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Measuring Marriage or Measuring Individuals: An Ontological Analysis of Marital Therapy Outcome Measures

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Measuring Relationships or Measuring Individuals:

An Ontological Analysis of Marital

Therapy Outcome Measures

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ABSTRACT

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Many scholars have noted the pervasiveness of individualism in American culture, particularly in the marriage culture. Unfortunately, assuming individualism in the marriage culture poses very specific threats to marriage as an institution. Some claim that these individualistic assumptions have also infiltrated the marital sciences, undermining the efforts of researchers who hope to defend marriage. This dissertation explores that claim by analyzing seven of the most popular marital outcome instruments used by marital researchers today for individualistic assumptions.

Using a conceptual analysis called "contrasting relations," the meanings of both the content and the process of the instruments are laid out according to their underlying ontological assumptions. Two types of ontology guide the analysis: weak relationality, that from which individualism arises, and strong relationality. As the results demonstrate, the instruments are in fact almost entirely underlain with individualistic assumptions. It is argued that outcome instruments used by marital researchers can only measure individualistic relationships (weak relationality), and are incapable of measuring strong relationships, implying that marital researchers are ill-equipped to measure relationships. Implications and future directions are explored.

Keywords: Marriage, marital therapy outcome, individualism, ontology, contrasting relations

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INTRODUCTION

In a ground-breaking study, sociologists Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, and Tipton (1996) argued that individualism is a dominant cultural theme in America. Individualism is the idea that a person's autonomy and independence take precedence over the needs or demands of the collective group of which he or she is a part (Scranton, 1982). Bellah et al (1996) describe many of the ways in which this idea has come to dominate how Americans view life. For example, they discuss how individuals setting out on their own for the first time are expected to be self-reliant, depending primarily on themselves and not on their parents or their community. They further describe where individualism has come to pervade many of our cultural conceptions, including not only our personal life, but also our civic and religious lives, and they worry that its pervasiveness is negatively affecting how we as Americans are choosing to live.

Fowers (2000) is one who maintains that individualism has even penetrated our understanding of seemingly non-individualistic issues such as the nature of marriage. Marriage is typically seen as a partnership, but Fowers contends that cultural expectations for marriage are often individualistic. That is, the partnership of marriage is often expected to fulfill individualistic ends. Unfortunately, as Richardson, Fowers and Guignon (1999) warn, the more we see marriage in this individualistic way, "the more likely we are to divorce if [marriage] is not conducive to our well-being" (p. 161). Indeed, Fowers (2000) worries that the high divorce rate in America today may actually be due to our individualistic conceptions of marriage.

Fowers is also concerned about married couples who seek help from professionals, worried that they might not get the help they need. As he puts it, "we may well look to professionals, such as marital therapists or social scientists, for a less problematic alternative [to

individualism]" (p. 77), but he fears that "social scientific research on marriage cannot help us resolve the marital difficulties that grow out of" individualism because "social scientists fail to question [it]" (p. 97-98). Richardson et al (1999) express a similar concern that the failure of social scientists to question individualism "may very well heighten the already excessive popular [individualistic] expectations of marriage, thereby inadvertently helping to maintain or accelerate the rate of divorce" (p. 166). Compounding this concern is their contention that many professionals harbor these individualist conceptions without even knowing or examining them.

Individualism and Marriage: From Culture to Science

Individualism

Understanding what individualism is and how it plays out in the marriage culture can better illuminate the problems that Richardson, Fowers and others are concerned about. Individualism has been generally defined as the assumption that the "primary human reality is the individual, conceived independently of social relationships" (Sullivan, 1982, p. 19). Alexis de Tocqueville (2000) argued that individualism "disposes each member of the community to sever himself from the mass of his fellows" (p. 104f). Those who assume individualism claim that the individual's autonomy takes precedence over the individual's social obligations or responsibilities. For Bellah et al (1996), this means that "society is a second-order, derived or artificial construct" and is meant primarily to advance the interests of the individual (p. 334). Individualism has "marched inexorably" through the history of America (p. xlii), permeating politics (e.g., Sullivan, 1982), education (e.g., Watt, 1989), the civic and religious life of American citizens (Bellah et al, 1996), and, notably, psychotherapy (e.g., Richardson, 2005; Frank, 1978), and has fast become a ubiquitous cultural force.

