more controversial would be teaching youth about the odds of poverty being far greater if they have children-out-of-wedlock or before finishing high school. The data are compelling on this, but people might have varying opinions about such things being directly taught in high school curricula. Regardless, it will be important in some

contexts to assess attitudes and beliefs about marriage, cohabitation, non-marital childbearing, and so forth. I will not present measures for such here, but it is clear that many exist and have been used, and are therefore available for use in evaluation efforts. There is also quite a bit of normative data on many such measures.

### Discussion

What I have presented here are some of the variables that might profitably be measured in evaluations of initiatives and interventions in the public or private sector to promote healthy marriages. This is a sampling of what is possible. Various moderators and outcomes can provide a detailed understanding of the characteristics of who participates in interventions and who gains the most from them. Such information can be used by policy makers and curriculum developers to refine efforts over time; a process that we believe are best practices in this field (Halford, Markman, Kline, & Stanley, 2003). We do not know all we would like to know in order to most effectively meet the needs of individuals and couples who aspire to develop and maintain healthy marriages. Yet we have learned quite a bit, and most encouraging of all, we in this broad field of research on couple, marriage, and family relationships have many tools available to learn more as we go forward (Stanley, 2001).

### Levels of Measurement

In this paper, I have focused attention (with notable exceptions such as divorce proneness) on constructs and measurement approaches that are more typically used by psychologically trained marital researchers. Therefore, the emphasis here is on a rich set of constructs that I believe can be useful both for advancing understandings of societal changes in marriage and family structure, and, specifically, for evaluating outcomes of interventions designed to foster healthy marriages. Despite this focus on more in depth measurement, I want to

acknowledge that one important strategy in assessing public sector efforts to help couples build and maintain healthy marriages would be at the macro, demographic level—which is generally not my focus here. In line with the aims of TANF and overall government interests, one specific measurable goal would be to assess the percentage of children living with their biological or adoptive parents in a given community over time. Such a metric has the advantages of being tightly tied to TANF, is relatively measurable, has obvious public policy implications, and has quality of life implications for children that are both direct and likely to be agreed upon by experts (personal communication among research advisory group for Oklahoma, specifically Paul Amato, Norval Glenn, Christine Johnson, Howard Markman, Steve Nock, Scott Stanley, & Theodora Ooms, October, 2002). Additionally, communities that are attempting changes could be compared directly (though not experimentally) with others that are not doing so.

#### Multi-Disciplinary Approaches Will Be Superior In This Current Context

This conference is entitled “Measurement Issues in Family *Demography*,” portraying the roots that most researchers attending have in demography and sociology. While there are many training backgrounds among researchers who study marriage and family (sociology, psychology, economics, social work, etc.), two dominant groups are sociology and psychology. There are important differences in traditions of these two groups of researchers. Sociologists are used to large samples with brief measures, often one or two items being used to measure a variable. Psychologists are used to smaller samples but more detailed and rich measurement; probably owing to both their theoretical interests and also the need to have more robust measures to compensate for the inherent lower power available in smaller samples.

There is a great need in coming years for ongoing multidisciplinary collaboration. Given the range of different experiences and expertise, it is immensely useful to have researchers from

a variety of backgrounds working together on measure selection and development when contemplating evaluations of effects in studies of healthy marriage initiatives. It would be terribly simplistic to say that sociologists have focused more on family structure (form) and psychologists more on dynamics (function), but there can be no doubt that research efforts are strengthened by greater blending of such emphases in mutual efforts to expand knowledge. My personal experience working on the Oklahoma Marriage Initiative has been very rewarding in this regard. There, we formed a research advisory group that included those from sociology (Amato, Glenn, Johnson, & Nock), psychology (Dion, Markman, Stanley), public policy arenas (Haskins, Ooms), and numerous others, including Oklahoma state demographers (Kickham). The combined experience of this group allowed for the efficient assembly of a survey instrument (Johnson & Stanley, 2001) that was subsequently used in a baseline assessment at the macro level of the state of Oklahoma and surrounding states (Johnson et al, 2002). Variations of this instrument are being used in other states such as Florida and Utah, with others to come. Having a multi-disciplinary team provided a wealth of background about variables that could be assessed and items that were likely to provide adequate measurement in a brief survey format. Researchers from differing backgrounds will think of variables and measures that those from one discipline alone will not consider.

### Brief Measures Can Still Tell Us A Lot

In many contexts, diverse measurement may be desirable yet hampered by pragmatics such as the time resources of participants. Fortunately, many important variables can be measured relatively briefly, even if initial research on those variables developed and used long measures for psychometric reasons. Two examples should suffice to make this point. There has been a long and impressive line of studies on religiosity over several decades using Allport and

Ross's multi-item Religious Orientation Scale (Allport & Ross, 1967). Yet, there are three items among many on the original scale that capture most of the essential variance associated with the constructs (Gorsuch & McPherson, 1989). Similarly, we have found that four self-report items assessing negative interaction yield results entirely consistent with various studies employing objective coding of couple interaction (Johnson, et al, 2002; Stanley et al., 2002). While in some studies with certain samples and purposes, not using objective coding of couple behavior would be too great a sacrifice of sensitivity, there are likely many other studies where brief, self-report measures will tell us an adequate amount. My key point here is simply that choosing to expand measurement to variables not typically assessed in outcome research does not necessarily mean that procedures have to become cumbersome to participants, provided that researchers take care in selection and use of the actual items to be used.

### In Conclusion

Having a diverse and rich measurement approach is crucial for the evaluation of interventions in this new policy environment. It also allows for reductions in bias because researchers do not “see” what they do not measure, and they do not talk nearly as much about what they cannot see. In these matters we are operating in a politically and philosophically charged atmosphere. There is the confluence of public policy, public costs, and private behavior in the midst; and these three Ps make a perfect storm capable of producing more heat than light. The job of good research is to shed light.

Well conceived measurement gives researchers the ability to break down what may appear to be homogenous variance into its components—much like a prism refracts light to reveal its range and depth of color. So, good, broad measurement not only sheds light on important phenomena, it allows the light to be understood in greater depth. This is especially

needed because we are dealing with matters that are sensitive and, at times, controversial. We need an expanding knowledge base that provides rich understandings upon which ongoing efforts can be guided based on an accurate portrayal of dynamics affecting real couples struggling to live well.

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### Appendix of Some Constructs and Articles Related to Use and Measurement

I have included here a sampling of key constructs that might profitably be measured in the evaluations of outcomes related to couple and marital interventions of many types. Rather, I have included a list of constructs that have either figured prominently in our own recent work or that I think might be useful for others to think about in planning for evaluations.

- What I have included here is by no means exhaustive. I have not included a variety of important outcomes that might be assessed such as mental health and substance abuse.
- I have included constructs and references related to their use OR related to measure development. Hence, I am not making an attempt here to have consistency in the references at the level of discussions of measurement or use of the construct, but am citing examples of both.
- For a number of the constructs mentioned, I solicited input from colleagues from the psychological side of the marital research field. I invited many of them to send key abstracts and references to me which I have organized. Therefore, what is included here is not necessarily a list of what I think is most important, but rather, a list of things that evaluators might consider as important given the specific nature of the research questions and sample opportunities they have before them.
- Not all constructs here would be desirable for measurement in all contexts. Some might not be desirable for use in evaluation of most any evaluations of community based interventions.
- I have not attempted to provide actual measures or sample questions. Rather, I am providing references for measures and examples of research using them so that one might easily follow-up on determining suitability in a given project.
- In our group (e.g., I and Howard Markman, Galena Kline, Chris Saiz, and others) we have a long interest in measurement of constructs we think can be very important for understanding couples. I have placed samples of measures that we have used in various projects in the mix here because it was easy to do. Specifically, I have provided examples of brief versions of measures of some key constructs that we (our team) have come to believe are crucial in measuring couple functioning. There are longer versions (e.g., negative interaction) and more multi-faceted versions (e.g., commitment) available for those constructs.

## Construct: Attachment security in adult romantic relationships

[Comment: If there is any theory that will become the theory of everything in psychology, it is attachment theory. The construct and measures of adult attachment security or insecurity are making increasingly regular appearances in the marital literature. I am not aware, however, of attempts as yet to employ the construct in outcome research, though doing so seems wise and only a matter of time. ]

### Abstract(s) of research on or using the construct:

Davila, J., & Bradbury, T. N. (2001). Attachment insecurity and the distinction between unhappy spouses who do and do not divorce. Journal of Family Psychology, 15, 371-393.

