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PERCEPTION OF MARITAL SATISFACTION AND ADJUSTMENT BETWEEN
MALES AND FEMALES IN RURAL APPALACHIA

BY

GINA INGRAM

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS

IN

PSYCHOLOGY

MARSHALL UNIVERSITY GRADUATE COLLEGE

1999

RUNNING HEAD: PERCEPTION OF MARITAL

Masters Thesis

of

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1999

Running Head: Perception of Marital

Perception of Marital Satisfaction and Adjustment Between Males and Females
in Rural Appalachia

Gina Ingram

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Abstract

With the divorce rates having doubled since 1960, numerous researchers have attempted to identify some of the relevant factors associated with successful marriages. This research attempted to identify those factors associated with marital satisfaction and adjustment among Appalachian males and females. Subjects were selected from southern West Virginia. Marital satisfaction and adjustment were evaluated using the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS). The DAS consisted of four subscales: Consensus, Cohension, Affectional Expression, and Satisfaction. The data were analyzed using Pearson Coefficient Product Correlation and t-tests. There were no significant differences among the descriptive variables and the subscale variables were identified. There was significant differences between males and females when comparing marital satisfaction and the total global score. Overall, the results indicated that males from Appalachia were more satisfied and adjusted with the marriage than were females from Appalachia.

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Perception of Marital Satisfaction and Adjustment

Between Males and Females in Rural Appalachia

As a result of the increase in the number of separations and divorces in the United States, numerous researchers have attempted to identify those factors associated with marital satisfaction and adjustment (London, Wakefield, & Lewark, 1990; Tucker & Grady, 1991). Various researchers (e.g. Knox & Schacht, 1994; Reynolds, Remer, & Johnson, 1995; Rice, 1995) have identified different factors. The purpose of this research was to identify some of the relevant variables associated with marital satisfaction and adjustment among males and females in Southern Appalachia.

Knox and Schacht (1994) identified effective communication as the primary factor in marital satisfaction and adjustment. The authors described communication as the "process of exchanging information and feelings between two individuals" (p. 309) and effective communication as "the exchange of information and feelings that was timely, accurate, and precise" (p.310). As defined by the authors, timely communication meant that one had to allow the partner enough time to respond, accurate information was simply true information, and precise information meant the facts were clearly explained in detail. Nonverbal communication was perceived as equally important by the authors. Happy marriages tended to have quality time together, high affection, high sex frequency, and equality and respect for each other. Quality time together indicated the couple had a close friendship and frequently did many activities together. The happiest couples showed affection openly in public and reported having intercourse on eight to twelve occasions each month. The authors stated that partners who share the

responsibility of cooking, cleaning, child rearing, and breadwinning have happier marriages. Happier spouses were fair and cooperative with one another and shared decision making. Intimacy, commitment, congruence, and religious orientation were other strengths identified in marital satisfaction and adjustment (Knox & Schacht, 1994).

According to Reynolds, Remer, and Johnson (1995), equity and reward are the primary factors in marital satisfaction and adjustment. Equity is defined as inputs (couples contribute to the exchange) and outcomes (positive and negative consequences) shared in a relationship. Both partners who share a balance between inputs and outcomes reported a satisfying marriage. Psychological distress occurs when one partner's net gain is unequal to his or her partner. Reward is defined as a higher levels of status, love, money, goods, services, and information. According to the authors, the factors are consistent across the life-span. There are significant differences, however, between young and old couples in gender effects: roles become more blended as the couple age.

Rice (1995) stated that marital satisfaction and adjustment are closely linked to the phases of marriage. During the early years of marriage, the couple has to adjust to personal habits, sex roles, finances, work, social life, friends, communication, decision making, morals, sexual adjustment, and the handling and solving of problems. According to the author, marital satisfaction and adjustment depend on how well the couple confronts these issues during courtship. During the child rearing years, components that add stress are parental expectations that do not match reality, unplanned pregnancies, and the sudden change in one's role as a parent. During the postparental years, women often need to fill a void left by the absence of children because their energy has been

wrapped-up in child rearing. On the other hand, men typically do not feel a great loss when the children leave the home. According to the author, once the couple adjusted to the loss, couples were "happier than are those earlier or later in life" (p.616). Retirement years bring about an increase in marital satisfaction because couples have more leisure time to spend with one another. Satisfaction and adjustment, however, begins to decline in latter years because of increased physical and financial problems (Rice 1995).