Bellah et al (1996) distinguish between two different types of individualism, and their distinction helps inform the discussion below of how individualism manifests itself in the marriage culture today. The first type of individualism is called *utilitarian individualism,* which Bellah et al say "takes as given certain basic human appetites and fears…and sees human life as an effort by individuals to maximize their self-interest relative to these given ends" (p. 336). For those assuming utilitarian individualism, life is a series of "rational and strategic" actions meant to manipulate circumstances in such a way as to achieve maximum fulfillment (Fowers & Richardson, 1996, p. 125). From this instrumental perspective, the individual's autonomy pits the individual against the world outside the self. Social relationships are seen as merely contracts into which individuals enter as a means of achieving fulfillment for the autonomous self.

The second type of individualism is called *expressive individualism,* which, as Fowers and Richardson (1996) point out, is "partly a reaction to the seeming harshness of the contractualism and calculation of utilitarian individualism" (p. 125). Bellah et al (1996) say of expressive individualism that "each person has a unique core of feeling…that should unfold or be expressed [in order to realize] individuality" (p. 334). They go on to say that, while this core is unique to the individual, it is "not necessarily alien to others" and it is possible for persons to "merge" with one another through sharing emotional cores. In other words, though expressive individualism still holds that the individual is autonomous, relationships do not have to be harshly instrumental. Rather, two people can hypothetically realize individuality together, as long as a mutual understanding of emotional core exists. The harsh contractuality of utilitarianism is replaced by mutual emotional understanding intended to enable the individual's full emotional, psychological, and intellectual expression.

While expressive individualism was meant in some ways to oppose utilitarian individualism, both forms are grounded in and emphasize the autonomy of the individual. And while they do so in different ways, both forms also identify the individual's ultimate aim in life as some sort of self-fulfillment: instrumental manipulation for the utilitarian; and the sharing of a common emotional core for the expressive. As argued in what follows, both forms of individualism are manifest in the culture of marriage today, and both can have negative consequences for marriage.

Individualism and the Marriage Culture

One important indication that individualism has infiltrated the marriage culture is the historical and social evolution of how marital obligations and commitments have been viewed. Though I argue here that marriage is mainly viewed as an individualistic pursuit today, historically it was seen as primarily a social institution in which commitment and obligation to the larger society or extended family group were at one time marital ideals (Popenoe, 1993). When two people married, they were expected to fill societal obligations such as "procreation…and the socialization of children; the provision to its [the family's] members of care, affection, and companionship; [and] economic cooperation" (p. 529). These were roles that the unmarried could not fulfill, so it was the responsibility of married couples to do so. In this way, marriage was an essential part of sustaining local political and social life (Mintz & Kellogg, 1988). Married couples were traditionally committing to fulfill certain societal obligations and, as such, were committed to one another and marriage was seen primarily in terms of commitment and obligation, not romantic attachment, love, or personal fulfillment.

But as individualism has become more and more culturally pervasive, marriage has increasingly become understood in a very different light (Aldous, 1987). Where a "good marriage" used to be one that fulfilled the obligations and commitments associated with social cohesion, a "good marriage" today is many times seen as one that encourages "self-fulfillment and personal growth" (Hill, 2007, p. 298). Marriage is now primarily more often seen, not as an expression of one's obligation to others, but rather as an expression of one's individuality. Indeed, it is seen by many as a rather important – perhaps necessary – way of expressing individuality. Popenoe (1993) argues that "[o]ne's own self-fulfillment is seen to *require* a significant other, and marital partners are picked primarily to be personal companions" (p. 533, emphasis added). In other words, people continue to enter marriage by way of commitment to another person, but those commitments are no longer meant to enhance the community, or even the marriage itself. They are intended to enhance the individuals in the marriage. For many today, the marital commitment has become in essence a means to expressing individuality and thus, is individualistic.