We tested the hypothesis that attachment insecurity would be associated with remaining in an unhappy marriage. One-hundred seventy-two newly married couples participated in a 4-year longitudinal study with multiple assessment points. Hierarchical linear models revealed that compared to spouses in happy marriages and divorced spouses, spouses who were in stable but unhappy marriages showed the highest levels of insecurity initially and over time. Spouses in stable unhappy marriages also had lower levels of marital satisfaction than divorced spouses and showed relatively high levels of depressive symptoms initially and over time. Results suggest that spouses at risk for stable unhappy marriages can be identified early and may benefit from interventions that increase the security of spouses' attachment to one another.

Davila, J. (2003). Attachment processes in couples therapy: Implications for behavioral models. In S. Johnson & V. Whiffen (Eds.), Attachment: A perspective for couple and family intervention. Guilford.

The goal of this chapter was to discuss why attachment processes can be an important focus in couples treatment and to describe the role of attachment processes in romantic relationships. Because a behavioral approach to treatment has been the most dominant of the empirically supported treatments, this chapter was written with more behaviorally oriented practitioners in mind and pays particular attention to what an attachment perspective has to offer to them. The chapter describes three ways in which attachment theory can inform behaviorally oriented models of relationships and couples therapy. It is suggested that an attachment perspective can shed light on why problems emerge in relationships, on why people behave the way they do in relationships, and on who is at most risk for relationship problems. Suggestions for intervention are discussed.

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## Construct: Attributions

[Comment: Here is another area that I think holds great potential for adding to our knowledge about relationships. As with attachment, attributions have not been assessed significantly in outcome research that I am aware of, but should be. We also need research testing the degree to which it is possible to teach people to make better, less negative attributions and interpretations of their partner's behavior, though we think there is conceptual and plausible reasons for attempting to do this regardless (e.g., Markman, Stanley, & Blumberg, 2001).]

### Abstract(s) of research on or using the construct:

Bradbury, T.N., Beach, S.R.H., Fincham, F.D., & Nelson, G. (1996). Attributions and behavior in functional and dysfunctional marriages. Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 64, 569-576.

The study examined whether spouses' attributions for partner behavior are related to their own behavior by assessing their attributions and observing the problem-solving discussions of couples in which (a) neither spouse was depressed or maritally distressed, (b) the wife was depressed and both spouses were maritally distressed, and (c) the wife was not depressed and both spouses were maritally distressed. To the extent they made maladaptive attributions, wives displayed less positive behavior and more negative behavior. Husbands' attributions and behavior were unrelated, and associations between attributions and behavior were not moderated by marital distress and depression. These results highlight the need to clarify how partner behavior contributes to the attributions spouses make and to reexamine interventions designed to modify attributions in marital therapy.

Bradbury, T.N., & Fincham, F.D. (1992). Attributions and behavior in marital interaction. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 63, 613-628.

To examine whether spouses' attributions for events in their marriage are related to their behavior in interaction, spouses were asked to report their marital quality, to make attributions for marital difficulties, and to engage in problem-solving discussions. Study 1 demonstrated that spouses' maladaptive attributions were related to less effective problem-solving behaviors, particularly among wives. Study 2 showed that spouses' maladaptive attributions were related to higher rates of negative behavior and, for wives, to increased tendencies to reciprocate negative partner behavior. In both studies attributions and behavior tended to be more strongly related for distressed than nondistressed wives. These results support social-psychological models that posit that attributions are related to behavior and models of marriage and close relationships that assume that maladaptive attributions contribute to conflict behavior and relationship dysfunction.

Fincham, F.D., & Bradbury, T.N. (1992). Assessing attributions in marriage: The Relationship Attribution Measure. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 62, 457-468.

A brief, simple measure of different types of attributions for partner behavior was examined in 3 studies of married couples. Reliability was established by high internal consistency and test-retest correlations.

Causal and responsibility attribution scores correlated with marital satisfaction, attributions for marital difficulties, and attributions for actual partner behaviors generated by spouses. Responsibility attributions were related to (a) reported anger in response to stimulus behaviors used in the measure and (b) the amount of anger displayed by wives during a problem-solving interaction with their partner. The extent to which husbands and wives whined during their discussion also correlated with their responsibility attributions. The results address several problems with existing assessments, and their implications for the measurement of attributions in marriage are discussed.

### Some Citations about Measures or the Construct or that use the Construct

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### Construct: Commitment

[I have done a good deal of work in terms of assessment of commitment and related constructs. There are longer measures, encompassing many subconstructs available and very brief measures, such as a four item measure of dedication commitment that has shown excellent characteristics.]

Sample of four item measure of dedication:

Please answer each of the following questions by indicating how strongly you agree or disagree with the idea expressed.

- 1 = Strongly Disagree
- 2 = Disagree
- 3 = Neither Agree Nor Disagree
- 4 = Agree
- 5 = Strongly Agree

- |           |   |
|-----------|---|
| 1 2 3 4 5 | My relationship with my partner is more important to me than almost anything else in my life. |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | I may not want to be with my partner a few years from now.                                    |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | I like to think of my partner and me more in terms of "us" and "we" than "me" and "him/her."  |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | I want this relationship to stay strong no matter what rough times we may encounter.          |

### Abstract(s) of research on or using the construct:

Johnson, M. P., Caughlin, J. P., & Huston, T. L. (1999). The tripartite nature of marital commitment: Personal, moral, and structural reasons to stay married. Journal of Marriage and the Family, 61, 160-177.

Assessed the empirical viability of M. P. Johnson's (1991) commitment framework. The core principle is that commitment, rather than comprising a unitary phenomenon, involves 3 distinct experiences: wanting to stay married, feeling morally obligated to stay married, and feeling constrained to stay married. Using data from a sample of married couples (91 couples and 5 women in their 13th yr of marriage), the present authors show that direct measures of the 3 experiences are not highly correlated with each other; that a measure of so-called global commitment is a function primarily, if not exclusively, of personal commitment; that the 3 direct measures of the experiences of commitment are associated for the most part with the components of each type as hypothesized in the commitment framework; and that the 3 types of commitment and their components are not associated in the same way with other variables.

Johnson, C. A., Stanley, S. M., Glenn, N. D., Amato, P. A., Nock, S. L., Markman, H. J., & Dion, M. R. (2002). Marriage in Oklahoma: 2001 baseline statewide survey on marriage and divorce (S02096 OKDHS). Oklahoma City, OK: Oklahoma Department of Human Services.

From the executive summary:

- Despite higher divorce rates, married Oklahomans are more likely to say they are very happily married than couples nationally.
  - Among married persons, those who were most satisfied and least likely to have thought or talked about divorce reported:
    - Less frequent negative communication and conflicts
    - Higher levels of commitment to their partners
    - More frequent talking as friends and more frequent going out on dates
  - Negative interaction was, by far, the most potent discriminator of who was satisfied or not in marriage.
- Those who reported being more religious—and especially those who were most frequent in attending religious services—reported higher average levels of marital satisfaction, less frequent conflicts, and a lower likelihood of having thought about divorce.
- Women and men were not found to differ in their ratings of marital satisfaction, commitment, or in feelings of being trapped in their marriages.
- Cohabitation outside of marriage is accepted by many Oklahomans:
  - Thirty-eight percent (38%) believe it is acceptable for a man and woman who are not married to live together, with men (44%) more likely than women (33%) to approve.
  - While the majority of Oklahomans (54%) reject the notion that living together outside of marriage has all the advantages of marriage without the legal details, 36% believe nonmarital cohabitation has all the benefits of marriage.
  - Fifty-nine percent (59%) of those who are cohabiting outside of marriage believe that their parents approve of their living together, and only 14% believe that their parents disapprove.
- Those who lived with their spouses before marriage reported, on average, lower levels of satisfaction, lower levels of commitment, higher levels of negative interaction, and a greater average tendency to think about divorcing, compared to those who did not live together prior to marriage.

Stanley, S.M. & Markman, H.J. (1992). Assessing commitment in personal relationships. Journal of Marriage and The Family, 54, 595-608.

A model for conceptualizing relationship commitment is presented and the development of a measure corresponding to this model described. Commitment is considered as two constructs: Personal Dedication and Constraint Commitment. In study one, items developed for the Commitment Inventory (CI) were given to a sample of 141 subjects. Item analyses resulted in selection of the items for the measures. In study two, 279 subjects yielded data used in further testing of the CI. Tests were conducted on the reliability of the subscales, the factor structure of the CI, and the associations between the CI and various other measures of commitment. Further, the CI was examined in relation to various demographic variables and various measures of other relationship constructs. Overall, the research demonstrated that the CI shows promise as a reliable and valid instrument for measuring commitment. Implications are discussed for both the CI and the concept of commitment.

