

A Generic Measure of Relationship Satisfaction

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## A Generic Measure of Relationship Satisfaction

*The variety of interpersonal relationships in contemporary society necessitates the development of brief, reliable measures of satisfaction that are applicable to many types of close relationships. This article describes the development of such a measure. In Study I, the 7-item Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS) was administered to 125 subjects who reported themselves to be "in love." Analyses revealed a unifactorial scale structure, substantial factor loadings, and moderate inter-correlations among the items. The scale correlated significantly with measures of love, sexual attitudes, self-disclosure, commitment, and investment in a relationship. In Study II, the scale was administered to 57 couples in ongoing relationships. Analyses supported a single factor, alpha reliability of .86, and correlations with relevant relationship measures. The scale correlated .80 with a longer criterion measure, the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (Spanier, 1976), and both scales were effective (with a subsample) in discriminating couples who stayed together from couples who broke up. The RAS is a brief, psychometrically sound, generic measure of relationship satisfaction.*

The study of close interpersonal relationships has increased in recent years and with it has come the proliferation of approaches to relationship assessment. Such approaches include behavioral self-report, observational, and behavioral methods (Olson, 1977), but general self-report techniques

have been among the most popular. Although a number of problems with self-report research have been noted, it remains a useful research approach (Harvey, Christensen, and McClintock, 1983).

Relationship satisfaction is one of the major established areas of relationship assessment, with numerous measures to assess feelings, thoughts, or behaviors within the marital relationship. The most popular measures include the 15-item Locke-Wallace Marital Adjustment Test (Locke and Wallace, 1959), the 400-item Spouse Observation Checklist (Patterson, 1976), the 280-item Marital Satisfaction Inventory (Snyder, 1979), and the 32-item Dyadic Adjustment Scale (Spanier, 1976). Although all of these measures are respected, several are relatively lengthy (and thus sometimes unwieldy both for research and therapy purposes), and all are oriented to marital relationships. That suggests the need for a short, general measure of relationship satisfaction.

In a study of 51 married couples, the Marital Assessment Questionnaire, a 5-item measure of marital satisfaction developed by Hendrick (1981), was found to be modestly correlated (.48) with a more established measure, the Marriage Adjustment Inventory (Manson and Lerner, 1962). The Marital Assessment Questionnaire was also positively related to self-disclosure, a primary variable of interest in that study.

The present research was designed to widen the focus of the Marital Assessment Questionnaire to romantic relationships in general, to explore the psychometric characteristics of the revised measure, and to provide initial information on the scale's validity and potential utility.

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## STUDY I

*Method*

**Measures.** The Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS), a 7-item Likert scale, was based on a 5-item Marital Assessment Questionnaire used in previous research (Hendrick, 1981). Changes in the scale involved substitution of the word "partner" for the word "mate" and the word "relationship" for the word "marriage" and inclusion of two items from an earlier version of the scale.

Several additional measures were also used. The Love Attitudes Scale (Hendrick and Hendrick, 1986) assessed attitudes toward six different love styles: Eros (passionate love), Ludus (game-playing love), Storge (friendship love), Pragma (practical love), Mania (possessive, dependent love), and Agape (altruistic love). The Sexual Attitudes Scale (Hendrick, Hendrick, Slapion-Foote, and Foote, 1985) is a sexual attitudes instrument with four subscales: Permissiveness (casual sex), Sexual Practices (responsible sex), Communion (idealistic sex), and Instrumentality (utilitarian sex). Two items (combined) measured self-esteem, while the Self-Disclosure Index and Opener Scale (Miller, Berg, and Archer, 1983) explored both willingness to self-disclose to specific others and self-perceived ability to elicit disclosure from others. Four items were oriented to commitment (Lund, 1985), and four original items explored subjects' beliefs about their own (and partner's) ability to attract another partner and their own (and partner's) general investment in the relationship.

**Procedure.** The scales were administered as a questionnaire battery to 235 undergraduate subjects (118 males, 117 females) enrolled in psychology courses at a large southwestern university in the fall of 1986. The total questionnaire consisted of a brief section of background items; measures assessing love and sex attitudes, self-esteem, communication, commitment, investment, and alternative partners; and the RAS. Several other measures not related to the present study were also included. The questionnaire was administered to groups of students, who received course credit for participation. Only subjects who reported themselves on question 14 of the background items as "in love" were retained for this study ( $n = 125$ ).

TABLE 1. ITEMS, MEANS, AND STANDARD DEVIATIONS FOR RELATIONSHIP ASSESSMENT SCALE (RAS): STUDY I ( $n = 125$ )

Item Number and Content	Mean	SD
1. How well does your partner meet your needs?	4.224	.869
2. In general, how satisfied are you with your relationship?	4.256	.924
3. How good is your relationship compared to most?	4.280	.912
4. How often do you wish you hadn't gotten into this relationship?	4.136	.970
5. To what extent has your relationship met your original expectations?	3.944	1.080
6. How much do you love your partner?	4.792	.528
7. How many problems are there in your relationship?	3.512	1.126

Note: Scores could range from 1 (low satisfaction) to 5 (high satisfaction). Items 4 and 7 are reverse scored.

