

CONCEPTUALIZING AND MEASURING A
CONSTRUCT OF MARITAL VIRTUES

Alan J. Hawkins

Brigham Young University and
Office of Planning, Evaluation, and Research
Administration for Children and Families
U. S. Department of Health and Human Services

ahawkins@acf.hhs.gov

(202) 401-5750

Blaine J. Fowers

University of Miami

Jason S. Carroll

Chongming Yang

Brigham Young University

Draft: please do not cite without permission of the first author.

ABSTRACT

Research on marriage has been dominated by an untested assumption that individualism reigns supreme in marriage. An individualistic perspective of marriage focuses on the benefits that partners derive from the relationship, and views the contributions that partners make to a relationship as investments that will provide a return of satisfaction, intimacy, support, and reward. Professional researchers by and large present the individualistic perspective as a comprehensive and sufficient description of marriage rather than one interpretive framework among many. To the degree that the social science of marriage is focused on the personal satisfaction of the spouses, researchers may find themselves in the problematic position of perpetuating this cultural view of marriage rather than providing a more reflective perspective on it. Moreover, researchers' insistence that rewards are spouses' primary motive might actually encourage individuals to operate primarily from self-interest, concerned with maximizing their personal fulfillment bottom line. A potential alternative model is that what one *gives* in marriage is more important than what one *receives* in terms of understanding the stability and quality of the relationship. Within this model, character strengths and virtues take center stage. Yet research has paid little attention to these dimensions of marriage. In order to give more attention, measurement tools are needed. We present an initial attempt to measure the construct of marital virtues with a sample of 155 couples transitioning to parenthood. While more work is needed, our pilot test of this instrument should encourage other researchers to include the construct of virtues in their marriage research. And our new measure raises the possibility of comparing the dominant, individualistic-rewards model of marriage with a marital-virtues model.

Conceptualizing and Measuring a Construct of Marital Virtues

INTRODUCTION

One of the most unmistakable features of the study of marriage is researchers' reliance on self-report measures of marital satisfaction, happiness, or adjustment as indicators of the quality of marriage. The dominant choice of a subjective assessment of positive feelings about the relationship can be seen as an attempt to allow research participants define what is and is not a high quality marriage. By leaving the assessment of the quality of marriage to the research participants, investigators believe that they can avoid making value judgments about marriage. An interest in discovering the facts about marriage without injecting the investigators' cultural or ideological biases does provide one explanation for the choice of subjective affective measures of marital quality. Indeed, the received view of science requires the objective definition and measurement of constructs independent of the taken-for-granted understandings of the scientist's cultural group. Many social scientists, policy makers, and citizens hope that this form of objectivity can suggest professional practices that can enhance marriages and reduce divorce.

There is an equally plausible explanation for the preponderance of individual satisfaction as the primary indicator of marital quality, however. The vast majority of marital quality researchers live and work in North Atlantic cultures, in which individualism is a predominant value orientation. Within this worldview, individual happiness and fulfillment are paramount, and the individual autonomy to pursue self-chosen ends is essential. Individualism portrays marriage as a choice that individuals

make on the basis of present satisfaction and perceived future potential gratification with the relationship. Commitment to the relationship is largely dependent on the rewards that it offers vis-à-vis the available alternatives. Relationship scientists tend to see relationships, including marriage, as contracts or arrangements through which individuals satisfy their needs and desires. But these scientists did not *discover* that spouses are independent individuals who seek emotional fulfillment in their marriages. There is no careful, well-documented research that establishes this key premise, because social scientists, adopting common theoretical frameworks in the social sciences, have assumed it from the beginning.

Individualism focuses on the benefits that partners derive from the relationship, and views the contributions that partners make to a relationship as investments that will provide a return of satisfaction, intimacy, support, and reward. In the predominant social scientific understanding, these contributions occur primarily through communication and interaction and take the form of providing one another rewards, communicating feelings, using positive conflict resolution tactics, and so forth. Although there is some recent debate about the importance of developing relationship skills (Fowers, 1998, 2000; Gottman, Driver, & Tabares, 2002), some researchers (e.g., Markman, Resnick, Floyd, Stanley, & Clements, 1993) see the ability to communicate well as a technical matter wherein spouses learn communication and conflict resolution skills in order to foster a satisfying pattern of interaction that leads to relationship commitment. We will refer to this as the communication-satisfaction model of marriage.

The focus on communication and satisfaction is so common-sensical in North Atlantic societies that it is seldom questioned. It may even be difficult for many

investigators to imagine a reasonable alternative perspective on marriage. The predominance and the naturalness of this approach to understanding marriage cannot blind us to the fact that it is not the only model of marriage in human culture and history. The importance of romantic love, communication, emotional intimacy, and relationship satisfaction as central to the quality of marriage is a relatively recent arrival in the history of marriage. The widespread practice of arranged marriages makes it clear that a love-communication-satisfaction model of marriage is culturally and historically relative.