Stanley, S.M., Whitton, S. W., & Markman, H. J. (In Press). Maybe I Do: Interpersonal Commitment and Premarital or Non-Marital Cohabitation. Journal of Family Issues.

Explanations for the risks associated with premarital and non-marital cohabitation (e.g., higher rates of break-up and divorce, lower relationship satisfaction, and greater risk for violent interaction) have focused on levels of conventionality, including attitudes about commitment to the institution of marriage. However, relatively little attention has been paid to the role of interpersonal, not institutional, commitment. In a national random sample (U.S.), premarital and non-marital cohabitation was associated with lower levels of

interpersonal commitment to partners, suggesting links to further understanding of risk in these relationships. Premarital cohabitation was particularly associated with less committed and less religious males. Prior findings associating cohabitation with lower levels of happiness and religiosity, and higher levels of negative interaction (for men), were replicated.

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### Construct: Confidence

[We have been measuring confidence in various projects for the past few years. There is not a lot of published literature to refer to with regard to the construct, but we have been continually impressed with the things the construct does when measured, including as an outcome in couple interventions and as a theoretical variable, such as in the understanding of the linkages between marital dynamics and depressive symptomatology in women.]

Sample of four item measure of confidence:

**Answer each question below by indicating how strongly you agree or disagree with the idea expressed. Circle any number from 1 to 7 to indicate various levels of agreement or disagreement.**

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly	Neither	Agree			Strongly	
Disagree	or	Disagree			Agree	

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 I believe we can handle whatever conflicts will arise in the future.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 I feel good about our prospects to make this relationship work for a lifetime.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 I am very confident when I think of our future together.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 We have the skills a couple needs to make a marriage last.

#### **Abstract(s) of research on or using the construct:**

Kline, G. H., Stanley, S. M., Markman, H. J., Olmos-Gallo, P. A., St. Peters, M., Whitton, S. W., & Prado, L. M. (In Press). Timing in everything: Pre-engagement cohabitation and increased risk for poor marital outcomes. Journal of Family Psychology.

Data from a longitudinal study were used to examine differences among couples that cohabited before engagement, after engagement, or not until marriage. Survey data and objectively-coded couple interaction data were collected for 136 couples (272 individuals) after engagement (but prior to marriage) and nine months into marriage. At both time-points, the before-engagement cohabiters (N = 59 couples) had more negative interactions, lower interpersonal commitment, lower relationship quality, and lower relationship confidence than those who did not cohabit until after engagement (N = 28 couples) or marriage (N = 49 couples), even after controlling for selection factors and duration of cohabitation. Our findings suggest that those who cohabit before engagement are at greater risk for poor marital outcomes than those who cohabit only after-engagement or marriage, which may have important implications for future research on cohabitation, clinical work, and social policy decisions.

Stanley, S. M., Markman, H. J., Saiz, C. C., Schumm, W. R., Bloomstrom, G., & Bailey, A. E. (2003). Building Strong and Ready Families: Interim Report. Washington D. C.: SAIC, Inc.

From the executive summary:

Army couples showed gains on most measures of couple functioning from pre-BSRF to post-BSRF and at the one month follow-up. Of note is the finding that couples who came into BSRF relatively less happy in their relationships than others demonstrated the strongest positive gains following BSRF. The following are key findings within this study:

- BSRF couples reported increases in relationship satisfaction and confidence.

Stanley, S., Prado, L., St. Peters, M., Olmos-Gallo, P.A., Whitton, S., Markman, H., & Baucom, B. (2000, November). The development of female depression early in marriage: a path analysis looking at the role of commitment variables and female relational confidence. Paper presented at the 34<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting for the Association for the Advancement of Behavior Therapy. New Orleans, La.

This paper reports on the association between self-reported symptoms of depression and relationship variables in females who are close to becoming married. In particular, a number of variables are explored that have either empirical support in the literature or strong theoretical linkages to the expression of depression and depressive symptomatology in marriage. These variables include negative interaction, male levels of interpersonal commitment, female ratings of confidence in the relationship, social support (from partner), and commitment in the form of constraints. Support is found for the hypothesis that female depression scores are more associated with relationship variables for couples who have lived together relatively longer than other couples. The findings imply a possible synchronization of depressive symptoms with the dynamics of relationships over time.

### Some Citations about Measures or the Construct or that use the Construct

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### Construct: Demand-Withdraw Interaction

[Comment: This is a rich and useful construct for which excellent measurement exists. There is significant overlap with the general category of negative interaction.]

### Abstract(s) of research on or using the construct:

Overview by Andrew Christensen: In this pattern of interaction, one partner initiates conversation about a problem and pressures for change on it while the other avoids discussion of the problem or withdraws during discussion of the problem. Both cross-sectional and longitudinal research, using self-report as well as observational data, has shown that this pattern of interaction is strongly associated with relationship satisfaction and that there is a gender linkage in the pattern, with men more likely to be in the withdraw role and women more likely to be in the demand role. Recent research suggests that these findings are replicable cross-culturally. Recent research also indicates that the pattern of interaction accounts for variance in relationship satisfaction beyond that accounted for by simple negative affect or affection. Furthermore, the pattern may be linked to violence in couples.

Heavey, C. L., Larson, B., Christensen, A., & Zumtobel, D. C. (1996). The communication patterns questionnaires: The reliability and validity of a constructive communication subscale. Journal of Marriage and the Family, 58, 796-800.

This study provides evidence for the reliability and validity of a 7-item constructive communication subscale of the Communication Patterns Questionnaire (CPQ-CC, A. Christensen and M. Sullaway, 1984). Seventy married couples completed the CPQ and participated in videotaped problem-solving discussions. The constructiveness of spouses' behavior during the videotaped problem-solving discussions was rated by trained observers. The CPQ-CC had high internal consistency and moderately high agreement between spouses. The CPQ-CC also was strongly associated with observer ratings of the spouses' constructiveness during videotaped problem-solving discussions. Finally, the CPQ-CC was strongly associated with spouses' self-reported marital adjustment. These data support the reliability and validity of this brief self-report measure of constructive communication.

Heavey, C. L., Christensen, A., Malamuth, N.M. (1995). The longitudinal impact of demand and withdrawal during marital conflict. Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 63, 797-801.

Forty-eight couples completed a measure of relationship satisfaction and participated in 2 videotaped problem-solving interactions, 1 focused on an issue identified by the woman and 1 focused on an issue identified by the man. Thirty-six men and 36 women completed the satisfaction measure again 2.5 years

later. Demandingness, and to a lesser extent withdrawal, during the interactions showed many significant associations with both Time 1 and Time 2 satisfaction. The relationship of demandingness and withdrawal to change in satisfaction was also examined using both change scores and partial correlations. Withdrawal by men and woman demand-man withdraw during discussions of issues identified by the women reliably predicted change (decline) in wives' relationship satisfaction.

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- Hahlweg, K., Kaiser, A., Christensen, A., Fehm-Wolfsdorf, G., & Groth, T. (2000). Self-report and observational assessment of couples' conflict: The concordance between the Communication Patterns Questionnaire and the KPI Observation System. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 62, 61-67.
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**Construct: Divorce Proneness (Thinking, Talking, or Planning about Divorce)**

[Comment: This is a construct that has been used extensively in the sociological literature and is being used in the psychology literature as well. It has the advantage of getting at stability likelihood in situations where measuring eventual, actual divorce may be difficult or may not unfold for years.]

**Abstract(s) of research on or using the construct:**

Johnson, C. A., Stanley, S. M., Glenn, N. D., Amato, P. A., Nock, S. L., Markman, H. J., & Dion, M. R. (2002). Marriage in Oklahoma: 2001 baseline statewide survey on marriage and divorce (S02096 OKDHS). Oklahoma City, OK: Oklahoma Department of Human Services.

From the executive summary:

- Despite higher divorce rates, married Oklahomans are more likely to say they are very happily married than couples nationally.
  - Among married persons, those who were most satisfied and least likely to have thought or talked about divorce reported:
    - Less frequent negative communication and conflicts
    - Higher levels of commitment to their partners
    - More frequent talking as friends and more frequent going out on dates
- Those who reported being more religious—and especially those who were most frequent in attending religious services—reported higher average levels of marital satisfaction, less frequent conflicts, and a lower likelihood of having thought about divorce.
- Those who lived with their spouses before marriage reported, on average, lower levels of satisfaction, lower levels of commitment, higher levels of negative interaction, and a greater average tendency to think about divorcing, compared to those who did not live together prior to marriage.