*Results and Discussion*

The RAS items and their means and standard deviations are shown in Table 1.

**Scale structure.** The items were subjected to a principal-components factor analysis, with the best solution (all factor solutions specified an eigenvalue greater than one) extracting one factor, shown in the left column of Table 2. This factor accounted for 46% of the variance. Intercorrelations among the RAS scale items are shown in Table 3. Most were in the moderate range. The item-total correlations varied from .573 to .760.

**Correlations with other measures.** Correlations between the RAS and selected measures are shown in Table 4 in the column for Study I. The RAS was positively related to the love attitude

TABLE 2. FACTOR ANALYSIS OF RAS

Item	Study I ( $n = 125$ ) Factor 1	Study II ( $n = 114$ ) Factor 1
1	.77	.80
2	.79	.88
3	.72	.83
4	.67	.67
5	.58	.62
6	.66	.65
7	.49	.79

TABLE 3. ITEM CORRELATIONS FOR RAS: STUDY I ( $n = 125$ )

Item	2	3	4	5	6	7	Total
1	.671*	.480*	.337*	.348*	.436*	.211*	.726*
2		.508*	.429*	.354*	.341*	.261*	.760*
3			.385*	.270*	.339*	.354*	.712*
4				.308*	.386*	.342*	.687*
5					.389*	.117	.607*
6						.221*	.604*
7							.573*

\* $p < .05$ .

styles of Eros (passionate love) and Agape (altruistic love), negatively related to Ludus (game-playing love), positively related to the sexual attitude orientation of Communion (idealistic sexuality), and also positively related to self-esteem, self-disclosure to a lover, and one's self-perceived ability to elicit self-disclosure (Opener). There was an impressive correlation between the

RAS and commitment, a moderate negative correlation with alternative partners, and a positive correlation with relationship investment. Overall, although most of the significant correlations were modest, all were in directions that were expected on the basis of the contents of the various measures.

The results of Study I indicated that the RAS is a unifactorial instrument, with moderate correlations between items and conceptually consistent correlations with additional relationship measures.

TABLE 4. CORRELATIONS OF RAS TOTAL SCORE WITH OTHER MEASURES

Measure	Study I ( $n = 125$ )	Study II ( $n = 114$ )
Eros	.60*	.50*
Ludus	-.30*	-.53*
Storge	.14	.01
Pragma	.04	-.04
Mania	-.05	-.12
Agape	.36*	.21*
Permissiveness	-.14	—
Sex practices	.15	—
Communion	.24*	—
Instrumentality	.01	—
Self-esteem	.24*	.27*
Self-disclosure, lover	.41*	—
Self-disclosure, friend	.10	—
Opener	.21*	—
Commitment	.55*	—
Alternative partner	-.21*	—
Investment	.45*	—
Dyadic consensus	—	.62*
Dyadic satisfaction	—	.83*
Dyadic cohesion	—	.57*
Affectional expression	—	.51*
Total DAS	—	.80*

Note: A dash indicates that the measure was not administered in the study.

\* $p < .05$ .

## STUDY II

Although it appeared that the Relationship Assessment Scale might be a useful, brief measure of relationship satisfaction, a need existed to employ the scale with actual partners in ongoing dating relationships and to explore the scale's relation to a more established criterion measure. The measure chosen was the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (Spanier, 1976; Spanier and Thompson, 1982). This widely used satisfaction instrument includes 32 items assessing adjustment in marital couples and similar dyads. It has four subscales: Dyadic Satisfaction, Dyadic Cohesion, Dyadic Consensus, and Affectional Expression. It is viewed by some scholars as "probably the psychometrically soundest measure of marital adjustment available" (Follette and Jacobson, 1985: 340).

## Method and Results

The Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS), the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS), the Love Attitudes Scale, and a brief self-esteem measure were administered to 57 dating couples recruited in the spring and fall of 1986 at a large southwestern

university. Subjects received either psychology course credit or a \$5 payment for participation. The questionnaire was administered to groups of couples, and partners were not allowed to communicate during testing. In addition, couples recruited in the fall only ( $n = 31$ ) were contacted at the end of the semester to determine whether the partners were still dating.

Limited changes were made in ten of the DAS items to render the scale more suitable for dating couples. In five items, the word "mate" was changed to the word "partner." In three other items, the words "family, or in laws, divorce, separation, or" were deleted; the meaning of the items did not change. "How often do you or your mate leave the house after a fight" was changed to "How often do you or your partner just 'leave' after a fight," and "Do you ever regret that you married (or lived together)" was changed to "Do you ever regret that you two got together."

To substantiate the factor structure of the RAS, a principal-components factor analysis was conducted for the sample. The best solution extracted one factor, accounting for 57% of the variance. The factor loadings are shown on the right column of Table 2. The factor structure and loadings were consistent with those of Study I. Reliability analyses were conducted on the RAS, with results shown in Table 5. The mean inter-item correlation of .49 and the alpha of .86 were very acceptable for a brief scale.