Other researchers identify gender as a factor in the perception of marital satisfaction and adjustment (Fowers, 1991; Langis, Lussier, Mathieu, & Sabouring, 1994). According to Fowers, men are more satisfied and adjusted in marriages than women. Landis et al., however, reported that marital satisfaction and adjustment are related to the spouse's perception of male and female characteristics. Satisfaction increases as the person perceives the partner as having a larger number of same sex-roles characteristics (Landis et al. 1994).

Acitelli and Antonucci (1994) explored the effects of social support on marital satisfaction and adjustment. The authors found that women were more likely than men to report that social support was important. The findings, however, indicated that an individual's perception of perceived support is greater than their partner's reports on actual support given. The females' perception of social support related to general well-being. The authors found that men did not require as much social support from the spouse as did the women in order to be happy in the marriage. Men tend to receive social support outside of the marriage at work or during personal activities.

Research also indicates that culture affected the perception of marital satisfaction and adjustment (Knox & Schacht, 1994). African-American spouses tend to be less satisfied in the marriage than Anglo-American spouses. According to the authors, the primary reasons are related to economic and social discrimination. The higher the income the happier the marriage. Socially, females tend to be unhappy because

“...they are forced to settle for husbands who have less education than they do. The sense of inadequacy the husband may feel, coupled with the wife’s feeling that she has selected someone who is less than her ideal mate, may have a negative impact on both partners” (p. 292).

Contretras, Hendrick, and Hendrick (1996) stated that Mexican-American and Anglo-American differ in the methods by which marital satisfaction and adjustment are achieved, but the level of satisfaction is the same. Mexican-American couples tend to be more “practical and less idealistic in their love and sex attitudes” (p.414).

Purpose

As the divorce rate increases, professionals need to develop a better understanding of what variables effect the perception of satisfaction and adjustment in marriage. Culture may play a significant role in marital satisfaction and adjustment. Presently, there is little research that explores the perception of marital satisfaction and adjustment among males and females from rural Appalachia. The purpose of this study was to compare the perception of marital satisfaction and adjustment between males and females in rural Appalachia. This may assist in identifying interventions to use in specific cultural areas to improve marital relationships.

Method

Subjects

The subjects consisted of 25 males and 25 females who ranged in age from nineteen to seventy-two. The subjects were from Raleigh and Wyoming Counties in southern West Virginia. The counties are primarily rural and are included in the Appalachia belt (Durrance and Shamblin, 1976). Ninety-two percent of the population were Caucasian and eight percent were African-American. The median income for males was \$36,500.00 and the median income for females was \$28,500.00. The medium income for West Virginia's total population is \$22,600.00 (King, 1994). Fifty-eight percent of the subjects were Baptist. Forty-two percent included Catholic, Methodist, Presbyterian, and other.

Instrument

The Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS) was used for the measure of marital satisfaction and adjustment. The DAS is composed of thirty-two items that can be completed by either or both partners. The test consists of four subscales: Dyadic Consensus, Dyadic Satisfaction, Dyadic Cohesion, and Affectional Expression. A total marital satisfaction and adjustment score is calculated by adding the four subscales scores. The DAS takes approximately five to ten minutes to complete. The DAS was administered according to the directions in the manual.

Internal consistency reliability is high for the total dyadic adjustment (.96) and moderate to high for subscales (.58 to .94). Test-retest reliability is .96 for the total

dyadic adjustment score and .78 to .98 for the subscale scores.

Content validity of the DAS was established by Spanier (1976) and Jacob (1982). According to the researchers, most of the items are considered highly important in measuring marital satisfaction and adjustment. Low scores reflected poor marital satisfaction and adjustment while high scores reflected good marital satisfaction and adjustment. Convergent validity was .86 among married respondent and .88 among divorced respondents (Spanier, 1976).