Another indication that marriage is often conceptualized as individualistic is the importance of communication when marriages are troubled (Knapp & Gantt, in press). For several years now, communication has been seen as "central to the conventional concept of the good marriage" and essential for marriage to succeed (Fowers, 2000, p. 78). Where marriage is seen as an expression of individuality, it should come as no surprise that communication would be important. Two unique individuals attempting to express their own individualities are almost inevitably going to find differences in their emotional cores. Where emotional cores differ, communication of the differences, wherein each individual expresses his or her personal

emotional core, is perhaps the only way to ensure the merging of emotional cores necessary for each individual to fully express his or her individuality. Thus the emphasis on marital communication is also individualistic, as its purpose is not to fulfill obligations or commitments, but to express individuality and to achieve self-fulfillment through marriage (Richardson, Fowers, & Guignon, 1999).

While expressive individualism is a large part of how marriage is understood today, some argue it is not the best way to conceptualize marriage. From this perspective, interpersonal obligation and commitment are secondary to personal fulfillment. Ultimately, Bellah et al (1996) argue, expressive individualism "denies all forms of obligation and commitment in relationships, replacing them only with the ideal of full, open, honest communication among self-actualized individuals" (p. 101). When conceptualized in this manner, marriage is merely a means to individuation and self-fulfillment. The consequence of seeing marriage as this type of a means is that marriage becomes more fragile, as marriages cannot always live up to these individualistic expectations (Fowers, 2000). Self-fulfillment is the goal, and marriage is just a means to achieving that goal. If a marriage is no longer meeting the needs of the individual, then one must seek self-fulfillment elsewhere.

Fowers also argues that seeing self-fulfillment as the goal of marriage strips marriage of its broader context, leaving it barren of any larger meanings, such as virtues that Fowers suggests ought to be characteristic of a marriage; virtues that are at *least* as important as – if not more important than – self-fulfillment. As a consequence of this radical reduction of marriage, even divorce is coming to be "seen as a path to individual freedom and greater personal fulfillment" (p. 71). Thus, rather than focusing on a broader context of marriage, couples maintain marriage only

to express one's individuality, and thus are more willing to divorce if that is the most effective means of fulfilling the self.

Expressive individualism and utilitarian individualism were meant to oppose one another. However, the manner in which marriage is frequently conceptualized today accommodates both types of individualism rather well. Not only is marriage meant to express individuality, but as Richardson, Fowers, and Guignon (1999) note, the "good marriage" is often characterized by the good feelings that marriage brings to each individual. They argue that couples seeking the good feelings a marriage brings often "remain committed to each other out of desire, not obligation" (p. 159) and that "modern ideology…tends to emphasize voluntary participation in families *contingent* on emotional fulfillment, individual satisfaction, and compatibility with other individual pursuits" (p. 78, emphasis added). That is, participation in marriage is *primarily* a way to maximize personal fulfillment. And where personal fulfillment is not maximized, couples should then "be able to alter or terminate their commitments as they see fit" (p. 162-3). This "rational and strategic" approach to marrying and divorcing is the most prominent way in which utilitarian individualism manifests itself today: because marriage is so often seen as merely a means to good feelings and self-fulfillment, it is also seen as terminable when those good feelings end.

In this sense, marriage today is frequently subject to both expressive and utilitarian individualism and, as many are arguing, is threatened as a consequence. That is not to say that individualistically based marriages will automatically fail, or that non-individualist marriages are impossible. In spite of how fragile marriage is today, it is still as popular as it ever was, valued "as a prime source of happiness in life" (Richardson, Fowers and Guignon, 1999, p. 77). And

certainly, where happiness is felt in marriage, it may continue for a time. Still, as the traditional wedding vows imply, marriages will likely encounter sickness as well as health, and poverty as well as wealth. These events can be deeply problematic when the first priority from this individualistic perspective is not the relationship but the individual. For those who see marriage in this highly individualistic way, marriage is seen mainly as a disposable instrument, one that should be engaged in *only* when it serves its purpose of fulfilling the individual (or bringing "happiness"). It is not difficult to see that conceptualizing marriage this way might lead "to more fragile, less committed relationships" (p. 77); relationships that are almost bound to fail where self-fulfillment is impossible. It is also easier to understand why Fowers (2000) attributes the high divorce rate in America today to the growing influence of individualism.

In opposition to this focus on the individual, Fowers and others (e.g., Richardson, Fowers, & Guignon, 1999) argue that marriage is as much about betweenness. In other words, human relationships – in particular, marriage – imply much more than just the individual needs or desires of the couple. One example would be the virtues Fowers (2000) writes about. I will discuss more in depth this alternative approach, and in particular how it contrasts with individualism, in the following chapter. For now, it is important to point out that individualism is only one way to view marriage – and according to many, a rather poor way of doing so.