Of course, there is no doubt that humans are, at least partly, motivated by pleasurable experiences, and that contemporary marriage is one of the most important sources of feeling good. *The real problem comes in the fact that professional researchers by and large present the individualistic perspective as a comprehensive and sufficient description of marriage rather than one interpretive framework among many.*

Two general alternative conceptions of marital quality have been proposed. Fowers (1998, 2000) has argued that personal strengths or virtues such as generosity, loyalty, and justice are key constituents of good marriages. These personal strengths may foster a willingness to sacrifice for the sake of the relationship (Hargrave, 2000; Van Lange, et al., 1997). Terms that reflect these personal strengths include generosity, loyalty, sacrifice, devotion, maturity, and goodwill. Similarly, conceptualizations of the relationship that transcend individual experience and emphasize the corporate aspects of marriage are not particularly compatible with the dominant model. A more corporate understanding of marriage has been described variously as “we-ness” (Buehlman, Gottman, & Katz, 1992; Carrere, Buehlman, Gottman, Coan, & Ruckstuhl, 2000; Hargrave, 2000), character friendship or partnership (Fowers, 2000), communal

relationships (Clark, Mills, & Powell, 1986), and cognitive interdependence (Agnew, Van Lange, Rusbult, & Langston, 1998). Terms that reflect this focus on unity in relationships that goes beyond individual satisfaction include partnership, teamwork, cooperation, collaboration, and coordination.

It is an empirical question whether marital researchers favor the culturally predominant communication-satisfaction model or not. Fowers, Bucker, Calbeck, and Harrigan (2003) used a content analysis of ten years of marital research to answer this question. They found that the communication-satisfaction model is overwhelmingly dominant in marital research. These researchers content analyzed the abstracts of more than 2200 published quantitative studies and tallied the measurement procedures of a subset of 200 of these publications. By a very wide margin, satisfaction and other measures of subjective evaluation of the marriage were the most frequently referenced terms in the abstracts and the most frequently measured constructs in the studies. The second most common set of terms and measures were related to communication (communication, conflict, interaction, problem-solving). Other constellations of terms identified in the study included, in descending order, gender, power/violence, general affective terms (emotion, love, feelings, anger, etc.), cohesion/intimacy, sexual, cognitive (attribution, belief), and, in ninth place, commitment.

The relative lack of attention paid to relationship commitment is particularly illuminating, given its *prima facie* importance in marriage. The content analysis revealed that relationship satisfaction was mentioned and measured between 12 and 26 times as frequently as relationship commitment. In addition, there is very scant mention of any personal strengths that spouses might bring to the marriage, such as maturity, devotion,

loyalty, generosity, dedication, goodwill, or sacrifice. Similarly, features of the relationship that transcend individual satisfaction (e.g., we-ness, cooperation, teamwork) are seldom mentioned or measured in the research literature.

A number of research studies have confirmed the associations between communication, positive affect, positive cognitions, intimacy, marital satisfaction, and marital stability, which supports the plausibility of the communication-satisfaction model of marriage (Bray & Jouriles, 1995; Fowers & Olson, 1986; Gottman, 1999; Larsen & Olson, 1989). The empirical support for associations among these variables is relatively well established and may tempt us to ignore the narrowness in the commonsensical scientific definition of a good marriage.

Yet the overwhelming emphasis on personal emotional experience as the sine qua non of a good marriage raises the question of how this model of marriage came to predominate. Why is there such a strong consensus about the communication-satisfaction approach to marriage? Why have we placed such a premium on individual satisfaction in marriage? What are the other models of marriage against which the communication-satisfaction model has been compared? On what basis should we assume that the communication-satisfaction model is the best model? The establishment of the association among the key variables supports the *plausibility* of this model, but it does not, in any way, establish its *superiority* or *exclusivity* as an explanatory model. It is possible that many different accounts of marriage could produce similar sets of statistical relationships among the variables that constitute them, but recent social science has been so single-minded that alternative models have been investigated very infrequently, if at

all. The exclusivity of the focus on the communication-satisfaction model is therefore not particularly well founded.

Contemplation of the prevalence of satisfaction, communication, and intimacy in marital research might well lead us to recognize the strong similarity between the communication-satisfaction model of marriage in the research literature and the cultural ideals for marriage in North Atlantic societies (Fowers, 1993, 1998, 2000; Furstenberg & Cherlin, 1991; Popenoe & Whitehead, 2001; Richardson, Fowers, & Guignon, 1999). The cultural predominance of emotional gratification in popular conceptions of marriage may help to explain why the research literature relies almost exclusively on the communication-satisfaction model of marriage. It is not likely to be coincidental that this social scientific model of marriage emerged within a civilization that has increasingly prioritized positive communication, personal satisfaction, and emotional intimacy in marriage in the last two and a half centuries. Historians of marriage have documented the growing centrality of the emotional tie between spouses since the 18th century in tandem with the growth of individualism (Carlson, 1994; May, 1980; Mintz & Kellog, 1988; Phillips, 1988; Stone, 1979). Communication, intimacy, and satisfaction in marriage are prominent features of contemporary popular media accounts of marriage as well (Fowers, 2000).

To the degree that the social science of marriage is focused on the personal satisfaction of the spouses, researchers may find themselves in the problematic position of perpetuating this cultural view of marriage rather than providing a more reflective perspective on it. To the extent that disappointments in high expectations for satisfaction in marriage play a role in divorce decisions, the professional emphasis on the emotional

evaluation of marriage may even exacerbate the already inflated expectations of marriage. The constant emphasis in the social scientific literature on satisfaction, communication, and intimacy to the exclusion of other dimensions of married life suggests that these aspects of marriage are the only truly important variables in marriage. Moreover, researchers' insistence that rewards are spouses' primary motive might actually encourage individuals to operate primarily from self-interest, concerned with maximizing their personal fulfillment bottom line. Social scientists may be throwing gasoline on the fire of our obsession with marital happiness rather than providing an independent account of marriage. This exclusive emphasis gives the stamp of scientific authority on a culturally based model of marriage that has not, in fact, been empirically shown to be superior to any other model.