The demographic questionnaire (see Appendix B) included age, gender, religion, income, number of children, and ethnicity. The questionnaire used fill in the blank and circle format.

Procedure

The subjects were asked to take the DAS and the questionnaire when entering the court houses until 25 men and 25 women had completed the information. The subjects who participated in the survey verified that they were from West Virginia.

Analysis

The Pearson Product Correlation Coefficient was used to examine the relationships among the variables. The demographic variables of income, age, duration of marriage, religion, and number of children were correlated with one another. The variables were also correlated with each of the subtests scores from the DAS (i.e., Marital Consensus, Marital Satisfaction, Marital Cohesion, and Affectional Expression) and the

Total Dyadic Score for each gender. As expected, age was significantly related to duration of the marriage for males ($r = .86, p < .001$) and females ($r = .88, p < .001$) and duration of marriage was significantly related to the number of children for males ($r = .40, p < .05$) and females ($r = .36, p < .05$). There were no other significant relationships found among the descriptive variables. Between the descriptive variables and the variables derived from the DAS (Marital Consensus, Marital Satisfaction, Marital Cohesion, and Affectional Expression), no significant relationships were found for females or males. As can be seen in Table 1, there were no significant differences between males and female on the descriptive variables. The subscales scores of the DAS (Marital Consensus, Marital Satisfaction, Marital Cohesion, and Affectional Expression) and the Total Dyadic Adjustment Score were correlated among themselves separately for each gender (See Table 2). For females significant relationships were found among all the subscales and the Total Adjustment Scale. For males positive relationships were found only for Marital Adjustment and Affection ($r = .63, p < .001$), Cohesion ($r = .50, p < .01$), Consensus ($r = .68, p < .001$), and Marital Satisfaction ($r = .83, p < .001$). No other significant relationships were found among the variables for males.

T-tests were used to examine the differences between males and females on the subscale variables (i.e., Consensus, Cohesion, Affectional Expression, and Satisfaction) and the Total Adjustment Scale (See Table 3). Males ($M = 39.16, SD = 11.90$) were significantly more satisfied in the marriage than were females ($M = 34.16, 4.86$) [$F = 3.33, p < .01$]. The males ($M = 113.96, SD = 12.98$) also indicated that they were

Table 1
Comparison of Males (n=25) and Females (n=25) on the Demographic Variables

Variables	Males	SD	Female	SD	t-value
Age	42.52	11.24	36.08	13.06	1.11
Duration	15.8	14.37	11.96	12.48	.85
Income	\$42,862.50	\$39,877.00	\$34,198.00	\$22,401.00	.74
Children	2.16	1.37	1.95	1.26	.62

Table 2

Correlation Among Variable for Males (n=25, top row), Females (n=25, second row)

<u>Variables</u>	Affectional Expression	Consenses	Satisfaction	Cohesion	Total Adjustment
Affectional Expression		.63*** .80***	.28 .70***	-.01 .81***	.63*** .63***
Consenses			.25 .81***	-.24 .73***	.68*** .89***
Satisfaction				.68*** .83***	.83*** .95***
Cohesion					.50* .88***
Total Adjustment					

Note: * .001, ***.05

Table 3

Comparison of Males (n=25) and Females (n=25) of the Ratio Variables

Variable	Males	SD	Females	SD	T -Value
Consensus	50.52	7.56	46.32	12.14	1.79
Satisfaction	39.16	4.86	34.48	11.90	3.33**
Affect	8.96	2.07	8.84	2.58	.52
Cohesion	15.32	4.50	14.36	5.49	.72
Total Adjust	113.96	12.98	104.00	29.69	3.20**

Note: **p<.01

Discussion

The research explored marital satisfaction and adjustments among males and females in Appalachia. The results identified no significant relationship among age, duration of marriage, religion, income, and number of children with gender. Age was, however, significantly related to the duration of the marriage and the number of children.