Booth, A., Johnson, D., & Edwards, J. N. (1983). Measuring marital instability. Journal of Marriage & the Family, *45*(2), 387-394

Describes the development of a scale specifically designed to assess instability among intact couples. Marital instability denotes affective and cognitive states along the related actions that are precedent to terminating a relationship. Instability also refers to a situation in an intact dyad, not to ones that already have been disrupted. The measure, a Marital Instability Index, was shown to be a reliable and valid indicator. Scale scores among a national sample of 2,034 currently married men and women (under 55 yrs of age) varied with the known incidence of divorce among subgroups of the population. An abbreviated form of the index is also presented.

Weiss, R. L. & Cerreto, M. C. (1980). The Marital Status Inventory: Development of a measure of dissolution potential. American Journal of Family Therapy, *8*(2), 80-85.

The Marital Status Inventory (MSI) forms a Guttman-like scale to measure likelihood of marriage dissolution. Preliminary discriminant validity data are presented indicating that the 24 couples presenting

with marital problems scored significantly higher than did the 32 couples seeking parent-child related therapy. The predictive validity of the scale remains to be demonstrated.

### Some Citations about Measures or the Construct or that use the Construct

- Booth, A., Johnson, D., & Edwards, J. N. (1983). Measuring marital instability. Journal of Marriage & the Family, 45(2), 387-394
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### Construct: Domestic Violence

[Comment: Domestic violence can be conceptualized and measured very complexly or rather simply. Even simple assessments based on one or two items (I have pushed shoved or slapped my partner in the past year.) yield useful results. I think it would be very valuable to have measures of richer conceptions such as Holtzworth-Munroe's available for use in outcome research.]

### Abstract(s) of research on or using the construct:

- Holtzworth-Munroe, A., Meehan, J.C., Herron, K., Rehman, U., & Stuart, G.L. (In Press). Do subtypes of maritally violent men continue to differ over time? Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology.

Among over 20 published batterer typology studies, only one (Gottman et al., 1995) gathered longitudinal data, and in that study, only relationship stability was examined longitudinally. Thus, virtually no data exist regarding the question of whether subtypes of maritally violent men continue to differ from one another over time. The present study was designed to address this issue. We predicted that, at 1.5 and 3 year follow-up assessments, the subtypes identified, at Time 1, in Holtzworth-Munroe et al. (2000; i.e., Family Only, Low Level Antisocial, Borderline/Dysphoric, and Generally Violent/Antisocial) would continue to differ in their levels of husband violence and on variables theoretically related to their use of violence (e.g., generality of violence, psychopathology, jealousy, impulsivity, attitudes toward violence and women; Holtzworth-Munroe & Stuart, 1994). Many group differences emerged in the predicted direction; however, perhaps due to relatively small sample sizes at follow-ups, not all reached statistical significance. The implications of these findings for understanding husband violence (e.g., not all violent men escalate their marital violence; possible overlap of the Borderline/Dysphoric and Generally Violent/Antisocial subgroups) are discussed, as are methodological issues in this type of research (e.g., the need for more assessments over time, the instability of violent relationships, sampling concerns).

- Straus, M.A., Hamby, S.L., Boney-McCoy, S. & Sugarman, D.B. (1996). The Revised Conflict Tactics Scales (CTS2). Journal of Family Issues, 17, 283-316.

Conflict Tactics Scale: The Conflict Tactics (CT) Scale was designed to measure the use of reasoning, verbal aggression, and violence within family conflict. Items range from low in coerciveness (such as discussing an issue) to high in aggressiveness (such as hit, kicked, threatened with weapon). In recent years the CTS has been used in research with high school populations (see O'Keefe, M. (1997). Predictors of dating violence among high school students. Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 12, 546-568).

### Some Citations about Measures or the Construct or that use the Construct

- Holtzworth-Munroe, A., Meehan, J.C., Herron, K., Rehman, U., & Stuart, G. L. (2000). Testing the Holtzworth-Munroe and Stuart (1994) batterer typology. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 68, 1000-1019.
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### **Construct: Interspousal Criticism**

[Comment: Measures such as this have not been used much in outcome research, but clinical utility is clear and the concept would certainly be consistent with what interventionists would likely want to impact.]

### **Abstract(s) of research on or using the construct:**

[Summary provided by David Smith]

Inter-Spousal Criticism. Studies of Expressed Emotion (EE) and relapse following recovery from mood disorders provide perhaps the most direct empirical link to inter-spousal criticism (e.g., Hooley, Orley, & Teasdale, 1986; Vaughn & Leff, 1976a). EE research is concerned with the extent to which relatives of psychiatric patients (viz. schizophrenic, depressed, and borderline; Butzlaff & Hooley, 1998); a) express hostility toward the patient, b) evidence emotional overinvolvement, and c) display warmth when talking about the patient during an extensive standardized interview, the Camberwell Family Interview (CFI; Vaughn & Leff, 1976b). In an investigation by Hooley, Orley, and Teasdale (1986), 39 depressed patients were followed for 9 months following hospital discharge. Although there was a 59% rate of relapse among patients discharged to homes with high-EE spouses (viz. more than 2 critical comments expressed), none of those discharged to low-EE spouses relapsed. This study replicated a previous one by Vaughn and Leff (1976a) and has itself been replicated cross-culturally (Okasha et al., 1994) and in studies of bipolar disorder (e.g., Miklowitz et al., 1988). Interestingly, Vaughn and Leff (1976a) and Hooley, Orley, and Teasdale (1986) found that the levels of spousal criticisms associated with relapse in depressed patients were lower than the levels associated with relapse in schizophrenic patients, suggesting a particular sensitivity to criticism among depressed people.

Despite empirical progress in establishing the association between EE and relapse following recovery from depression, Wearden et al. (2000) have pointedly noted that "no theoretical rationale for carrying out EE research in depression has been expounded in the literature" (p. 643, emphasis added). They go on to suggest that theoretical efforts might fruitfully be directed at the known tendency for people with depression to attribute negative events to internal causes (e.g., Brewin, 1985). On this view, inter-spousal criticism is thought to be especially depressogenic because it supports and validates self-criticism, which is itself a symptom of depression. Theoretical considerations of this sort strongly suggest that spousal criticism is particularly worthy of study, striking as it does at a special vulnerability. It is also worth considering the depression-amplifying possibility that, as observed in the medical

literature (e.g., Manne, 1999; Manne & Zautra, 1989), important inter-spousal criticisms may be illness-directed. Analogous investigations of criticisms centered on spousal mental illness have yet to be undertaken, though it is not difficult to envision the depressing vicious cycle that gets started when depressive symptoms are themselves criticized by a close intimate partner of the depressed person. Prospective longitudinal studies and experimental analogue studies would be required to test models such as these.

**Accuracy.** Gauging the accuracy of perceived inter-spousal criticism requires knowledge of actual inter-spousal criticism. This has been indirectly tested by EE researchers who observe interactions between people with schizophrenia and their relatives. In these interactions, highly critical relatives engage in greater negative reciprocity of communication and make more critical comments (Hahlweg et al., 1989; Miklowitz, Goldstein, Falloon, & Doane, 1984; Strachan, Leff, Goldstein, Doane, & Burt, 1986). In the sole interaction study of depressed married people to date, high EE spouses made more critical remarks, disagreed with patients more frequently, and were less likely to accept what their depressed partner said (Hooley, 1986).

Although these studies suggest an association between actual and perceived spousal criticism, they are only indirectly related to fundamental questions about accuracy of perceived criticism among depressed spouses. First of all, only one of these studies (Hooley, 1986) was of depressed patients; the others concerned schizophrenia. Secondly, spousal criticism was inferred from observed behavior and was not confirmed via self-reported critical intentions on the part of the purportedly critical spouse. Finally, the perception of criticism itself was inferred from critical comments made during EE interviews in the patient's absence not via patient reports of criticism actually perceived. Hence, both criticism perceived and criticism expressed were assessed via "outside" observers. While outside observers provide a valuable perspective on interactional behavior, the "insider" perspective is at least as important, particularly when the phenomenon under investigation is a perceptual one.

### **Some Citations about Measures or the Construct or that use the Construct**

- Hooley, J.M., & Gotlib, I.H. (2000). A diathesis-stress conceptualization of expressed emotion and clinical outcome. *Applied and Preventive Psychology*, 9, 135-151.
- Riso, L.P., Klein, D.N., Anderson, R.L., Crosby Ouimette, P., Lizardi, H. (1996). Convergent and discriminant validity of perceived criticism from spouses and family members. *Behavior Therapy*, 27, 129-137.
- Hooley, J.M., & Licht, D.M. (1997). Expressed emotion and causal attributions in the spouses of depressed patients. *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*, 106, 298-306.