Some scientists will cry foul at this reasoning. They might say that it is not their place to question or criticize social mores or values. They are only attempting to describe and explain the social world as it is. People marry and divorce on the basis of whether relationships are satisfactory or not, researchers say, and scientists only attempt to map this reality. Social scientists profess neutrality about what they study and actively eschew taking any position on such things as the value of marital satisfaction. Their job is to simply work within those social realities and let people make their own decisions about values.

This scientific disclaimer misses the point, however. Many authors believe that the prevalence of individualism is at the heart of the confusion and problems we are currently experiencing with marriage (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1985; Fowers, 2000; Furstenberg & Cherlin, 1991; Popenoe & Whitehead, 2001;

Richardson et al., 1999; Whitehead, 1997). Not only do social scientists fail to question individualism, they actually endorse it by conducting research that assumes the centrality of the individual and sees marriage primarily as a source of individual benefit. To the extent that the science of marriage adopts an individualistic understanding of marriage as a reality, marital scientists convey the idea that individual benefits *are* the ultimate reality. In so doing, they fail to recognize that the importance of emotional fulfillment in marriage is a historical construction rather than the real truth about marriage.

There are alternatives to the predominant model of marriage that portrays a more complete and somewhat less culturally biased view of marriage. The first aspect of this model is a clearer appreciation of what might be missing—personal strengths or virtues that spouses bring to and enact in the marriage. This aspect has been discussed as marital competence (L'Abate, 1997), goodwill (Gottman, 1999), dedication commitment (Stanley, 1998), and character strengths such as friendship, loyalty, generosity, and justice (Fowers, 2000, 2001). Attention to spousal strengths such as these expand our understanding of marriage by devoting greater attention to the ways that the partners contribute to the quality of the relationship as well as the benefits they derive from it.

Current research is identifying components of spousal interaction that are quite consistent with a spousal strength view. Character friendship is a spousal strength that disposes spouses to actively develop teamwork and to be concerned with their spouse's well-being (Fowers, 2000). Communication is particularly conducive to a high quality relationship when spouses treat each other as friends and seek to work together on problems rather than approach difficulties as adversaries. Gottman and his colleagues (Gottman, 1999; Gottman, Coan, Carrere, Swanson, 1998) have identified actions they

call “turning toward” and “repair attempts” that exemplify a friendship approach to communication. The ability to maintain goodwill and seek common ground is essential to good communication.

Generosity, or the willingness to give of oneself freely to the partner, is another important spousal strength. A number of studies have shown that being generous with one’s spouse in small ways is strongly related to relationship strength. Spouses who see the best in their partners are happier with their relationships (Fowers, Lyons, & Montel, 1996; Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 1996). Similarly, spouses who accommodate their partners (Wieselquist, Rusbult, Foster, & Agnew, 1999), who are willing to sacrifice for the relationship (Van Lange et al., 1997), who are feeling understood and appreciated (Hawkins et al., 1998; Reis, Sheldon, Gable, Roscoe, Ryan, 2000), and are having one’s accomplishments met with celebration (Gables, 2003), have stronger, happier relationships.

These spousal strengths contribute to a stronger relationship, and marital research must begin to focus more on the relationship itself rather than only on the partners’ self-reports of satisfaction and intimacy and self-reports or observations of communication behaviors. The relationship itself can be studied in terms of the emergence of the couple’s identity as a unit and in terms of the degree to which partners actually coordinate their activities. Various authors have highlighted the couple identity with terms such as a sense of “we-ness” (Hargrave, 2000), which has been successfully studied in oral history interviews (Buehlman et al., 1992; Carrere et al., 2000), character friendship and teamwork (Fowers, 2000), couple identity (Stanley, 1998), cognitive interdependence (Agnew et al., 1998), including the partner in one’s concept of self (Aron, Aron, & Smollan, 1992), and communal relationships (Clark et al., 1986). Investigations of these

concepts would focus more on various aspects of the strength of the bond between spouses than the individuals' emotional states as indicators of marital quality.

Although these perspectives on marriage have been in the minority, some current research has investigated them. In a recent study of relationship competence, Carroll (2003) found that respondents' reports of loving, kind, and compassionate actions on behalf of their partners and their perceptions of their mate's loving, kind, and compassionate actions on their behalf were central to their ability to negotiate with each other and to experiencing relationship satisfaction. This suggests that partners' personal strengths, goodwill, generosity, etc. may play a critical role in the quality of relationships. In a qualitative investigation of family strengths among dual-earner couples, valuing family time and the existence of partnership in the marriage emerged as the most prominent themes in how these couples maintain their relationships (Haddock, Zimmerman, Ziembra, & Current, 2001). Respondents described partnership in terms of mutual decision making, respect, and appreciation for each other. These studies highlight the possibility that marital quality may be as dependent on what the partner *gives* to the relationship as what spouses *receive* from it.