There were significant gender differences. Males and females indicated that the expression of affection and sex in the relationship, agreement between partners, common interests, and level of marital satisfaction and commitment in the marriage were significant factors in overall marital satisfaction and adjustment. Females reported that the factors were significantly related to one another. The level of satisfaction and commitment was significantly related to the expression of affection and sex in the relationship, the agreement between partners, and the overall marital adjustment. Females also reported that common interests were significantly related to the expression of affection and sex in the relationship, the agreement between partners, and the overall marital adjustment. Males, on the other hand, reported that although the factors were significantly related to overall marital adjustment, the factors may not be dependent on one another. Men did not report that there was a significant relationship among the expression of affect and sex in the relationship, agreement between partners, common interests, and the level of satisfaction and commitment in the marriage.

Perhaps, the study may suggest that females report difficulties in one area negatively effects each of the other areas in marital adjustment. For example, the lack of expression of affection or sex in the relationship may detrimentally effects all other areas

of marital adjustment. Males, however, may isolate each of the factors involved in marital adjustment. Difficulties in one area may not necessarily impact other areas. The results also indicate that men were significantly more satisfied and adjusted in the marriage than were females. Acitelli and Antonucci (1994) found that males in comparison to females find social support outside of the marriage through work or in personal activities which may account for some gender differences.

There are no norms with the DAS for comparing across cultures. The DAS may not be sensitive to cultural differences. The results may reflect gender differences rather than cultural differences. Future research on marital satisfaction and adjustment needs to include more racial diversity and a broader social economic status to have a better sample of the culture. The author recommends that future research use the DAS with other instruments to identify culture factors. The author also suggests that future research use the Path Analysis to analyze a casual relationship among the variables for gender.

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Appendix A
Literature Review

Review of Literature

With the divorce rate having doubled since 1960 (Tucker and Grady, 1991), researchers have attempted to identify the factors linked to a successful marriage. Knox and Schact (1994) defined marital satisfaction and adjustment as the presence of stability and happiness. Stability referred to how long the couple was married and happiness was described as the subjective aspects of the relationship. Religion, race, culture, gender, sex role, and personal qualities have been identified as factors in marital satisfaction and adjustment. Little has been written, on the other hand, that focuses on the effects of culture. The primary purpose of this research was to explore the impact of culture on marital satisfaction and adjustment. The author will begin with a review of those factors associated with marital satisfaction and adjustment.

Knox and Schact (1994) measured marital satisfaction and adjustment by determining how happy individuals perceived themselves to be, how often they spent free time together, how often they agreed about various issues, how easily they resolved conflict, how sexually satisfied they were, and how often they considered separation and divorce. The authors found that when one or both partners had no religious orientation, the couple reported lower levels of marital satisfaction compared to the couples who professed a religious belief. Knox and Schact felt that the lower levels of marital satisfaction and adjustment were due to the couples taking the vows less seriously than did those couples with a religious orientation.

Men with a faith different than the wife's faith, reported less marital satisfaction when children were raised within the mother's faith. Women, on the other hand, who

married a spouse from a different faith reported no difference in marital satisfaction levels than did women who married a spouse from the same faith. Fowers (1991) found that religion was of greater significance for men than for women in a marriage. Knox and Schact stated that religious orientation was a common characteristic among marriages that lasted six years or longer. According to the authors, the elements of religion that seem to impact the marriage were a strong support system from church members, and spiritual, emotional, and moral guidance.

Race and culture effect marital satisfaction and adjustment. Knox and Schact (1994) found that couples from interracial marriages reported numerous obstacles that interfered with marital satisfaction and adjustment. The major problems included prejudice, rejection by the parents, and lack of similar background experiences. Prejudice tended to leave the couple without social support. The parents, on the other hand, worried about how social status within the community would be effected and how the children would be treated by the community. The lack of similar background experiences left many of the spouses unable to identify with the partner's concern of prejudices and discrimination. The authors found that African-American women tended to report less satisfaction than did their spouses of other races. The African-American women felt that African-American men were less educated, therefore, there were fewer educated men from whom to choose when selecting a mate. For African-American men, higher income usually indicated greater marital satisfaction.

