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Short Marital-Adjustment and Prediction Tests: Their Reliability and Validity

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THIS study is an attempt to develop short, but reliable, and valid, marital-adjustment and prediction tests. Marital adjustment is accommodation of a husband and wife to each other at a given time. Marital prediction is forecasting the likelihood of marital adjustment at a future time.

Before considering the reliability and validity of the short tests, we shall discuss the length of previous tests, the study design, and the sample.

PREVIOUS TESTS

The first attempt to measure marital success by a numerical score was made by Hamilton.¹ He used a relatively short test composed of only thirteen items. More recent tests of marital adjustment and prediction have used a very large number of items. The length of these tests is their main disadvantage.

The Burgess-Wallin Marital-Success Schedule contains 89² numbered items, but several of these have multiple subitems.³ Counting the multiple subitems, it requires answers to a possible maximum of 246 questions.⁴ Enumerating items on this basis, the Terman Happiness Test contains 75 items;⁵ the modified Terman-Oden test contains 103 items.⁶ The Locke Marital-Adjustment Test contains 50 items.⁷ The Karls-

son Index of Marital Satisfaction used 40 items.⁸ The Burgess-Cottrell Marital-Adjustment Test contains 26 items.⁹

The various marital-prediction tests contain the following number of items, if all questions in multiple items are counted: Burgess-Wallin, 133;¹⁰ Terman, 182;¹¹ Terman-Oden, 180;¹² Locke, 155 for men and 158 for women;¹³ Karlsson, 94 for men and 102 for women;¹⁴ and Burgess-Cottrell, 195.¹⁵

It seems to the authors that by using only the most basic or fundamental items the length of marital-adjustment and prediction tests might be reduced without any appreciable loss in reliability and validity. As early as 1941, the same viewpoint was expressed in a study sponsored by the Social Science Research Council.¹⁶

THE STUDY DESIGN

The hypothesis of the study was that reliable and valid adjustment and prediction tests can be constructed by using a limited number of the most significant items taken from studies made prior to this one.

The specific purposes of the study were: (1) to critically review marital-prediction studies in

¹ Gilbert V. Hamilton, *A Research in Marriage*, New York: Albert and Charles Boni, 1929, pp. 60-76.

² One of these was not numbered.

³ It was sometimes difficult on multiple-answer questions to decide when an item should be counted as separate.

⁴ Ernest W. Burgess and Paul Wallin, *Engagement and Marriage*, Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1953, pp. 485-502. For wives it was 242.

⁵ Lewis M. Terman, et. al., *Psychological Factors in Marital Happiness*, New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1938, p. 50. For wives it was 71.

⁶ Lewis M. Terman and Melita H. Oden, *Genetic Studies of Genius, Vol. IV, The Gifted Child Grows Up*, Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1947, pp. 431-33. For wives it was 106.

⁷ Harvey J. Locke, *Predicting Adjustment in Marriage: A Comparison of a Divorced and a Happily Married Group*, New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1951, pp. 48-52.

⁸ Georg Karlsson, *Adaptability and Communication in Marriage: A Swedish Prediction Study of Marital Satisfaction*, Uppsala, Sweden: Almqvist and Wiksells, Boktryckeri Aktiebolag, 1951, pp. 95-99 and question 53 on pp. 171-72. For wives it was 40.

⁹ Ernest W. Burgess and Leonard S. Cottrell, *Predicting Success or Failure in Marriage*, New York: Prentice-Hall, 1939, pp. 64-65.

¹⁰ Ernest W. Burgess and Paul Wallin, *op. cit.*, pp. 801-808.

¹¹ Lewis M. Terman, et. al., *op. cit.*, pp. 122-41, 260-64, 352-55.

¹² Lewis M. Terman and Melita H. Oden, *op. cit.*, pp. 419-29.

¹³ Harvey J. Locke, *op. cit.*, pp. 319-38.

¹⁴ Georg Karlsson, *op. cit.*, pp. 136-49.

¹⁵ Ernest W. Burgess and Leonard S. Cottrell, *op. cit.*, pp. 420-29.

¹⁶ Paul Horst, Editor, *The Prediction of Personal Adjustment*, New York: Social Science Research Council, 1941, Chapter 6.

order to select the most basic or fundamental items; (2) to utilize these items, with minor modifications, in the construction of short marital-adjustment and prediction tests; and (3) to test the reliability and validity of these by applying them to a new sample.

First, adjustment and prediction items, which had proved significant in the original studies, were recorded. Then those items were selected which (1) had the highest level of discrimination in the original studies, (2) did not dupli-

cate other included items, and (3) would cover the important areas of marital adjustment and prediction as judged by the authors.