An intriguing possibility worth empirical exploration is that notions of marital quality emphasizing what personal strengths and virtues individuals offer to the relationship may be strongly related to parenting behavior and children's well-being. A substantial body of research confirms that marital quality, as measured by reports of satisfaction and the emotional quality of the rewards of the relationship, impacts the quality of parenting, especially for mothers, and the quantity of parenting, especially for fathers. Research for a generation now confirms that lower-quality marital relationships

detract from the quality and quantity of parenting, which impacts children's well-being (Cummings & Davis, 1994; Carlson & McLanahan, 2002). However, the behavioral elements captured by measures of marital virtues, such as generosity and loyalty, may generalize easily to positive parenting behavior, and may be a stronger predictor of parenting behavior than are the psychological elements and emotional feelings about the marriage captured by most measures of relational quality. If this hypothesis is confirmed by future research, then interventions targeting marital virtues may also translate more readily into better outcomes for children, a critical goal for marriage education.

There are hints in current research suggesting that spousal strengths or virtues are an integral part of high quality marital relationships. But this topic is in its infancy and requires much more research. It is one thing to offer a conceptual critique of a hole in the research on marriage. A more effective critique will offer a few shovels of dirt to begin filling the hole. And the first few shovels will need to build measurement tools capable of reliably and validly capturing the construct of interest, in this case, marital virtues.

Following, we offer a first attempt to operationalize some key constructs consistent with a marital-virtues model, specifically, friendship/partnership, generosity, fairness, and loyalty. With improved measurement techniques, we can then move on to studies that compare and contrast a marital-virtues model with the communication-satisfaction, or individualistic-rewards model of marriage, helping to forward our understanding of marriage and relationships.

This paper presents early findings related to our attempt to measure the construct of marital virtues. Data were taken from a larger project studying the effects of a self-administered intervention to strengthen couple relationships during the transition to

parenthood. The intervention highlighted the importance of marital virtues, and their application to common challenges during the transition to parenthood. In the “Methods” section that follows, we first briefly describe the context of the study. Then, in more detail, we present our attempt to create and analyze a measure of marital virtues.

METHODS

Sample and Procedures

Couples expecting their first child called to enroll in childbirth education classes at three hospitals in Utah County, Utah, which has the highest fertility rate of any county in the United States. As couples signed up for classes, the clerk informed them that there was a study of how having a baby impacts couples’ marriages. They were asked if they were interested in participating in the study. Couples were told that their childbirth class fee of \$45 would be paid for them by the researchers if they participated in the study. Research assistants then contacted couples by phone and explained the nature and requirements of the study. Over a period of about nine months, 155 couples were enrolled in the study.

Couples agreed to complete a battery of assessments at four times of measurement: before the childbirth class (T1), immediately following the childbirth class (T2), at three months (T3) and at nine months (T4) following the birth of the first child. (Data for this measurement study were taken from the first three waves of measurement.) Surveys were collected from couples in their homes by trained research assistants.

Table 1 summarizes various characteristics of the sample. The age range of individuals in this sample was 19 to 41 for the men and 19 to 33 for the women. Average

age among husbands was 25; average wife age was 24. Compared with national reports, our sample of first-time parents is young. According to the US Census Bureau (2000), the average age of parents at the birth of their first child is 29 for husbands and 27 for wives. Seventy-three percent of the husbands in our sample were 26 or younger at T1; 61% of the wives were 24 or younger. The relative lack of racial and ethnic diversity in our sample is reflective of the communities in which the studies were conducted. Ninety-one percent of our individuals are White. Approximately half (51%) of our sample indicated the completion of some college education. Only a small proportion (1.3%) of our sample did not receive a high school diploma. Nearly 40% have obtained a college or graduate degree. Utah Valley has a large population of college students and almost 40% of our sample were students at our first interview, including 62% of the husbands and 17% of the wives. Utah Valley also has an unusually high degree of religious homogeneity. More than 90% of residents are members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), and this is reflected in our sample. A large percentage of our sample indicated current employment at our first interview and throughout the study. Nearly 86% of all subjects were employed, 94.2% of men and 77.1% of women at the first interview. The average reported number of hours spent in paid employment each week was 33.9 for our entire sample, 35.4 hours for men and 32.1 hours for women.

Measuring Marital Virtues.

We found no extant instrument adequately assessing the construct of marital virtues, so we developed a new measure for this study. The Marital Virtues Profile (MVP) was designed to capture a profile of individual and relational virtues articulated by Fowers (2000) that contribute to marital quality and stability.

Direct observation of marital behavior generally produces stronger effects in empirical studies of marriage (Markman et al., 1993; Stanley et al., 2001). But direct observation provided substantial challenges for this study. First, observational studies need clearly defined behaviors that can be observed by trained researchers in a limited period of time. But spousal strengths and marital virtues that could be easily and reliably observed in the typical way that observational studies are done was problematic. That is, observational studies of marital interaction usually create a situation for couples to discuss, such as a problem they are currently experiencing, then researchers carefully and systematically observe communication and personal interactions that reflect various constructs. These communication patterns certainly would reflect, in part, underlying constructs of marital virtues, but likely they are not the most important manifestation of strengths and virtues. A wider range of situations and timeframes seemed necessary to adequately measure the construct.