Juni and Grimm (1994) evaluated how sex-roles effected marital satisfaction and adjustment. Sex roles and identity develop over time. Traditional sex roles are either

male or female. Recent research has included androgyny as an alternative to traditional sex roles. Androgyny has been used to incorporate both masculine and feminine characteristics into sex roles. The authors found that femininity was important in determining marital satisfaction for both men and women. Masculinity, on the other hand, contributed to satisfaction for men, but not for women.

Langis, Sabourin, Lusser, and Mathieu (1994) explored how femininity and masculinity influenced marital satisfaction and adjustment. Feminine traits were identified as sensitivity, responsibility, and having an interpersonal orientation. Masculine traits are ambition, assertiveness, and being goal-oriented. The authors described two other sex roles: androgynous and undifferentiated. Androgynous traits consisted of an equal amount of masculine and feminine characteristics. Undifferentiated traits were, on the other hand, characterized by few masculine or feminine qualities. Langis, et al. found that femininity affected marital satisfaction and adjustment in a positive way. The authors identified four categories related to sex roles: the subjects self-description, partners description of the subject, the subjects partner, and the description of an ideal partner. Individuals in each category reported differences in marital satisfaction and adjustment. The subjects self-description was associated with high levels of marital satisfaction when both partners report masculinity and femininity. Femininity, however, rather than masculinity, tended to be a stronger indication of marital satisfaction. The only unchanging characteristic in predicting marital satisfaction and adjustment was femininity and expressive characteristics. Femininity and expressive characteristics were significantly correlated with marital satisfaction and adjustment in

both first and second marriages. The partners description also found a higher level of marital satisfaction and adjustment when feminine traits were present. Men were more satisfied in the marriage when femininity was the only trait in the spouse. Greater marital satisfaction and adjustment was reported by the spouses when the partner reported both masculine and feminine traits. The subject's description of the partner revealed that men were more satisfied in the marriage when the spouse had greater feminine traits; whereas, women were more satisfied when the spouse had both masculine and feminine characteristics. The males ideal partner was described as having feminine qualities, however, the females ideal partner was described as having both masculine and feminine qualities.

Acitelli and Antonucci (1994) explored the effects of social support on marital satisfaction and adjustment. The authors defined social support as available support and perceived support. Perceived support refers to how the partner felt that his or her social support was returned in kind. The closer the couple's report matched one another the greater the reciprocity. The couples were asked to make a list of people important to them. The list consisted of six different types of social support: confiding, reassurance, respect, care when ill, talk when upset, and talk about health. The authors found that women were more likely than men to report that social support was important. The findings indicated an individual's perception of perceived social support is greater than their partner's reports on actual support given. The female's perception of social support related to general well-being, whereas, the male's perception did not. According to the authors, men may be reluctant to admit how important the wife's emotional support is in

the relationship. Men, on the other hand, may receive support outside of the marriage at work or during personal activities. Acitelli and Antoncci found that men did not require as much social support from the spouse as did the women in order to be happy in the marriage. The authors also found that wives were happier with the marriage if the husbands attended to the relationship (caring and nurturing behaviors).

In a 1991 study, Fowers found that husbands were more satisfied in areas such as finances, parenting, family, friends, and partner's personality. Women, on the other hand, wanted more egalitarian roles.

Tucker and Grady (1991) evaluated the impact of attractiveness, intelligence, and age on marital satisfaction and adjustment. People who are attractive were perceived as more satisfied; however, an attractive spouse was less satisfied in the marriage than the unattractive spouse. Women who were more intelligent were less likely to be satisfied with the marriage. Age, on the other hand, did not influence marital satisfaction and adjustment. The authors had speculated that brighter men and women would have more satisfying relationships. The conclusion was not supported. The authors found no significant relationship between higher intelligence and marital satisfaction and adjustment.