Fifteen items were selected for the adjustment test, and thirty-five for the prediction test. The possible scores for the adjustment test ranged from 2-158 points; for the prediction test the score ranged from 0-532 for men, and from 0-502 for women.

The short marital-adjustment test is as follows:

MARITAL-ADJUSTMENT TEST

1. Check the dot on the scale line below which best describes the degree of happiness, everything considered, of your present marriage. The middle point, "happy," represents the degree of happiness which most people get from marriage, and the scale gradually ranges on one side to those few who are very unhappy in marriage, and on the other, to those few who experience extreme joy or felicity in marriage.

| | | | | | | |
|--------------|---|---|-------|----|----|-----------------|
| 0 | 2 | 7 | 15 | 20 | 25 | 35 |
| • | • | • | • | • | • | • |
| Very Unhappy | | | Happy | | | Perfectly Happy |

State the approximate extent of agreement or disagreement between you and your mate on the following items. Please check each column.

| | Always Agree | Almost Always Agree | Occasionally Disagree | Frequently Disagree | Almost Always Disagree | Always Disagree |
|---|--------------|---------------------|-----------------------|---------------------|------------------------|-----------------|
| 2. Handling family finances | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 |
| 3. Matters of recreation | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 |
| 4. Demonstrations of affection | 8 | 6 | 4 | 2 | 1 | 0 |
| 5. Friends | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 |
| 6. Sex relations | 15 | 12 | 9 | 4 | 1 | 0 |
| 7. Conventionality (right, good, or proper conduct) | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 |
| 8. Philosophy of life | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 |
| 9. Ways of dealing with in-laws | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 |
| 10. When disagreements arise, they usually result in: husband giving in 0 , wife giving in 2 , agreement by mutual give and take 10 . | | | | | | |
| 11. Do you and your mate engage in outside interests together? All of them 10 , some of them 8 , very few of them 3 , none of them 0 . | | | | | | |
| 12. In leisure time do you generally prefer: to be "on the go" —, to stay at home —? Does your mate generally prefer: to be "on the go" —, to stay at home —? (Stay at home for both, 10 points; "on the go" for both, 3 points; disagreement, 2 points.) | | | | | | |
| 13. Do you ever wish you had not married? Frequently 0 , occasionally 3 , rarely 8 , never 15 . | | | | | | |
| 14. If you had your life to live over, do you think you would: marry the same person 15 , marry a different person 0 , not marry at all 1 ? | | | | | | |
| 15. Do you confide in your mate: almost never 0 , rarely 2 , in most things 10 , in everything 10 ? | | | | | | |

The short marital-prediction test is as follows:

MARITAL-PREDICTION TEST

1. Circle the number which represents the highest grade of schooling which you had completed at the time of your marriage:

| | | | |
|-----------------|-------------|---------|--------------|
| 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 | 1 2 3 4 | 1 2 3 4 | 1 2 3 4 |
| Grade School | High School | College | Postgraduate |
| (0) | (5) | (10) | (20) |
2. Check the number which represents your age at the time of marriage: 19 and under 0 , 20-24 H,2;W,5 ; 25-30 10 ; 31 and over 8 .
3. How long did you "keep company" with your mate before marriage? (check) 1 to 3 months 0 ; 3 to 6 months 2 ; 6 months to 1 year 4 ; 1 to 2 years 7 ; 2 to 3 years 10 ; 3 years or longer 15 .
4. How long had you known your mate at the time of your marriage? (check) 1 to 3 month 0 ; 3 to 6 months 2 ; 6 months to 1 year 4 ; 1 to 2 years 7 ; 2 to 3 years 10 ; 3 to 5 years 15 ; 5 years or longer 20 ; since childhood 25 .
5. My father and mother (check) both approved my marriage 15 ; both disapproved my marriage 0 ; father disapproved H,0;W,5 ; mother disapproved 5 .
6. My childhood and adolescence, for the most part, were spent in: (check) open country 20 ; a town of 2,500 population or under 15 ; a city of 2,500 to 10,000 10 ; 10,000 to 50,000 3 ; 50,000 and over 0 .
7. Did you ever attend Sunday school or other religious school for children and young people? (check) Yes ; no H,5;W,0 . If answer is yes, at what age did you stop attending such a school? Before 10 years old H,10;W,5 ; 11 to 18 years H,15;W,10 ; 19 and over H,25;W,20 ; still attending H,25;W,20 .
8. Religious activity at time of marriage: (check) never attended church 0 ; attended less than once per month 3 ; once per month H,8;W,5 ; twice H,12;W,7 ; three times H,15;W,10 ; four times H,15;W,10 ; more than four times H,15;W,10 .
9. Indicate the number of your friends of the same sex before marriage: (check) almost none 0 ; a few H,5;W,10 ; several H,10;W,15 ; many H,15;W,20 .
10. Before your marriage how much conflict was there between you and your father? (check) None H,25;W,20 ; very little H,20;W,15 ; moderate H,15;W,10 ; a good deal H,5;W,3 ; almost continuous 0 .
11. Before your marriage how much attachment was there between you and your father? (check) None 0 ; very little 5 ; moderate 7 ; a good deal H,15;W,10 ; very close H,25;W,15 .
12. Before your marriage how much conflict was there between you and your mother? (check) None H,25;W,20 ; very little H,20;W,15 ; moderate H,15;W,10 ; a good deal H,5;W,3 ; almost continuous 0 .
13. Before your marriage how much attachment was there between you and your mother? (check) None 0 ; very little 5 ; moderate 7 ; a good deal H,15;W,10 ; very close H,25;W,15 .
14. Give your appraisal of the happiness of your parents' marriage: (check) very happy 45 ; happy 30 ; about averagely happy 15 ; unhappy 3 ; very unhappy 0 .
15. My childhood on the whole was: (check) very happy 35 ; happy 20 ; about averagely happy 10 ; unhappy 3 ; very unhappy 0 .
16. In my childhood I was (check) punished severely for every little thing 0 ; was punished frequently 2 ; was occasionally punished 10 ; rarely 15 ; never 15 .
17. In my childhood the type of training in my home was: (check) exceedingly strict 5 ; firm but not harsh 20 ; usually allowed to have my own way 5 ; had my own way about everything 3 ; irregular (sometimes strict, sometimes lax) 0 .
18. What was your parents' attitude toward your early curiosities about birth and sex? (check) Frank and encouraging 15 ; answered briefly 10 ; evaded or lied to me 3 ; rebuffed or punished me 0 ; I did not disclose my curiosity to them 5 .
19. My general mental ability, compared to my mate's is: (check) very superior to his (hers) 0 ; somewhat greater H,5;W,0 ; about equal H,15;W,20 ; somewhat less H,5;W,10 ; considerably less 0 .
20. Before marriage what was your general attitude toward sex? (check) One of disgust and aversion 0 ; indifference H,0;W,5 ; interest and pleasant anticipation 15 ; eager and passionate longing H,5;W,0 .

(Concluded on following page.)

21. Do you often feel lonesome, even when you are with other people? (check) Yes 0 ; No. 5 ; ? 2 .
22. Are you usually even-tempered and happy in your outlook on life? Yes 20 ; No 0 ; ? 9 .
23. Do you often feel just miserable? (check) Yes 0 ; No 7 ; ? 3 .
24. Does some particular useless thought keep coming into your mind to bother you? (check) Yes 0 ; No 5 ; ? 2 .
25. Do you often experience periods of loneliness? (check) Yes 0 ; No 10 ; ? 4 .
26. Are you in general self-confident about your abilities? (check) Yes 5 ; No 0 ; ? 2 .
27. Are you touchy on various subjects? (check) Yes 0 ; No 6 ; ? 2 .
28. Do you frequently feel grouchy? (check) Yes 0 ; No 8 ; ? 3 .
29. Do you usually avoid asking advice? (check) Yes 0 ; No 5 ; ? 2 .
30. Do you prefer to be alone at times of emotional stress? (check) Yes 0 ; No 5 ; ? 2 .
31. Do your feelings alternate between happiness and sadness without apparent reason? (check) Yes 0 ; No 6 ; ? 2 .
32. Are you often in a state of excitement? (check) Yes 0 ; No 5 ; ? 2 .
33. Are you considered critical of other people? (check) Yes 0 ; No 8 ; ? 3 .
34. Does discipline make you discontented? (check) Yes 0 ; No 7 ; ? 3 .
35. Do you always try carefully to avoid saying anything that may hurt anyone's feelings? (check) Yes 10 ; No 0 ; ? 4 .

THE SAMPLE

A sample representative of the general married population was not needed, for the only purpose of this study was to see if reliable and valid short tests could be constructed. However, if it were to be used either in counseling or for research, it would be most applicable to a middle class group. The social characteristics of the 118 husbands and 118 wives in the present sample were quite similar to those of the Burgess-Cottrell and the Terman samples. The husbands and wives were not related spouses and, consequently, the sample represents 236 marriages.