### **Construct: Forgiveness**

[Comment: A growing area with growing options for measurement.]

### **Abstract(s) of research on or using the construct:**

Gordon, K. C. & Baucom, D. H. (under review). Forgiveness and marriage: Preliminary support for a measure based on a model of recovery from marital betrayal. Unpublished manuscript, University of Tennessee.

Forgiveness is an issue that recently has received increasing attention in the psychological literature, yet little empirical research has been conducted on this topic. This paper presents initial support and validation of an inventory based upon Gordon and Baucom's (1998) three-stage synthesized model of forgiveness in marital relationships. This model places forgiveness in the framework of a reaction to a traumatic interpersonal event. One hundred seven community couples completed several measures of marital functioning, along with the new measure of forgiveness. The measure achieved internal reliability, and a confirmatory factor analysis suggests that the resulting subscales are a good fit with the data. Further results offered preliminary support for the inventory's validity and its relation to various aspects of marital functioning. Individuals placed into groups based upon their scores on this measure reported expected levels of global forgiveness, relationship power and closeness, and assumptions about themselves and their partners. The limitations of the study are identified, and clinical and research implications of these findings are discussed.

Gordon, K.C., Baucom, D. H., & Snyder, D. K. (In press). An integrative intervention for promoting recovery from extramarital affairs. Journal of Marital and Family Therapy.

The discovery or disclosure of an extramarital affair can have a devastating impact on partners, both individually and on their relationships. Research suggests that affairs occur relatively frequently in relationships and are a common presenting problem in couple therapy. However, despite their prevalence, there is little empirical treatment research in this area, and most therapists describe this problem as one of the more difficult to treat. This study used a replicated case study design to explore the efficacy of an integrative treatment designed to help couples recover from an affair. Six couples entered and completed treatment. The majority of these couples were less emotionally or maritally distressed at the end of treatment, and the injured partners reported greater forgiveness regarding the affair. Details of the intervention, suggested adaptations of the treatment, and areas for future research are discussed.

### Some Citations about Measures or the Construct or that use the Construct

- Fincham, F.D. (2000). The kiss of the porcupines: From attributing responsibility to forgiving. Personal Relationships, 7, 1-23.
- Gordon, K. C. & Baucom, D. H. (under review). Forgiveness and marriage: Preliminary support for a measure based on a model of recovery from marital betrayal. Unpublished manuscript, University of Tennessee.
- Gordon, K.C., Baucom, D. H., & Snyder, D. K. (In press). An integrative intervention for promoting recovery from extramarital affairs. Journal of Marital and Family Therapy.
- Gordon, K. C., & Baucom, D. H. (2003). Forgiveness and marriage: Preliminary support for a synthesized model of recovery from a marital betrayal. American Journal of Family Therapy, 31, 179-199.
- McCullough, M.E., Worthington, E.L., Jr., & Rachal, K.C. (1997). Interpersonal forgiving in close relationships. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 73, 321-336.

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### Construct: Negative Interaction (self-reported)

[Comment: Negative interaction in various forms has a rich tradition of explaining differences in distressed and non-distressed couples, and in classifying couples with regard to eventual outcomes (so called prediction studies). When measured even simply, negative interaction often explains more variance in other indices of couple functioning than anything else measured. This is perhaps the case because negativity is both a very potent corrosive force on the positive bond between partners, and it is also very likely a marker for other things like overall level of commitment (dedication) reflected in a willingness to inhibit negative responses in response to frustration.

The Abstracts here refer to research using very brief assessment comprised of four items tapping escalation, invalidation, negative interpretation, and withdrawal.]

Sample of four item measure of negative interaction:

Little arguments escalate into ugly fights with accusations, criticisms, name calling, or bringing up past hurts. Is that...

1. never or almost never
2. once in a while
3. frequently

My spouse/partner criticizes or belittles my opinions, feelings, or desires. Is that...

1. never or almost never
2. once in a while
3. frequently

My spouse/partner seems to view my words or actions more negatively than I mean them to be. Does that happen...

1. never or almost never
2. once in a while

3. frequently

When we argue, one of us withdraws...that is, does not want to talk about it anymore, or leaves the scene. Does that happen...

1. never or almost never
2. once in a while
3. frequently

**Abstract(s) of representative research using the brief measure of the construct:**

Stanley, S.M., Markman, H.J., & Whitton, S. (2002). Communication, Conflict, and Commitment: Insights On The Foundations of Relationship Success from a National Survey. Family Process, 41(4), 659-675.

The key relationship dynamics of communication, conflict, and commitment were investigated using data from a randomly sampled, nationwide phone survey of adults in married, engaged, and cohabiting relationships. Findings on communication and conflict generally replicated those of studies using more in-depth or objective measurement strategies. Negative interaction between partners was negatively associated with numerous measures of relationship quality and positively correlated with divorce potential (thinking or talking about divorce). Withdrawal during conflict by either or both partners, though quite common, was associated with more negativity and less positive connection in relationships. The most frequently reported issue that couples argue about in first marriages was money, and for re-marriages it was conflict about children. Overall, how couples argue was more related to divorce potential than was what they argue about, although couples who argue most about money tended to have higher levels of negative communication and conflict than other couples. Further, while male's divorce potential was more strongly linked to levels of negative interaction, female's was more strongly linked to lower positive connection in the relationship. Consistent with the commitment literature, higher reported commitment was associated with less alternative monitoring, less feeling trapped in the relationship, and greater relationship satisfaction.

Johnson, C. A., Stanley, S. M., Glenn, N. D., Amato, P. A., Nock, S. L., Markman, H. J., & Dion, M. R. (2002). Marriage in Oklahoma: 2001 baseline statewide survey on marriage and divorce (S02096 OKDHS). Oklahoma City, OK: Oklahoma Department of Human Services.

From the executive summary:

- Among married persons, those who were most satisfied and least likely to have thought or talked about divorce reported:
  - Less frequent negative communication and conflicts
  - Higher levels of commitment to their partners
  - More frequent talking as friends and more frequent going out on dates
- Negative interaction was, by far, the most potent discriminator of who was satisfied or not in marriage.
- Those who lived with their spouses before marriage reported, on average, lower levels of satisfaction, lower levels of commitment, higher levels of negative interaction, and a greater average tendency to think about divorcing, compared to those who did not live together prior to marriage.

Stanley, S. M., Markman, H. J., Saiz, C. C., Schumm, W. R., Bloomstrom, G., & Bailey, A. E. (2003). Building Strong and Ready Families: Interim Report. Washington D. C.: SAIC, Inc.

From the executive summary:

Army couples showed gains on most measures of couple functioning from pre-BSRF to post-BSRF and at the one month follow-up. Of note is the finding that couples who came into BSRF relatively less happy in their relationships than others demonstrated the strongest positive gains following BSRF. The following are key findings within this study:

- BSRF couples reported increases in relationship satisfaction and confidence.

- BSRF couples reported reductions in various patterns of negative interaction that are associated with marital distress and divorce.

### Some Citations about Measures or the Construct or that use the Construct

- Bradbury, T. N., Beach, S. R. H., Fincham, F. D., & Nelson, G. M. (1996). Attributions and behavior in functional and dysfunctional marriages. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 64, 569-576.
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- Notarius, C., & Markman, H.J. (1993). *We can work it out: Making sense of marital conflict*. New York: Putnam.
- Stanley, S. M., Markman, H. J., Saiz, C. C., Schumm, W. R., Bloomstrom, G., & Bailey, A. E. (2003). *Building Strong and Ready Families: Interim Report*. Washington D. C.: SAIC, Inc.
- Stanley, S.M., Markman, H.J., & Whitton, S. (2002). Communication, Conflict, and Commitment: Insights On The Foundations of Relationship Success from a National Survey. *Family Process*, 41(4), 659-675.
- Stanley, S.M., Markman, H.J., Prado, L.M., Olmos-Gallo, P.A., Tonelli, L., St. Peters, M., Leber, B.D., Bobulinski, M., Cordova, A., & Whitton, S. (2001). Community Based Premarital Prevention: Clergy and Lay Leaders on the Front Lines. *Family Relations*, 50, 67-76.