Individualism and Marital Science

As marriage has become weaker in the United States, the social sciences have tried diligently to address this weakness. Divorce brings with it a number of social problems, such as financial (Lupton & Smith, 2003), health (Lillard & Waite, 1995), and psychological for the divorced (Marks & Lambert, 1998) and their children (Ge, Natsuaki, & Conger, 2006; Pryor &

Rodgers, 2001). In response, therapy has been geared specifically for married couples since the 1940s (Nichols, 1992) and extensive research has been conducted, all in hopes of combating the ills associated with troubled marriages and divorce.

Married couples often turn to the marital sciences when their marriages are troubled in hopes of finding relief. But with the pervasiveness of individualistic assumptions in American culture, one questions whether the marital sciences have found truly alternative assumptions upon which to build their science. The answer to this question will likely prove consequential: if selfishness or pride is at the foundation of a married couple's problems, then advice founded on individualism will likely not help much; indeed, it may make matters worse. Even if selfishness is not at the heart of a couple's problems, it seems risky to encourage individualism – whether in therapy or through research findings – for any married couple. Thus it does not seem unreasonable to ask whether and to what extent individualism infects the marital sciences.

Some argue that the marital sciences have avoided the pitfalls of individualism. This should come as no surprise, given the ostensible emphasis on relationships in the marital sciences. Doherty and Boss (1991) are among those who assert that marital therapy "has transcended the narrow focus on the individual" that one finds in traditional psychotherapy (p. 613). They acknowledge the pervasiveness of individualism in American culture – even in psychology – but assure readers that the family sciences as a whole generally avoid the more extreme forms of individualism. Stahmann (2002), for example, points out that marital therapists and scientists have for years been aware of the threats that individualism poses to married couples, and proper training is in place that can help the scientist or practitioner avoid individualism in their work. Doherty (2002) agrees, admitting that many marital therapists are

likely promoting individualistic values in therapy, but do so only because of improper training or no training at all. He expresses confidence in the marital sciences to right what bad therapists (those with individualistic values) do wrong, and argues that by drawing upon resources already available in the marital sciences, therapists can begin to avoid the threats posed by individualism in the marital sciences.

On the other hand, there are also those who argue that, in spite of efforts to avoid individualism, it can be found at the very foundation of the marital sciences (Milardo & Wellman, 1992). For example, Fowers (2000) fears that the consumerism associated with marital therapy leads therapists to give the customer (the client) exactly what he or she wants – which in today's culture, generally translates into warrant to pursue individualistic ends. Thus therapists, as service providers in a capitalistic system, are driven by the consumer to endorse individualistic values because the client desires those values. And the social scientific study of marriage fares no better, according to Fowers. He argues that "there is a great deal of overlap between research on marriage and the common wisdom about it" (p. 96). In other words, the common wisdom of marriage – that it should be personally fulfilling above all – spills over into marital research. Richardson, Fowers and Guignon (1999) point out that marital happiness is "the most frequently studied topic by marital and family researchers," indicating that researchers are interested in finding what most Americans are interested in finding – happier marriages (p. 164). They go on to argue that the "standard scientific and therapeutic approaches to the dilemmas of contemporary marriage [such as individualism] have considerable potential for reinforcing these dilemmas rather than resolving them" (p. 169). In other words, Richardson, Fowers & Guignon

worry not only that the marital sciences do not avoid individualism, but that they endorse and encourage individualism among married couples and in the culture at large.

These two conflicting views – on the one hand, that the marital sciences transcend individualism; on the other, that the marital sciences *encourage* individualism – leave one wondering which view is empirically correct. The answer to this question matters immensely: if turning to the marital sciences will help couples avoid individualistic tendencies, then the tide of individualism can be somewhat stemmed by marital therapy and research. However, if the marital sciences are *reinforcing* individualism, we should recognize this potentially deleterious reinforcement and consider what direction marital science ought to take instead.