Yet we were also dubious of the value of a self-report measure of personal strengths and marital virtues. It's not that individuals are incapable of honestly reporting these characteristics, but they are certainly biased, bathing their actions in a positive light and giving themselves the benefit of the doubt. Hence, we settled on a strategy of spousal reports of partners' strengths and virtues. While spousal ratings also can be biased, they were more likely to produce greater variation. Moreover, a spousal report seems more consistent with the construct of marital virtues and is a more demanding way to assess it. That is, a marital virtue should manifest itself to the marital partner, not just reside in one's head and heart. Asking the partner to report, then, requires an "outsider" to see or feel the spouse's virtuous behavior. Partner report items, moreover, often correlate

stronger with outcome measures than self-report measures (Carroll citation?). Using partner reports also has the benefit of reducing the potential for method variance in correlational analyses.

We included in our survey, then, 32 partner-report items intended to capture various indicators of marital virtues, and 8 items assessing relational constructs such as sense of partnership and shared vision. Initial exploratory factor analyses indicated that about 14 of the 40 items did not work particularly well in this pilot study of 150 young married, pregnant couples. An interpretable factor structure did emerge out of the remaining 26 items. Six factors, with acceptable to good internal consistency reliability, emerged from a promax rotation that corresponded reasonably well to many of the virtues that Fowers (2000) discussed. (More details on these sub-constructs this will be presented in the “Discussion” section that follows.) The factors were highly correlated, however, indicating that a second-order model, with the six factors as indicators of a global relational virtues construct, would likely fit the data well.

With some initial confidence that our instrument was measuring these relational virtues, we proceeded to a more rigorous, confirmatory test of the MVP's factor structure, as well as tests of spousal and time invariance. We tested a second-order factor model based on the exploratory analysis described above. To examine the measurement invariance between husbands and wives as well as measurement invariance across time, we conducted a set of confirmatory factor analyses using structural equation modeling. (In all these models, we correlated the error terms of husbands' and wives' corresponding items in order to model the likely dependency in the data.)

To examine measurement invariance between husbands and wives, first, the measurement of the constructs for both husbands and wives were estimated respectively with the first three waves of data. These three models did not have any equality constraints on the factor loadings for husbands and wives. Second, three models with equality constraints on factor loadings for husbands and wives were estimated respectively. The constrained model for each wave of data was compared with its unconstrained model in terms of chi-square differences corresponding to the differences in degree of freedom. A significance of increase of the chi-square indicated that certain factor loadings were invariant across the two informants. Wherever a significant chi-square increase was found, more models with certain release of the equality constraints on the factor loadings were compared with the unconstrained model in order to identify which items had variant loadings between the two informants. The first- and second-order standardized factor loadings, correlations between the husbands' and wives' responses, goodness-of-fit indices, and model-comparison parameters are listed in Table 2.

In summary, we found only two items with significantly different factor loadings between husbands and wives at T1; we found no significantly different factor loadings between husbands and wives for T2 and T3. Accordingly, we concluded that the measure worked similarly for both husbands and wives (spousal invariance).

Furthermore, to examine measurement invariance across time, husbands and wives were separated. Then, the measurement models were specified to include T1 and T2 measures, and then T1 and T3 measures, respectively. (The relatively small sample size constrained our ability to estimate all these parameters simultaneously.) The first set of

models was not constrained to have equal factor loadings between T1 and T2 or between T1 and T3. The second set of models was constrained to have equal factor loadings across the two waves of measurement. The model comparisons based on the chi-square difference tests indicated certain factor loadings changed at T3 for wives and at T2 for husbands. Models with more release of the equality constraints were further compared with the unconstrained models to identify individual items that changed in factor loadings. The goodness-of-fit indices of the unconstrained models and chi-square increase for the constrained models were also listed in Table 2. The results indicated that only three items changed significantly over time in their factor loadings. The relative invariance of the vast majority of factor loadings between the two measurements, then, indicated to us that the measures were also reliable over a time period of about six months (temporal invariance).

We then calculated Cronbach's alpha coefficients as an estimate of internal consistency reliability for the six first-order factors and the single second-order factor comprising the MVP for husbands and wives for the first three times of measurement (see Table 3). To summarize, Cronbach's alphas for the six first-order factors ranged from .79-.84 for husbands at T1 and from .61-.90 for wives. An overall Cronbach's alpha for a global relational virtues scale comprised of all items was .92 at T1 for both husbands and wives. (Authors note: alphas for T2 and T3 coming soon.)

Overall, the MVP subscales and overall scale appear to have good internal consistency. A more stringent test of instrument reliability, however, is test-retest reliability. Hence, we computed correlations between the overall MVP scale at T1 and T2 (about 8 weeks apart) for husbands and wives in the control group. (Because this

study was part of a program evaluation study, about 100 couples were assigned to two treatment groups. These couples received an intervention after the initial assessment at T1 that attempted to strengthen these marital virtues. Accordingly, we deemed it inappropriate to include treatment-group participants' scores in this test-retest reliability analysis.) The stability coefficient for the overall MVP for husbands was .80, and for wives, .83.

[\(Author's note: brief report on construct validity coming.\)](#)

These analyses, then, suggest that marital virtues can be identified and reliably measured with partner report data. In addition, the distinct virtues appear to indicate a more global construct of relational virtues in marriage. Moreover, husbands and wives appear to respond to the MVP items in similar ways, facilitating comparisons between their responses. Therefore, we concluded that the MVP has potential as an instrument to be used in marriage studies attempting to understand how marital virtues are involved in marital quality, satisfaction, and stability.