Rice (1995) examined the effect of time on marital satisfaction and adjustment. The author identified five marital stages: beginning marriage, children, empty-nest, after 65 (retirement), and widowhood. Rice found an increase in marital satisfaction after the children reached school age and when the children finished the teen years. Marital

satisfaction increased when the children left the home and when the couple retired. According to the author, marital satisfaction and adjustment declined during the late stages of old age due to poor health and limited resources. Herman (1994) challenged Rice's findings. The author investigated marital and adjustment among the elderly (young old: 60-72; old-old: 73-84; and very old: 85 and over). Males tended to be more satisfied in marriage than did females. Herman concluded that the elderly reported no significant difference (more or less) in satisfaction levels than the younger couples.

Remer, Reynolds, and Johnson (1995) explored the effect of equity, equality, and reward on marital satisfaction and adjustment on younger couples. Equity involved all parties receiving similar gains. Equality derived from benefits such as love, status, goods, money, and information, as well as how well these were allocated. Reward involved what the individual perceived as a higher level of love, status, services, goods, money, and information even if the partner received less. Equity was found to effect marital satisfaction more significantly than reward and equality. Similarities were found with older adults. The major difference between younger and older couples was the relative lack of gender effect among the older couples. The results indicated that age influenced gender differences and that therapeutic techniques used with younger couples may not apply to older couples.

According to Knox and Schact (1994), marriages can be happy, successful, and unhappy. Elements of a happy marriage include quality time together (a close friendship as well as doing all the little things together), high affection and high sex frequency (publicly showing affection and sexually passionate in private), and equality and respect

for each other (fairness, cooperation, and sharing cleaning, cooking, breadwinning, and decision making). The authors found that marriages which last six years or longer shared intimacy (closeness), commitment (divorce was not an option), communication (sharing thoughts, feelings, and ideas, and listening to each other), and congruence.

Wallestein and Blakeslee (1995) attempted to identify the elements that make what the authors refer to as a successful marriage. The researchers found four elements that effect success or failure: romantic, rescue, compassionate, and traditional. Marriages are made up of all four elements. According to the authors, the couple must confront nine challenges or psychological tests. The first challenge requires the couple to emotionally separate form their family of origin. The second, togetherness must be created by allowing time for the relationship, however, each partner still needs to maintain an individual identity. The third, when the couple becomes parents, they maintain time for the relationship. The fourth, crisis situations are handled effectively while preserving the strength of the marriage. The fifth, emotions are expressed freely. The sixth, the sexual relationship must be protected from outside distractions such as work or family interference. The seventh, humor is used to deal with stressors and relieves boredom. The eighth, nurturance and comfort will be used to maintain support with each other. The final challenge consists of preserving the feelings during the early years of marriage while confronting the realities of life.

Overall, numerous factors have been identified that were related to marital satisfaction and adjustment. Little has been written, however, on the effect of culture on marital satisfaction and adjustment. According to Durrance and Shamblin (1976) thirteen

states make-up the Appalachian area. The states include Alabama, Georgia, Kentucky, Maryland, Mississippi, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia. West Virginia is the only state that is entirely in the Appalachian area. Durrance and Shamblin concluded that the geographic isolation has significantly influenced West Virginia's culture. The Scotch-Irish and Germans have had the most influence on the forming the culture. Batteau (1983) in a discussion of how others perceive the people in Appalachia stated that as a group the people of Appalachia are seen as people whose "cultural traits and personality deficiencies cause economic and social troubles in Appalachia." (p.73). The Appalachian people were described as "underpaid, underemployed, undermotivated, and undereducated." (p.73). This research was designed both to evaluate marital satisfaction and adjustment and to identify the factors that contribute to satisfaction and adjustment in residents from southern West Virginia, an integral part of the Appalachian area.

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Appendix B

Questionnaire

Appendix B

Demographic Questionnaire

Please complete the following questionnaire to give information about the people of rural Appalachia area.

A. Circle the answer that best applies.

1. Gender: Female or Male

2. Race: Caucasian

African-American

Spanish

Indian

Other _____

3. Religion: Baptist

Catholic

Methodist

Presbyterian

Other _____

4. Employed, Unemployed, Disabled, or Other _____

B. Fill in the blank.

1. How long have you been married? _____

2. How old are you? _____

3. How many kids do you have? _____

4. What is your annual income? _____