Theory, Practice, and Methods. The purpose of this dissertation is to determine if and to what extent individualistic assumptions drive marital research. In particular, my purpose will be to analyze marital therapy outcome measures. As we will see below, doing so is necessary to get a whole picture of the marital sciences, since this analysis will add to what has already been argued about the level of relationality in the marital sciences. In what follows, I will show that both the theory and practice of marital scientists have been analyzed to some degree and have been shown to make individualistic assumptions. No such analysis has been done, however, on the research methods of marital scientists, which I will argue will help provide a whole picture of the marital sciences.

Richardson, Fowers and Guignon (1999) are among those who have looked at theory in the marital sciences and pointed out the underlying individualism. They argue that the theories often focus on individual marital satisfaction. That is, marital quality is nearly always defined in some way or another by the personal satisfaction of married individuals (see also Fowers, 1998;

Bishop, 2007). Richardson, Fowers and Guignon (1999) argue that this perspective on marriage grows out of the individualistic understanding of the "good marriage" that has arisen culturally. As Fowers (2000) puts it, "[we] like to think of scientists as objective observers…[but from] the very beginning of research on marriage, social scientists have simply *assumed* that personal experiences such as happiness, satisfaction, or adjustment define a good marriage" (p. 89-90, emphasis in original). In other words, those theorizing about the "good marriage" have not obtained their own goal of being objective, as they have relied upon individualistic assumptions in their theorizing.

Fowers and Richardson (1996) have also looked at the practices within the marital sciences and have argued that marital therapy has also been unable to avoid individualistic assumptions (an argument also shared by Bellah et al, 1996). For the most part, therapists have simply adopted the same assumptions made by their clientele, which tend to fall right in line with the individualistic assumptions of most Americans (Fowers, 2000). What is worse, argues Fowers, is that therapists are unaware of the assumptions they adopt, but do so out of a desire to give the client what they want. Richardson, Fowers, & Guignon (1999) have pointed out that this "unquestioned acceptance" by marital therapists of individualistic assumptions threatens to *promote* the same assumptions among married couples that caused their problems in the first place.

While analysis of theory and practice are currently being pursued, the methods used by these same scientists have been for the most part ignored. Theory and practice are seldom hidden from public view and therefore get much of the attention when it comes to criticism of the marital sciences, with good cause. After all, what is most apparent seems to also make the most

impact, so it deserves as much attention as it can get. However, a complete view of whether the marital sciences are individualistic, or weakly relational, cannot exist without an investigation of the methods used by marital scientists. Indeed, ignoring the methods may be ignoring the most important part of the marital sciences.

First of all, outcome measures are the predominant measures that have been used pervasively since the beginning of the marital sciences. Initially, they were used to help distinguish marital therapy from individual therapy (Fredman & Sherman, 1987). Before marital therapy, those whose troubled marriages led them to therapists had to rely on individual therapeutic models (which models have also been implicated as being individualistic; see, for example, Cushman, 1995). As marital therapy developed, it was meant to be more effective than individual therapy at treating couples (Sprenkle & Moon, 1996). Special measures were developed to determine the effectiveness of marital therapy. Thus early on, outcome measures were used to distinguish marital science from other social sciences, and in this way were also used to help validate its scientific reputation.

Indeed, outcome measures are still used today as a means of lending scientific credence to the discipline. For example, there is a big push today for evidence based practice (EBP) in the marital sciences (Carr, 2000). The “evidence” for EBPs draws heavily on the marital therapy outcome measures, making the role of outcome measures significant in establishing scientific credibility for marital research (cf. Sholevar & Schwoeri, 2003; Johnson, 2002). Outcome measures have also been used for roles such as “gathering information and making diagnoses…[aiding] the working therapist, [enlightening] the student, and [providing] reliable and valid measurements for researchers,” as well as helping to establish the marital sciences as a

discipline worthy of government and private financial support (Fredman & Sherman, 1987, p. xv). Thus we see that outcome measures are used ubiquitously by the theorists being criticized by Richardson, Fowers, and others.