DISCUSSION

In this paper, we have argued for the need to look at alternative models for understanding marriage. Specifically, we have posited the potential utility of a spousal-strengths or marital-virtues model compared to the hegemonic communication-satisfaction model. As a first step to comparing the value of these models, we designed an instrument to measure marital virtues, the Marital Virtues Profile (MVP), which consists of about 30 spouse-report items.

Empirically, and not too surprisingly, the various dimensions of marital virtues we explored did not align perfectly with the dimensions that Fowers (2000) discussed. For instance, fairness, understanding, and sacrifice clustered together in a construct we labeled, “Other Centeredness.” We anticipated that fairness items would cluster with loyalty items. But the loyalty construct was reduced to a few items that emphasized a specific opposite—backbiting. (Frankly, our initial attempt to measure the loyalty construct was not well done, or there was too little variation to yield to analytic inspection.) Forgiveness, acceptance, and appreciation were predictably clustered within a construct we labeled, “Generosity.” The construct of “Admiration,” however, which Fowers discussed under the rubric of generosity, remained empirically distinct from acceptance and appreciation. “Team Work” and “Shared Vision” also were empirically distinct dimensions, even though conceptually they seem intimately interrelated in a construct of partnership. Of course, saying that these constructs were empirically distinct is overstating the reality. The second-order factor model revealed that they were highly correlated, suggesting that marital virtues is an effective, overarching rubric for the various components.

This study was a first attempt and suffers from notable weaknesses. First, our sample was narrow in terms of age (20s) and family life cycle (transitioning to parenthood). They were predominantly White and religious (Mormon). In addition, our loyalty construct needs to be measured more effectively, and other potential marital virtues, such as courage, maturity, and goodwill need to be included. And the wording of several items will need to be simplified for survey populations with less formal education

than what we had for this pilot study. We are currently working on an improved survey to be sent to a larger, more diverse national sample to stretch these initial findings.

In the context of this session of the conference, however, the take-home message we offer is that marriage researchers have both a reason and a tool to examine their reliance on the communication-satisfaction model that dominates the study of marriage. We ask researchers to explore their own assumptions about the motives that individuals bring to their marriages, and the foundational elements of a healthy, stable marriage. While more work in the future will produce better measurement tools, we provide researchers willing to challenge their a priori, operating assumptions at least one tool that can begin to illuminate a contrasting model of marriage rooted in a marital virtues framework, and how it might compare with or supplement an individualistic, hedonistic framework. This approach will likely revise our understanding of strong and healthy marriages and lead to better interventions.

References

- Agnew, C. R., Van Lange, P. A. M., Rusbult, C. E., & Langston, C. A. (1998). Cognitive interdependence: Commitment and the mental representation of close relationships. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 74*, 939-954.
- Aron, A., Aron, E. N., & Smollan, D. (1992). Inclusion of Other in the Self Scale and the structure of interpersonal closeness. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 63*, 596-612.
- Bellah, R. N., Madsen, R., Sullivan, W. M., Swidler, A. & Tipton, S. M. (1985). *Habits of the heart*. Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Bray, J. H., & Jouriles, E. N. (1995). Treatment of marital conflict and prevention of divorce. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy, 21*, 461-473.
- Buehlman, K. T., Gottman, J. M., & Katz, L. F. (1992). How a couple views their past predicts their future: Predicting divorce from an oral history interview. *Journal of Family Psychology, 5*, 295-318.
- Carlson, E. J. (1994). *Marriage and the English Reformation*. Oxford, England: Blackwell.
- Carlson, M., & McLanahan, S. (2002). *Do good partners make good parents?* Working paper #02-16-FF. Princeton, NJ: Center for Research on Child Wellbeing.
- Carrere, S., Buehlman, K. T., Gottman, J. M., Coan, J. A., & Ruckstuhl, L. (2000). Predicting marital stability and divorce in newlywed couples. *Journal of Family Psychology, 14*, 42-58.
- Carroll, J. S. (2001). *The ability to negotiate or the ability to love: An investigation of interpersonal competence in marriage*. Manuscript in review.
- Clark, M. S., Mills, J., & Powell, M. C. (1986). Keeping track of needs in communal and exchange relationships. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 51*, 333-338.
- Cummings, E. M., & Davies, P. T. (1994). *Children and marital conflict: The impact of family dispute and resolution*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Fowers, B. J. (1993). Psychology as public philosophy: An illustration of the moral dimension of psychology with marital research. *Journal of Theoretical and Philosophical Psychology, 13*, 124-136.
- Fowers, B. J. (1998). Psychology and the good marriage: Social theory as practice. *American Behavioral Scientist, 41*, 516-541.