### Construct: Negative Interaction (objectively coded)

[Comment: Objective coding of couple interaction requires video-taping couples, training coders, and a lot of time and energy. It is expensive, but generally produces rich findings.]

### Abstract(s) of research on or using the construct:

Johnson, M. D. (2002). The observation of specific affect in marital interactions: Psychometric properties of a coding system and a rating system. *Psychological Assessment*, 14, 423-438.

The Specific Affect Coding System (SPAFF; J. M. Gottman & L. J. Krokoff, 1989) has led to conclusions about which types of dyadic affect predict positive and negative outcomes in marriage, yet the lack of information about collinearity among the codes limits interpretation of SPAFF results. Psychometric properties of SPAFF were examined by assessing the interactions of 172 newlywed couples with SPAFF and with an affect rating system developed for this study. For husbands and wives, factor analysis indicated 4 distinct factors of affect, representing anger/contempt, sadness, anxiety, and humor/affection. Anger/contempt and humor/affection were associated with marital satisfaction, relationship beliefs, and appraisals of the interactions. Correlations were in the expected directions. The strengths, limitations, and implications of the data are discussed.

Notarius, C. I. & Markman, H. J. (1989). Coding marital interaction: A sampling and discussion of current issues. Special Issue: Coding marital interaction. Behavioral Assessment, 11(1), 1-11.

Discusses some of the concerns facing the observational study of marital and family interaction and presents examples of the conceptual and methodological gains that can be made through observational research. Issues facing the field include naive reliance on observational methods, the emergence of global coding systems, the need to assess the impact of individual factors on interaction, selection of the coding unit, selection of the research task and appropriate statistical analyses, and conceptualization of key findings. Recommendations for future progress are offered. (PsycINFO Database Copyright 1989 American Psychological Assn, all rights reserved)

Julien, D., Markman, H.J., & Lindahl, K.M. (1989). A comparison of a global and a microanalytic coding system: Implications for future trends in studying interactions. Behavioral Assessment, 11, 81-100.

Presents initial data concerning the criterion validity of a new global measure of couples' interactions, the Interactional Dimensions Coding System (IDCS). 59 premarital couples (males aged 18-32 yrs, females aged 18-35 yrs) completed the Marital Adjustment Test and the Relationship Problem Inventory. Their conflict-resolution discussions were videotaped and coded using the IDCS, the affect codes of a microanalytic system (Couples Interaction Scoring System (CISS)), and an insider's rating procedure (Communication Box). Results reveal that 4 of the 5 negative IDCS dimensions were significantly correlated with the negative CISS affect codes, but positive codes of the 2 systems did not converge. The IDCS showed an association with males' but not females' reports of marital quality. The global and microanalytic measures of escalation were predictive of future relationship satisfaction.

Heyman, R. E. (2001). Observation of couple conflicts: Clinical assessment applications, stubborn truths, and shaky foundations. Psychological Assessment, 13(1), 5-35.

The purpose of this review is to provide a balanced examination of the published research involving the observation of couples, with special attention toward the use of observation for clinical assessment. All published articles that (a) used an observational coding system and (b) relate to the validity of the coding system are summarized in a table. The psychometric properties of observational systems and the use of observation in clinical practice are discussed. Although advances have been made in understanding couple conflict through the use of observation, the review concludes with an appeal to the field to develop constructs in a psychometrically and theoretically sound manner.

### Some Citations about Measures or the Construct or that use the Construct

Cordova, J. V., & Dorian, M. (in press). Observing intimacy in couples' interactions. In P. K. Kerig & D. Baucom (Eds.), Couple observational coding systems. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Bradbury, T. N., Beach, S. R. H., Fincham, F. D., & Nelson, G. M. (1996). Attributions and behavior in functional and dysfunctional marriages. Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 64, 569-576.

Bradbury, T.N., & Fincham, F.D. (1990). Attributions in marriage: Review and critique. Psychological Bulletin, 107, 3-33.

Gottman, J. M. (1993). The roles of conflict engagement, escalation or avoidance in marital interaction: A longitudinal view of five types of couples. Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 61, 6-15.

Gottman, J. (1994). What Predicts Divorce? The Relationship Between Marital Process and Marital Outcomes. Lawrence Erlbaum, New Jersey.

Gottman, J.M., & Krokoff, L.J. (1989). Marital interaction and satisfaction: A longitudinal view. Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 57, 47-52.

- Heyman, R. E. (2001). Observation of couple conflicts: Clinical assessment applications, stubborn truths, and shaky foundations. *Psychological Assessment*, 13(1), 5-35.
- Julien, D., Markman, H.J., & Lindahl, K.M. (1989). A comparison of a global and a microanalytic coding system: Implications for future trends in studying interactions. *Behavioral Assessment*, 11, 81-100.
- Karney, B.R., & Bradbury, T.N. (1995). The longitudinal course of marital quality and stability: A review of theory, method, and research. *Psychological Bulletin*, 118, 3-34.
- Johnson, C. A., Stanley, S. M., Glenn, N. D., Amato, P. A., Nock, S. L., Markman, H. J., & Dion, M. R. (2002). *Marriage in Oklahoma: 2001 baseline statewide survey on marriage and divorce* (S02096 OKDHS). Oklahoma City, OK: Oklahoma Department of Human Services.
- Markman, H.J., & Hahlweg, K. (1993). The prediction and prevention of marital distress: An international perspective. *Clinical Psychology Review*, 13, 29-43.
- Markman, H. J. & Kraft, S. A. (1989). Men and women in marriage: Dealing with gender differences in marital therapy. *The Behavior Therapist*, 12, 51-56.
- Matthews, L.S., Wickrama, K.A.S., & Conger, R.D. (1996). Predicting marital instability from spouse and observer reports of marital interaction. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 58, 641-655.
- Noller, P. (1981). Gender and marital adjustment level differences in decoding messages from spouses and strangers. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 41, 272-278.
- Notarius, C., & Markman, H.J. (1993). *We can work it out: Making sense of marital conflict*. New York: Putnam.

### **Construct: Sacrifice**

[Comment: I think this construct has excellent potential to illuminate differences between men and women in terms of how commitment impacts behavior in relationships.]

### **Abstract(s) of research on or using the construct:**

Van Lange, P. A. M., Rusbult, C. E., Drigotas, S. M., Arriaga, X. B., Witcher, B. S. & Cox, C. L. (1997). Willingness to sacrifice in close relationships. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 72, 1373-1395.

The authors advance an interdependence analysis of willingness to sacrifice. Support for model predictions was revealed in 6 studies (3 cross-sectional survey studies, 1 simulation experiment, 2 longitudinal studies) that used a novel self-report measure and a behavioral measure of willingness to sacrifice. Willingness to sacrifice was associated with strong commitment, high satisfaction, poor alternatives, and high investments; feelings of commitment largely mediated the associations of these variables with willingness to sacrifice. Moreover, willingness to sacrifice was associated with superior couple functioning, operationalized in terms of level of dyadic adjustment and probability of couple persistence. In predicting adjustment, willingness to sacrifice accounted for significant variance beyond commitment, partially mediating the link between commitment and adjustment; such mediation was not significant for persistence.

Whitton, S. W., Stanley, S. M., & Markman, H. J. (under review). *If I Help my Partner, Will it Hurt Me? Perceptions of Sacrifice in Romantic Relationships*.

The authors propose and test an interdependence-based model of the associations between relationship commitment constructs, perceptions of one's sacrifices for the relationship, and individual and relationship well-being. Findings provided support for the model predictions, especially for males. The degree to which sacrifices are perceived to be harmful to the self was associated with overall commitment and long-term view of the relationship for both genders and with a sense of couple identity for males only. These associations were stronger for males than for females. Perceptions of sacrifice as less harmful to the self were also related to greater relationship quality and lower levels of individual depressive symptomatology. Further, perceptions of sacrifice partially mediated the effects of commitment constructs on relationship quality.

### Some Citations about Measures or the Construct or that use the Construct

- Stanley, S.M. & Markman, H.J. (1992). Assessing commitment in personal relationships. Journal of Marriage and The Family, 54, 595-608.
- Van Lange, P. A. M., Agnew, C. R., Harinck, F. & Steemers, G. E. M. (1997). From game theory to real life: How social value orientation affects willingness to sacrifice in ongoing close relationships. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 73, 1330-1344.
- Van Lange, P. A. M., Rusbult, C. E., Drigotas, S. M., Arriaga, X. B., Witcher, B. S. & Cox, C. L. (1997). Willingness to sacrifice in close relationships. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 72, 1373-1395.
- Whitton, S. W., Stanley, S. M., & Markman, H. J. (under review). If I Help my Partner, Will it Hurt Me? Perceptions of Sacrifice in Romantic Relationships.
- Whitton, S. W., Stanley, S. M., & Markman, H. J. (2002). Sacrifice in romantic relationships: An exploration of relevant research and theory. In H. T. Reiss, M. A. Fitzpatrick, A. L. Vangelisti (Eds), Stability and Change in Relationship Behavior across the Lifespan (pp. 156-181). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Wieselquist, J., Rusbult, C. E., Foster, C. A., & Agnew, C. R. (1999). Commitment, pro-relationship behavior, and trust in close relationships. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 77, 942-966.