The sample was a predominantly young,¹⁷ native-white,¹⁸ educated,¹⁹ Protestant,²⁰ white-collar and professional,²¹ urban group.²² The families were predominantly childless or had

only one child.²³ Mean length of marriage was 5.6 years for husbands and 5.3 years for wives. Cases married less than one year were excluded. We now turn to the question of reliability and validity.

RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY OF THE MARITAL-ADJUSTMENT TEST

The reliability coefficient of the adjustment test, computed by the split-half technique and corrected by the Spearman-Brown formula, was .90. Thus the short adjustment test has high reliability.

Forty-eight of the 236 subjects were known to be maladjusted in marriage. Extensive case data corroborated this for thirty-one of the persons, twenty-nine of whom were clients of the American Institute of Family Relations. Eleven more cases were recently divorced, and six were separated, making a total of twenty-two males and twenty-six females in the maladjusted group. This group of forty-eight was matched for age and sex with forty-eight persons in the sample judged to be exceptionally well-adjusted in marriage by friends who knew them well.

The mean adjustment score for the well-adjusted group was 135.9, whereas the mean score for the maladjusted group was only 71.7. This

¹⁷ Mean age of husbands was twenty-nine years; wives, thirty years.

¹⁸ Eighty-one per cent of subjects' fathers were native-white Americans; 15 per cent were born in Northern European countries.

¹⁹ Seventy per cent had some college training; 42 per cent of husbands and 32 per cent of wives had graduated from college; mean years of education was fifteen for husbands and fourteen for wives.

²⁰ Seventy-three per cent were Protestant; 11 per cent Catholic; 5 per cent Jewish; and 11 per cent no church affiliation.

²¹ Fifty-four per cent of husbands engaged in professional, sales, and semiprofessional occupations; 58 per cent of wives listed occupation as housewife, and the majority of the remainder were in clerical, skilled, and semiskilled occupations.

²² All cases were from Los Angeles.

²³ Forty per cent of husbands and 48 per cent of wives had no children; 39 per cent of husbands and 27 per cent of wives had only one child.

difference was very significant, for the critical ratio was 17.5.

Only 17 per cent of the maladjusted group achieved adjustment scores of one hundred or higher, whereas 96 per cent of the well-adjusted group achieved scores of one hundred or more.

The above figures indicate that this short marital-adjustment test clearly differentiates between persons who are well-adjusted and those who are maladjusted in marriage. It is evident, therefore, that the test has validity, since it seems to measure what it purports to measure—namely, marital adjustment.

RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY OF THE MARITAL-PREDICTION TEST

The reliability coefficient of the prediction test, computed by the split-half technique and corrected by the Spearman-Brown formula, was .84. This coefficient is approximately the same as that of other longer tests.

The most exacting measure of the validity of a marital-prediction test would require a longitudinal study over a period of several years. Since this was not feasible, the prediction scores were correlated with the adjustment scores for the 236 husbands and wives. For the total sample, the coefficient of correlation between the prediction and adjustment scores was .47.

Interestingly enough, this correlation is al-

most identical with those obtained in both the Burgess-Cottrell and the Terman studies. Burgess and Cottrell obtained a correlation of .48 between the adjustment and prediction scores for their couples.²⁴ Terman and his associates obtained correlations between the happiness and prediction scores of .54 for husbands and .47 for wives.²⁵

CONCLUSIONS

The foregoing data confirm the hypothesis tested in this study: namely, that marital-adjustment and marital-prediction tests, constructed with a relatively small number of basic and fundamental items, achieve results approximately comparable with the longer and more complex adjustment and prediction tests.

With the short tests, measurement or prediction of marital adjustment can be accomplished with approximately the same accuracy in a few minutes as ordinarily would require an hour or more with the longer ones.

These findings also raise a question: Can short tests of all types, which use a few of the most basic and discriminating items, profitably replace the long ones in current use? Further research is needed to answer this question.

²⁴ Ernest W. Burgess and Leonard S. Cottrell, *op. cit.*, p. 286.

²⁵ Lewis M. Terman, *et. al.*, *op. cit.*, p. 360.

1960 Burgess Award

The E. A. Burgess Award for the best research proposal for family research will be awarded in August, 1960. The award carries a monetary value of \$300.00. Research outlines, criteria, and other information may be obtained from Dr. Charles Bowerman, University of North Carolina, Chairman of the Award Committee.

Other committee members include Dr. Lee Burchinal, Iowa State College; Dr. Bernard Farber, University of Illinois; Dr. Alan Kerckhoff, Duke University; and Dr. Paul Wallin, Stanford University.