- Fowers, B. J. (2000). *Beyond the myth of marital happiness: How embracing the virtues of loyalty, generosity, justice, and courage can strengthen your relationship*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Fowers, B. J., Buckner, J., Calbeck, K. B., & Harrigan, P. (2003). *How do social scientists define a good marriage?* Unpublished manuscript.
- Fowers, B. J., Lyons, E. M., & Montel, K. H. (1996). Positive marital illusions: Self-enhancement or relationship enhancement? *Journal of Family Psychology*, 2, 192-208.
- Fowers, B.J. & Olson, D.H. (1986). Predicting marital success with PREPARE: A predictive validity study. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, 12, 403-413.
- Furstenberg, F. F., & Cherlin, A. J. (1991). *Divided families: What happens to children when parents part*. Cambridge, MA: University of Harvard Press.
- Gable, S. (October, 2003). *Accentuating the positives: Supportive responses to expressions of positive events*. Presented at the International Positive Psychology Summit, Washington, D. C.
- Gottman, J. M. (1999). *The marriage clinic: A scientifically based marital therapy*. New York: Norton.
- Gottman, J. M., Driver, J., Tabares, A. (2002). Building the sound marital house: An empirically derived couple therapy. In A. S. Gurman, & N. S. Jacobson (Eds). *Clinical handbook of couple therapy* (3rd ed.) (pp. 373-399). New York: Guilford Press.
- Gottman, J. M., Coan, J., Carrere, S., Swanson, C. (1998). Predicting marital happiness and stability from newlywed interactions. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 60, 5-22.
- Haddock, S. A., Zimmerman, T. S., Ziemba, S. J., & Current, L. R. (2001). Ten adaptive strategies for work and family balance: Advice from successful families. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, 27, 445-458.
- Hargrave, T. D. (2000). *The essential humility of marriage: Honoring the third identity in couple therapy*. Phoenix, AZ: Zeig, Tucker and Theisen.
- Hawkins, A. J., Marshall, C. M., & Allen, S. M. (1998) The Orientation toward Domestic Labor Questionnaire: Understanding dual-earner wives' sense of fairness about family work. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 12, 244-258.
- L'Abate, L. (1997). *The self in the family: A classification of personality, criminality, and psychopathology*. New York: John Wiley & Sons.

- Larsen, A. S. & Olson, D. H. (1989). Predicting marital satisfaction using PREPARE: A replication study. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, 15, 311-322.
- Markman, H. J., Resnick, M. J., Floyd, F. J., Stanley, S. M., & Clements, M. (1993). Preventing marital distress through communication and conflict management training: A four- and five-year follow-up. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 61, 70-77.
- May, E. T. (1980). *Great expectations: Marriage and divorce in post-Victorian America*. Chicago: University of Chicago.
- Mintz, S., & Kellogg, S. (1988). *Domestic revolutions: A social history of American family life*. New York: Free Press.
- Murray, S. L., Holmes, J. G., & Griffin, D. W. (1996). The benefits of positive illusions: Idealization and the construction of satisfaction in close relationships. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 70, 79-98.
- Phillips, R. (1988). *Putting Asunder*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Popenoe, D., & Whitehead, B. D. (2001). *Who wants to marry a soul mate?* Piscataway, NJ: National Marriage Project.
- Reis, H. T., Sheldon, K. M., Gable, S., Roscoe, J., Ryan, R. M. (2000). Daily well-being: The role of autonomy, competence, and relatedness. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 26, 419-435.
- Richardson, F. C., Fowers, B. J., & Guignon, C. (1999). *Re-envisioning psychology: Moral dimensions of theory and practice*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Stanley, S. M. (1998). *The heart of commitment*. Nashville, TN: Nelson.
- Stone, L. (1979). *The family, sex and marriage in England 1500-1800*. New York: Harper.
- 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.
- 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
- Whitehead, B. D. (1997). *The Divorce Culture*. New York: Knopf.

Table 1. Demographic Data for Sample.

Demographic Variable	Mean (SD) [Range] N = 310
Age: Men Women	25.3 (3.21) [19-41] 24.02 (2.83) [19-33]
Ethnicity: Caucasian Hispanic Asian/Islander Native American	91% 5% 3% 1%
Education: Some High School High School degree Some College College degree Graduate degree	1% 7% 52% 37% 3%
Current Students: Men Women	62% 17%
Current Employment: Men Women	94% 77%
Occupational Category: Managerial, specialty Technical, sales Service occupation Other	22% 26% 18% 35%
Hours per Week in Paid Employment: Men Women	35.39 (14.0) [0-84] 32.08 (11.6) [0-55]

Table 2. Confirmatory Factor Analysis of the Marital Virtues Profile: Standardized Factor Loadings, Correlations, Goodness-of-Fit Indices, and Cronbach's Alphas for Husbands and Wives across Measurement Times for Various Models