Not only are marital theorists using outcome measures ubiquitously, but outcome measures also play a big role in the *practice* of marital therapy. For example, therapists are also relying on EBPs, primarily to determine which of the numerous approaches to marital therapy are best (Carr, 2000). As I mention above, the evidence used to build the case for EBPs comes from the outcome measures. Thus marital therapy outcome measures determine for some therapists which techniques to use. Like theorists, therapists are depending on marital therapy outcome measures to help determine the credibility of their practice. Indeed, as the EBP movement grows, theorists and therapists both will come to depend upon marital therapy outcome measures. If the measures are underlain with individualistic assumptions, then the influence of individualism will continue to spread to both theory and practice in the marital sciences and the call to EBP will unintentionally become the purveyor of an individualistic approach to treatment.

Finally, outcome measures are also being used both at the beginning and the end of therapy to determine the status of a couple's relationship previous to and after therapeutic intervention (Fredman & Sherman, 1987). Couples coming into therapy are generally understood to have "bad marriages;" outcome measures are meant to reveal that. Then of course, therapists will use the measures to judge whether or not the relationship has improved, in which case, they are used to determine whether a "bad marriage" was successfully made into a "good marriage" as a consequence of therapy (Johnson, 2002). Implicitly, then, outcome measures *define* the

"good marriage" from a therapeutic perspective. Thus, even while the definition of a "good marriage" likely varies from therapist to therapist, one significant way of defining the "good marriage" – at least within the literature – can be found through an analysis of the marital therapy outcome measures.

Dissertation Outline

Given that marital therapy outcome measures are a significant part of the marital sciences, both as a foundation of marital research and as an implicit definer of effective therapy and the "good marriage," they need to be examined in order to determine if and how deep individualism runs in the marital sciences. Understanding how pervasive individualism is in the marital sciences is essential in understanding how effective the marital sciences conducted within such philosophical boundaries truly can be. Scholars have argued that, to some extent the theories and practices of marital scientists have difficulty avoiding individualism, but no one has yet looked at the methods used by marital researchers. Thus, we do not know as yet whether we are truly measuring relationships, or if we are simply measuring individuals. Therefore, I have done an analysis of the marital therapy outcome measures to determine whether individualism is as pervasive as it seems to be in the theory and practice of marital research.

For this particular project, I have used an ontological analysis to uncover the assumptions inherit to the measures of marital therapy outcome. In Chapter 2, I communicate why an ontological analysis is the best way to analyze the measures for individualism. I also describe two ontologies which will guide the analysis and devote the bulk of the chapter to defining the ontologies and describing what marriage would look like from both ontologies. This chapter will serve as a foundation for the remainder of the dissertation.

Chapter 3 is devoted to a literature review which has guided my choice of measures to analyze. I briefly describe the type of measure I will analyze, then present the literature review itself, describing the process that led to the inclusion of the analyzed measures. At the conclusion of Chapter 3, I list and describe these measures.

In Chapter 4, I present the results of the analysis. I begin this chapter by describing the method, which I call contrasting relations. The remainder of the chapter is devoted to a narration of the analysis, wherein I present my findings. The analysis was split up into two parts, the first of which deals with the content of the measures and the second with process.

In Chapter 5, I conclude with a summary of the analysis, including the limitations and implications, which include recommendations for future research.

INDIVIDUALISM AND ONTOLOGY

Determining how pervasive individualism is in the marital sciences is more difficult than it might seem. While scholars are fond of pointing out the individualistic assumptions being made in the marriage culture, it is rare for scholars to accuse marital *scientists* of making those same assumptions. This is likely due to the fact that the martial sciences study marriages – a particular type of relationship – and so seem ostensibly to be relational. A casual consumer of the marital sciences might simply assume that because of this ostensible relationality, the marital sciences successfully avoid individualism. Indeed, it would seem that individualism and relationality could not coexist, therefore the answer to whether researchers assume individualism is clear. Unfortunately, as I argue here, the answer is not so clear. My purpose in this chapter is to facilitate an answer to this question by distinguishing individualism and its corresponding relationality from an alternative form of relationality. Through this distinction, I show that a deeper analysis of the methods is therefore necessary.

I begin by discussing various features of individualism. From this discussion, we will see that individualism represents a set of assumptions about people that can negatively affect marriages. I will then argue that this set of assumptions can be unified by a particular ontology, namely abstractionism, and that individualism itself is underlain with an abstractionist ontology. In describing this ontology, I will demonstrate that in fact, a certain kind of relationality is possible from abstractionism, and is thus individualistic. But this relationality, as I will show, is problematic for marriage because of its relationship to individualism. In this way, I argue that individualism can coexist with at least *one* form of relationality.