### Construct: Satisfaction and Quality and Adjustment (a problem)

[Comment: The problem I refer to here is that many measures commonly used to measure “relationship satisfaction” actually measure a good deal more, such as conflict, commitment, and problem solving (e.g., Locke-Wallace MAT). This is a serious problem because means that a measure ostensibly of satisfaction actually sucks up variance across a range of constructs, muddling interpretation of results and understanding. I personally now prefer measures such as Schumm’s mentioned below for their simplicity and unity in assessing pure and global satisfaction.]

### Abstract(s) of research on or using the construct:

- Fincham, F. D., & Bradbury, T. N. (1987). The assessment of marital quality: a reevaluation. Journal of Marriage and the Family, 49, 797-809.

Contents that attempts have been made to measure and explain variance in marital quality, using self-reports, without adequate understanding specification of the construct of marital quality. It is suggested that the inability to establish unambiguous empirical relationships among relevant constructs severely limits theory development and that one means of avoiding these problems is to treat marital quality solely as the global evaluation of marriage. The implications of this strategy are examined in regard to 3 issues: (a) the association between empirical and conceptual dependence, (b) the interpretation of responses to self-report inventories, and (c) the consideration of the purpose for which marital quality is measured. The advantages of this approach and the conditions under which it is most appropriate are also outlined.

- Fincham, F. D., & Linfield, K. J. (1997). A new look at marital quality: Can spouses feel positive and negative about their marriage? Journal of Family Psychology, 11, 489-502.

Marital quality is examined as a 2-dimensional construct comprising positive and negative evaluations. Assessments of marital quality, behavior, attributions, and general affect were completed by 123 couples. Confirmatory factor analysis supported the existence of positive and negative marital quality dimensions. These dimensions also explained unique variance in reported behavior and attributions beyond that explained by a conventional marital quality measure and by positive and negative affect. Ambivalent (high-positive and high-negative) and indifferent (low positive and low-negative) wives differed in reports of behaviors and attributions but did not differ in scores on the conventional marital quality test. The implications of a 2-dimensional analysis of marital quality for theory and research are outlined.

Mattson, R. E., Paldino-Martin, D., Frame, L. E., Collins, Z. R., & Johnson, M. D. (2003, November). The role of affective behaviors and attributions on positive and negative marital quality. To be presented at the Association for Advancement of Behavior Therapy, Boston.

Marital satisfaction is commonly conceptualized such that positive and negative evaluations of a marriage are two points on a single dimension of marital quality. That is, marital satisfaction reflects an evaluation such that positive features are prominent relative to an absence of negative features within the marriage. Conversely, evaluations that are indicative of marital dissatisfaction will typically reflect prominent negative features with a dearth of positive features. Measurements based on this conceptualization have yielded tests that provide single-score global evaluations of marital quality. However, a study by Fincham and Linfield (1997) demonstrated that this conceptualization of marital quality might not be sensitive enough to differentiate between all types of couples. They believed that negative and positive evaluations of marital quality are two separate, albeit related, dimensions. Using a simple measure based on this two-dimensional conceptualization called the Positive and Negative Quality in Marriage Scale (PANQIMS), they found that the separate dimensions have different behavioral and cognitive correlates that would be indistinguishable through the use of the traditional omnibus assessment measures. While these findings provide an interesting new insight into the measurement and conceptualization of marital quality, the study by Fincham and Linfield (1997) had several limitations which include: self-reports of behavior instead of more objective measures of spousal behavior, a single measure of marital satisfaction, and the use of a cross-sectional methodology.

The purpose of the proposed article is to systematically examine the psychometric properties of the PANQIMS and expand upon the finding that measures of positive and negative marital quality are assessing distinct dimensions of marital satisfaction. We hypothesize that the PANQIMS will demonstrate satisfactory concurrent validity through its relationship with known measures of marital satisfaction, as well as adequate discriminant validity in its ability to account for unique variance over measures of marital satisfaction in observed couple behavior. This study will also examine the inter-item and test-retest reliability of the PANQIMS. In addition to these hypotheses, this study will also be providing valuable psychometric data on the PANQIMS using a population that is transitioning from engaged to married. Lastly, due to the multiple time points, this study will be able to provide new data concerning the test-retest reliability of this measure.

Schumm, W. R., Bollman, S. R., Jurich, A. P., & Hatch, R. C. (2001). Family strengths and the Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale: A factory analytic study. *Psychological Reports*, 88(3,Pt2), 965-973.

20 new items were developed to measure six concepts of family strengths and were administered, along with the Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale, to over 266 married subjects as part of a larger survey of current and former members of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). A common factor analysis suggested that most of the items were associated with their expected factors, while reliability analyses indicated that most of the scales had acceptable estimates of internal consistency. The marital satisfaction items clearly were associated with their own factor and not other factors, providing support for the unidimensional nature of the Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale and for its construct validity.

### **Some Citations about Measures or the Construct or that use the Construct**

Busby, D. M., Crane, D. R., Larson, J. H., & Christensen, C. (1995). A revision of the Dyadic Adjustment Scale for use with distressed and nondistressed couples: Construct hierarchy and multidimensional scales. *Journal of Marital & Family Therapy*, 21(3), 289-308.

Fincham, F. D., & Bradbury, T. N. (1987). The assessment of marital quality: a reevaluation. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 49, 797-809.

Locke, H.J., & Wallace, K.M. (1959). Short marital adjustment and prediction tests: their reliability and validity. *Marriage and Family Living*, 21, 251-255.

Mattson, R. E., Paldino-Martin, D., Frame, L. E., Collins, Z. R., & Johnson, M. D. (2003, November). The role of affective behaviors and attributions on positive and negative marital quality. To be presented at the Association for Advancement of Behavior Therapy, Boston.

- Schumm, W. R., Bollman, S. R., Jurich, A. P., & Hatch, R. C. (2001). Family strengths and the Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale: A factory analytic study. *Psychological Reports*, 88(3,Pt2), 965-973.
- Spanier, G. B. (1976). Measuring dyadic adjustment: New scales for assessing the quality of marriage and similar dyads. *Journal of Marriage & the Family*, 38(1), 15-28.

### **Construct: Specific Changes Resulting from Relationship/Marriage Education**

[In our work, we have found it useful to use very specific questions about the kinds of changes couples see occurring as a result of taking relationship education classes. Such measures can be idiosyncratic to the curricula's targets. The advantage of such measures is that they provide one window into the types of content that couples find most useful. They also can be devised to be sensitive to short-term changes when other types of outcomes one is interested in may be necessarily long-term.]

Examples from our work with the Army:

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 I am satisfied with the concern and support the Army or Army Leaders show for my family.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 We have the skills we need to make a life in the Army.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 I am comfortable talking with my spouse about Army-related concerns.

As a result of taking the BSRF program, \_\_\_\_\_

- |    |               |   |
|----|---------------|---|
| 1) | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 | "I know how to handle relationship conflicts better than I did before." |
| 2) | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 | "I have a better idea what to do when my spouse is upset."              |
| 3) | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 | "I feel more confident we will stay together in the years to come."     |
| 4) | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 | "We are more likely to stick with the Army and re-enlist."              |
| 5) | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 | "I have training that will help me make my marriage better."            |

### **Abstract(s) of research on or using the construct:**

Stanley, S. M., Markman, H. J., Saiz, C. C., Schumm, W. R., Bloomstrom, G., & Bailey, A. E. (2003). Building Strong and Ready Families: Interim Report. Washington D. C.: SAIC, Inc.

Sample from the report:

As this example portrays, couples were far more likely to say impacts of BSRF were likely on their relationship than on their involvement with the Army. This is not surprising, since the specific targets of BSRF are mostly about couple and individual functioning and less directly about specific attitudes and beliefs about the Army. BSRF is conceptualized as program that improves and sustains the institutional strength of The Army by strengthening the newly forming marriages of its first-term soldiers. Data presented previously indicate BSRF impacts well-being through improvements in couple's positivity about family life in the army, couple's ability to talk about Army life, and in their perceptions of command support. It is hoped that research in the future can track actual long-term Army involvement outcomes such as re-enlistments and early return of dependents.