Factor/ Item#	Contents	Model 1 (time 1)		Model 2 (time 2)		Model 3 (time 3)	
		Wives	Husbands	Wives	Husbands	Wives	Husbands
Factor I	Other-Centeredness (Fairness, Understanding, Sacrifice)	Alpha= .84	Alpha= .79	Alpha=	Alpha=	Alpha=	Alpha=
244	My partner recognizes when I am feeling that things are unfair in our relationship.	.61	.72	.81	.78	.82	.80
251	My partner is familiar with my likes and dislikes	.54	.63	.87	.90	.92	.94
252	My partner knows my preferred ways of receiving love.	.57	.68	.90	.89	.89	.91
255	My partner makes time to be with me.	.65	.73*	.93	.88	.92	.87
256	My partner makes personal sacrifices for the good of the relationship.	.72	.61	.92	.87	.92	.88
257	My partner drops some personal activities to be more available to me.	.68	.67	.89	.76	.90	.82
Factor II	Generosity (Forgiveness, Acceptance, Appreciation)	Alpha= .81	Alpha= .82	Alpha=	Alpha=	Alpha=	Alpha=
233	My partner is forgiving of my mistakes.	.78	.51	.92	.93	.94	.94
234	My partner is able to truly let go of negative feelings toward me.	.72	.42	.93	.89	.89	.92
236	My partner brings up my past offenses when we are arguing. (R)	.66	.51	.80	.88	.84	.90
241	My partner is able to look past my shortcomings.	.54	.81*	.93	.93	.94	.94
242	My partner expects me to change. (R)	.53	.57	.69	.73	.79	.81
247	My partner appreciates all the work I do for our relationship.	.73	.75	.90	.85	.91	.88
248	My partner struggles to recognize the things I do for him. (R)	.46	.70	.78	.81	.73	.84
Factor III	Admiration	Alpha= .90	Alpha= .84	Alpha=	Alpha=	Alpha=	Alpha=
237	My partner sincerely compliments me on a regular basis.	.88	.82	.92	.84	.89	.91
238	My partner recognizes my positive qualities.	.80	.90	.96	.93	.96	.97
239	My partner admires me.	.86	.90	.94	.96	.97	.96
Factor IV	Teamwork	Alpha= .80	Alpha= .81	Alpha=	Alpha=	Alpha=	Alpha=
265	My partner and I have a number of shared life goals we are working towards.	.64	.56	.92	.94	.93	.96
269	My partner and I work together as a team to accomplish our goals.	.88	.74	.93	.94	.94	.97
270	Our relationship is based on a deep sense of teamwork.	.79	.72	.91	.91	.95	.96
Factor V	Shared Vision	Alpha= .70	Alpha= .80	Alpha=	Alpha=	Alpha=	Alpha=
266	My partner and I are headed in different directions in life. (R)	.59	.70	.93	.90	.91	.93
267	My partner and I want the same things from life.	.75	.74	.95	.96	.97	.98
268	My partner and I have a shared vision of what makes up a good life.	.77	.61	.85	.93	.98	.98
Factor VI	Loyalty/Backbiting	Alpha= .61	Alpha= .83	Alpha=	Alpha=	Alpha=	Alpha=
262	My partner talks about me behind my back (in a negative way). (R)	.89	.56	.96	.98	.98	.98
264	My partner talks about my faults with others. (R)	.81	.74	.94	.98	.97	.98
	Correlations between husbands and wives	$\phi = .54$		$\phi = .87$		$\phi = .94$	
2 nd -Order	Global Relational Virtues	Alpha= .92	Alpha= .92	Alpha=	Alpha=	Alpha=	Alpha=
FI	Other-Centeredness	.82	.91	.98	.94	.98	.96
FII	Generosity	.85	.81	.97	.97	.99	.99
FIII	Admiration	.66	.72	.93	.93	.95	.92
FIV	Teamwork	.85	.89	.97	.99	.95	.97
FV	Shared Vision	.68	.76	.97	.98	.93	.98
FVI	Loyalty/Backbiting	.58	.66	.95	.94	.92	.95

Table 1 cont'. Confirmatory Factor Analysis of the Marital Virtues Profile: Standardized Factor Loadings, Correlations, Goodness-of-Fit Indices, and Cronbach's Alphas for Husbands and Wives across Measurement Times for Various Models.				
Spouse Invariance (Time 1--Time 3)				
	Goodness of fit indices of models without equality constraints on factor loadings	$\chi^2 = 1297.79$ df = 1047 CFI = .93 TLI = .92 RMSEA = .04	$\chi^2 = 1616.94$ df = 1057 CFI = .95 TLI = .95 RMSEA = .06	$\chi^2 = 1728.43$ df = 1053 CFI = .95 TLI = .94 RMSEA = .06
	Chi-square increase of models with equality constraints on factor loadings	$\chi^2_{dif} = 38.39$, df _{dif} = 16, p < .05	$\chi^2_{dif} = 4.29$, df _{dif} = 18, p > .05	$\chi^2_{dif} = 5.19$, df _{dif} = 18, p > .05
	Time Invariance (for wives and husbands)	Time 1 + Time 2	Time 1 + Time 3	
Wives	Goodness of fit indices without equality constraints on factor loadings of two measurements	$\chi^2 = 1465.18$ df = 1029 CFI = .90 TLI = .90 RMSEA = .05	$\chi^2 = 1404.84$ df = 1025 CFI = .91 TLI = .90 RMSEA = .05	
	Chi-square increase with equality constraints on factor loadings of two measurements	$\chi^2_{dif} = 13.94$, df _{dif} = 18, p > .05	$\chi^2_{dif} = 36.15$, df _{dif} = 18, p < .05	
	Correlation between two measurements	$\phi = .78$	$\phi = .73$	
	Items of variant loadings		251, 269	
Husbands	Goodness of fit indices without equality constraints on factor loadings of two measurements	$\chi^2 = 1378.76$ df = 1031 CFI = .92 TLI = .91 RMSEA = .05	$\chi^2 = 1440.45$ df = 1021 CFI = .90 TLI = .89 RMSEA = .05	
	Chi-square increase with equality constraints on factor loadings of two measurements	$\chi^2_{dif} = 30.70$, df _{dif} = 18, p < .05	$\chi^2_{dif} = 19.06$, df _{dif} = 18, p > .05	
	Correlation between two measurements	$\phi = .79$	$\phi = .68$	
	Items of variant loadings	242		