I will also introduce an alternative ontology as a contrast to abstractionism. From this alternative ontology an alternative relationality arises – one which is fundamentally different from individualism and one that might be amenable to addressing the problems of individualism for marriage. I will show by this discussion of contrasting ontologies that at least two differing types of relationality are available for theorists at the ontological level and that, consequently, determining whether individualism is being assumed in the methods of marital science is a matter of determining which relationality is assumed by the methods. In other words, as I will describe, the problem I am faced with in my analysis of the marital therapy outcome measures can be resolved at the level of ontology. A fuller explication of the implications of each ontology for marriage will refine my discussion of ontology, as well as provide a framework upon which my analysis of methods can be based.

Individualism as an Ontological Question

As individualism has risen in American culture, scholars have pointed out different ways in which it has manifested itself. And as we will see, each of these different features has been identified as a threat to marriage. The first feature is *atomism*, which is the idea that individuals are fundamentally self-contained (Reber & Osbeck, 2005). This particular feature arises out of the idea that the identity of an individual is fundamentally autonomous, which is also to say that an individual's identity is also fundamentally independent of others' identities. Assuming atomism places limitations upon the type of relationality that is possible. For example, relationships (such as marriage) cannot be a fundamental part of an individual's identity, for that would require one's identity to be dependent upon that relationship. Instead, the individual must begin and end as a self-contained entity, and understanding "whether and how [a] relationship is

maintained" will focus on the self-contained qualities of an individual, such as his or her "thoughts, feelings, and behaviors" (p. 65). Few critics of individualism in marriage have focused on this particular feature of individualism (e.g., Williams & Faulconer, 2008; Richardson, Fowers, & Guignon, 1999); nevertheless it is an important feature which helps us understand individualism and its other features.

The self-contained nature of an individual enables the individual to divide his or her own interests from the interest of others, making a second feature of individualism possible: self-interest. Self-interest is likely one of the most oft discussed and criticized features of individualism to marriage (e.g., Aldous, 1987; Doherty, 2002; Beach, Fincham, & Stanley, 2007; Amato, Booth, Johnson, & Rogers, 2007). Often when scholars talk about the threat of individualism to marriage, they are talking about an individualism that "ranks self-interest and self-preference as the highest priorities" in marriage (Porter, 1995, p. 14). That is, self-interest ranks higher than other-interest or interest in the relationship. This sort of "look out for myself" attitude can be potentially very damaging to marriage. After all, one who is only interested in herself is not likely interested in marriage and, if married, not likely to remain so unless her interests are consistently being met. Fortunately, the type of radical self-interest that would prevent people from marrying does not seem too pervasive, given that people still marry, and to assume *individualism* does not necessarily mean to assume a *radical* self-interest. However, self-interest is still an important feature of individualism that, like atomism, continues to make its appearance along with the other features of individualism.

Indeed, self-interest and atomism both figure prominently in instrumentalism, another feature of individualism. Instrumentalism is the idea that relationships can be objectified (and

essentially, atomized) and used as instruments in serving the self (Richardson, 2005). This particular feature of individualism shows up particularly at the intersection of marriage and individualism in American culture. As Bellah et al (1996) point out, individualism is rampant in our culture. And yet, Americans also marry at one of the highest rates in the world (Waite & Gallagher, 2000; Warren, 1992). The fact that marriage and individualism are both pervasive phenomena can leave one wondering whether they are truly at odds with one another. But Fowers (2000) claims that instead, marriage is often seen instrumentally, or as an instrument toward fulfilling individualistic ends. In other words, the main reason marriage is so highly valued in culture is not for its own sake, but rather for the emotional benefits that can be derived from marriage for the individual. Fowers also argues that the divorce rate in America bears this instrumental attitude out: because marriage often fails to meet our personal expectations, divorce enables us to look for personal fulfillment in a different marriage (see also Cherlin, 2009). Through this separation of the means (marriage) and the end (self-fulfillment), we have turned marriage into a thing-like object, independent of the self that either impedes or assists the self in obtaining fulfillment.