Correlations were computed between the RAS and the other measures and are shown in the right column of Table 4. (These correlations were computed for 114 subjects [57 couples], and members of a dyad will covary on many measures. Thus, these correlations may contain some nonindependence between individuals and should be interpreted cautiously.) Correlations with the love scales were similar to those from Study I, though the values for Eros and Agape were lower and that for Ludus higher. The correlation with self-esteem was similar to the earlier one. Of particular importance were the correlations with the subscale

scores and total scale score of the Dyadic Adjustment Scale. These ranged from a low of .51 for Affectional Expression to a high of .83 for Dyadic Satisfaction, with the total scale scores correlating .80.

Correlations were computed between partners' scores on the RAS items, and similar correlations were computed for random couples. The results are shown in Table 6. All but one of the RAS items showed a significant correlation between partners in ongoing relationships, with several of the values falling near or above .60. For the random couples, none of the correlations was significant. One would expect actual partners to be more alike in their perceptions of a relationship than would randomly selected partners, and indeed that was the case.

TABLE 6. CORRELATIONS BETWEEN PARTNERS ON THE RAS: STUDY II

Item	Ongoing Couples ( $n = 57$ couples)	Random Couples ( $n = 57$ couples)
1	.27*	-.04
2	.59*	-.01
3	.63*	-.04
4	.31*	-.07
5	.24	-.04
6	.33*	-.04
7	.67*	.21
Total RAS	.62*	-.02

\* $p < .05$ .

#### *Staying Together versus Breaking Apart*

Of the subsample of 31 couples recruited in fall, 1986, 30 were recontacted to ascertain how many couples were still together and how many had broken up (one couple could not be recontacted). Of these 30 couples, 23 were still dating and 7 were not. Analyses performed included an ANOVA comparing the two groups on the RAS, and discriminant analyses using the RAS and the total score of the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS) separately as discriminator variables.

For the ANOVA, the two groups differed significantly on the RAS,  $F(1, 29) = 28.41$ ,  $p < .0001$ . The mean score for persons continuing in relationships was 4.34 and that for persons no longer in relationships was 3.33. Discriminant analyses using the RAS and the DAS total score as separate predictors for the 60 individuals are

TABLE 5. RELIABILITY ANALYSIS AND INTER-ITEM CORRELATION FOR RAS: STUDY II ( $n = 114$ )

Statistic	Value
Mean inter-item correlation	.49
Alpha	.86
Standardized alpha	.87

shown in the top half of Table 7. Each measure was able to correctly assign 50 of the 60 persons. (Completely correct discrimination would have assigned 46 persons to "together" and 14 persons to "apart.") The DAS correctly predicted 93% of the "together" and 50% of the "apart" persons, whereas the RAS correctly predicted 91% of the "together" and 57% of the "apart" persons. Additional discriminant analyses of the subjects as couples (a couple as the unit of analysis) are shown in the bottom half of Table 7. Results indicated that the DAS total scale (using both the male and female DAS scores as predictors) was able to correctly assign 91% of the "together" and 57% of the "apart" couples, while the RAS (using both male and female RAS scores) correctly assigned 91% of the "together" and 86% of the "apart" couples. Although it should be noted that the sample was relatively small, both scales were effective in these analyses, with the RAS appearing to be slightly better than the DAS.

TABLE 7. DISCRIMINANT ANALYSES OF INDIVIDUALS AND COUPLES: STUDY II

Subject Classification	Predicted Classification			
	DAS Total Score		RAS	
	Together	Apart	Together	Apart
Individuals ( <i>n</i> = 60)				
Together	43	3	42	4
Apart	7	7	6	8
Couples ( <i>n</i> = 30)				
Together	21	2	21	2
Apart	3	4	1	6

#### CONCLUSION

The results of these studies indicate that the Relationship Assessment Scale shows promise for several reasons. The RAS has a coherent factor structure, is internally consistent, is solidly and consistently related to measures of relevant constructs such as love and self-esteem, and shows an extremely high correlation with the longer Dyadic Adjustment Scale, a well-respected measure of dyadic satisfaction. The RAS is also an effective discriminator of couples who stay together versus those who split apart, and its predictive ability (91% of "together" and 86% of "apart" couples) indicates that it could be extremely useful in targeting couples "at risk" for relationship breakup. It is also brief and easy to administer. Of course, when a detailed profile or set of descrip-

tors is needed for a couple, one of the longer measures of relationship satisfaction is probably essential. However, a therapist or researcher often wants only a "ballpark" estimate of a person's relationship satisfaction but wants it from something more informative than a single item asking "How satisfied are you with your relationship?" The RAS asks that particular question but also asks several others and has considerable breadth for such a brief scale. Individual item scores, as well as the total scale score, might prove useful in research and therapy.

Most important, the RAS is a generic relationship satisfaction measure with potential for much wider application than would be possible for a standard marital satisfaction measure. The items are specific enough to tap several relationship dimensions (e.g., love, problems, expectations), yet general enough to be appropriate for married couples, couples who are living together, dating couples, gay couples, and, with minimal changes, even for friendships. Our society encompasses many alternatives to the traditional marriage relationship, and each type of relationship merits our attention.

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