The questions asked about what impacts were most likely can be analyzed in different manners, with differing impressions resulting. The preceding analyses are based on the average ratings given by participants to the statements presented, with the "most likely" and "least likely" rankings being based on those averages. Such items can also be analyzed simply from the perspective of whether or not a respondent says a statement is more likely, less likely, or no change.

# **Construct: Support (Supportiveness between partners)**

[Comment: This is a great example of the new emphasis on positive constructs in understanding couple dynamics.]

## **Abstract(s) of research on or using the construct:**

Dehle, C., Larsen, D., & Landers, J. E. (2001). Social Support in Marriage. The American Journal of Family Therapy, 29, 307-324.

The current study examines the role of perceived adequacy of social support provided by spouses for both marital and individual functioning. Married individuals from a college sample (N = 177) recorded the adequacy of specific supportive behaviors provided by the spouse on a daily basis for seven days. Perceived support adequacy was correlated in the expected direction with marital quality, depressive symptomatology and perceived stress. Further, hierarchical multiple regressions indicated that perceived support adequacy accounts for significant unique variance in marital quality, depressive symptomatology and perceived stress, even after controlling for social desirability. Discussion focuses on limitations of the study and implications of the findings for clinical work with couples.

Dehle, C. You can't always get what you want, but can you get what you need? Personality traits and social support in marriage. Manuscript under review.

The current study examines associations among personality traits, social support behavior in marital interactions, and perceptions of partner social support provided during marital interactions. Sixty-six married couples participated in the study. Couples completed two measures of personality traits, and participated in two support-focused interactions. Each spouse completed ratings of satisfaction with the partner's support following discussion of an achievement related stressor. Frequencies of four types of social support behavior were observationally coded for each spouse during his/her turn as support provider. Results indicated that spouses within couples demonstrated similarity in support behavior, but dissimilarity in personality traits. Patterns of associations among personality traits, support behavior provided by the spouse, and satisfaction with support varied across husbands and wives. Husbands with higher levels of neuroticism and/or lower levels of conscientiousness receive more esteem support from wives. Husbands with low levels of conscientiousness also receive more informational support from wives. In addition, associations between husband conscientiousness and satisfaction with support, and husband neuroticism and satisfaction with support were moderated by the amount of the esteem support provided by wives. For wives, conscientiousness and neuroticism predicted satisfaction with support from husbands. The moderating effect for wives indicated that the association between conscientiousness and satisfaction with support depended on the amount of informational support provided by husbands.

Pasch, L. A., & Bradbury, T. N. (1998). Social support, conflict, and the development of marital dysfunction. Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 66, 219-30.

Nearly all research on marital interaction has focused on the behaviors spouses exchange when attempting to resolve marital conflicts. The present study adopts the view that the manner in which spouses help each other contend with personal, rather than marital, difficulties is an unexplored but potentially important domain for understanding how marital distress develops. Newly-married couples participated in two interaction tasks: the standard marital problem-solving task in which spouses discussed an area of conflict in their marriage, and a social support task, in which spouses took turns discussing personal, non-marital, difficulties. Results showed that (1) support solicitation and provision behaviors were associated concurrently with marital satisfaction, as were problem-solving behaviors; (2) wives' support solicitation and provision behaviors also predicted marital outcomes two years later, independent of either spouses' negative behaviors during problem-solving discussions; and (3) support behaviors moderated the effect of negative problem-solving behavior on marital outcomes such that couples who exhibited relatively poor skills in both behavioral domains were at particular risk for later marital discord or instability. Results have implications for expanding models designed to understand the development of distress in marriage, and they suggest that support solicitation and provision skill training be added to prevention programs currently aimed at teaching couples conflict resolution skills.

### Some Citations about Measures or the Construct or that use the Construct

- Cutrona, C. (1996). Social support in couples. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Dehle, C., Larsen, D., & Landers, J. E. (2001). Social Support in Marriage. The American Journal of Family Therapy, 29, 307-324.
- Fincham, F. D. (2003). Marital conflict: Correlates, structure, and context. Current Directions in Psychological Science, 12(1), 23-27.
- Pasch, L. A., & Bradbury, T. N. (1998). Social support, conflict, and the development of marital dysfunction. Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 66, 219-30.

### Construct: Religiosity and a Specific Construct of Sanctification of Marriage

[Comment: There are various ways to measure religiosity, and even quite simple measures often produce meaningful findings (see Johnson et al, 2002; report on Oklahoma survey). Here below is an example of a richer construct that may have great value in understanding how religious faith and practice play protective roles for some couples. I think the study below by Mahoney et al. in 1999 is the best ever conducted in advancing the understanding of how religious faith functions protectively for couples. Such measures and ways of thinking might be well utilized in some intervention research, even to the point of treating joint religious belief and involvement as an outcome for couples in some evaluations.]

Example of simple measures we have used.

All things considered, how *religious* would you say that you are?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not at all		Somewhat religious				Very religious

Please answer each of the next four questions by indicating how strongly you agree or disagree with the idea expressed.

1 = Strongly Disagree  
 2  
 3  
 4 = Neither Agree Nor Disagree  
 5  
 6  
 7 = Strongly Agree

1 2 3 4 5 6 7	What religion offers me most is comfort in times of trouble and sorrow.
1 2 3 4 5 6 7	My whole approach to life is based on my religion.
1 2 3 4 5 6 7	I go to church or synagogue mainly because I enjoy seeing people I know there.
1 2 3 4 5 6 7	Life has no real meaning apart from a relationship with God.

### Abstract(s) of research on or using the construct:

[2 subscales to assess: Manifestation of God in Marriage (theistic sanctification) & Sacred Qualities in Marriage (non-theistic sanctification)]

Mahoney, A., Pargament, K.I., Jewell, T., Swank, A.B., Scott, E., Emery, E., & Rye, M. (1999). Marriage and the spiritual realm: The role of proximal and distal religious constructs in marital functioning. Journal of Family Psychology, 13 (3), 321-338.

Ninety-seven couples completed questionnaires about their involvement in

joint religious activities and their perceptions regarding the sanctification of marriage, including perceived sacred qualities of marriage and beliefs about the manifestation of God in marriage. In contrast to individual religiousness and religious homogamy (distal religious constructs), these proximal religious variables directly reflect an integration of religion and marriage, and they were associated with greater global marital adjustment, more perceived benefits from marriage, less marital conflict, more verbal collaboration, and less use of verbal aggression and stalemate to discuss disagreements for both wives and husbands. The proximal measures also added substantial unique variance (adjusted R<sup>2</sup> change ranged from .06 to .48) to specific aspects of marital functioning after controlling demographic factors and distal religious variables in hierarchical regression analyses.

### **Some Citations about Measures or the Construct or that use the Construct**

- Allport, G. W. & Ross, J. M. (1967). Personal religious orientation and prejudice. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 5, 432-443.
- Call, V.R. & Heaton, T.B. (1997). Religious influence on marital stability. Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, 36, 382-392.
- Gorsuch, R. L. & McPherson, S. E. (1989). Intrinsic/extrinsic measurement: I/E revised and single item scales. Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, 28, 348-354.
- Heaton, T.B. (1984). Religious homogamy and marital satisfaction reconsidered. Journal of Marriage and the Family, 46, 729-733.
- Heaton, T.B., Albrecht, S.L., & Martin, T.K. (1985). The timing of divorce. Journal of Marriage and the Family, 47, 631-639.
- Heaton, T.B. & Pratt, E.L. (1990). The effects of religious homogamy on marital satisfaction and stability. Journal of Family Issues, 11, 191-207.
- Johnson, C. A., Stanley, S. M., Glenn, N. D., Amato, P. A., Nock, S. L., Markman, H. J., & Dion, M. R. (2002). Marriage in Oklahoma: 2001 baseline statewide survey on marriage and divorce (S02096 OKDHS). Oklahoma City, OK: Oklahoma Department of Human Services.
- Mahoney, A., Pargament, K.I., Jewell, T., Swank, A.B., Scott, E., Emery, E., & Rye, M. (1999). Marriage and the spiritual realm: The role of proximal and distal religious constructs in marital functioning. Journal of Family Psychology, 13 (3), 321-338.
- Mahoney A, Pargament KI, Murray-Swank A. B., Murray-Swank, N. (2003). Religion and the sanctification of family relationships, REV RELIG RES, 44, 220-236.