Instrumentalism is closely related to utilitarian individualism – discussed earlier – and its negative effects on marriage should be obvious. Marriages can only be successful "to the extent that they meet each partner's innermost psychological needs" (Amato, Booth, Johnson, & Rogers, 2007). When those needs are no longer met, then divorce tends to become the instrument that meets the self's needs. And in a culture such as ours, where "individual feelings [are] central to knowing which aims to pursue and in guiding the assessment of goal attainment," marriage can only thrive when it serves its instrumental purpose (Fowers & Richardson, 1996, p. 126). As I

mentioned previously, the harshness of this utilitarian perspective – particularly in relationships such as marriage – is one of the primary reasons expressive individualism arose (Bellah et al., 1996). Yet while this form of individualism does differ in important ways from utilitarian individualism, it does not entirely avoid instrumentalism. For the expressive individualist, the "end" is to express one's individuality, and marriage for many has become a means to that end (see Hill, 2007). Often, *when* one marries and *who* one marries – and even *how* one chooses to be married – are often viewed as ways of expressing oneself. Even from this expressive perspective, the individual takes precedence over the marriage and the marriage serves as an instrument to self-expression.

These differing features of individualism – atomism, self-interest, and instrumentalism – not only demonstrate different facets of individualism; each also deals with some sort of abstracting. Atomism assumes that the nature of an individual is best understood when it is abstracted from other individuals, since one's nature is fundamentally self-contained. Likewise, self-interest is by definition the abstraction of one's interest from the interest of others. Instrumentalism abstracts the means from the end, such that any (abstracted) object (such as marriage) that becomes a means cannot also be the end. Indeed, to assume instrumentalism one also abstracts individuals from the objects which serve the individual's well-being, such as relationships. And finally, individualism itself is an abstraction of one individual from other individuals, assuming their fundamental autonomy from one the other.

The fact that each of these features deals with some sort of abstraction alludes to the fact that each assumption is also derived from the same view of fundamental reality. Assuming individualism, as well as its other features, places limitations on what can or cannot be assumed

about the nature of things, particularly individuals. For example, to assume individualism is both to assume that individuals are fundamentally autonomous *and* to assume the individuals do *not* have a shared nature. One does not assume, for instance, that individuals are both autonomous and *not* autonomous simultaneously, so assuming individualism leaves one with a specific allusion to how things really are. The reality which unites the features of individuals seems to be a reality of abstractions; that is, a reality where abstractions are considered fundamentally real. The branch of philosophy which deals with the nature of reality is called ontology (Borchert, 2005) and the specific ontology in which abstractions are considered fundamental has been called an abstractionist ontology, or abstractionism (Slife, 2005). As we will see below, individualism and its features all fall under the blanket of abstractionism. Thus each feature of individualism can be derived from an abstractionist ontology. We will further see that there is a particular relationality that is derived from abstractionism, a relationality that is fundamentally no different than individualism and its features.

Abstractionism

An abstractionist ontology essentially takes abstractions to be fundamentally real, and all persons, places, or things are best understood as abstracted from one another, or removed from their context (Slife, 2005). Context refers to the particulars of the person, place, or object, such as its immediate surroundings or its history. Consider a hammer. From an abstractionist perspective, a hammer is best understood as an object in and of itself, removed from its context of tool box, work bench, user, or history of function, and is thought to have certain properties which do not change even when the context changes. In other words, a hammer is a hammer, whether it is being used to pound nails or to keep papers from flying away. It retains properties

which define it as a hammer in spite of the context. Thus it is, fundamentally, autonomous and independent of its context.

The abstractionist would also view persons as abstractions. That is, a person is "defined in abstraction from any constitutive concerns and hence from any [contextual] identity" (Taylor, 1989, p. 49). Consequently, the individual possesses certain properties or characteristics that contexts do not essentially change. One example of how this plays out is the use of laboratories in the social sciences: removing individuals from their context to the lab is viewed as a way to strip the context (e.g., remove "confounding" or changeable factors) and get at what is fundamental about those they are studying. Because of its fundamental, unchangeable characteristics, that knowledge can then be transferred to the world outside the lab. While the abstractionist will not deny that there are changeable aspects of the individual, change (or what changes) is not fundamental to a true understanding of the individual. Thus the individual is fundamentally "buffered" from the outside influences of context, including his or her relationships to other individuals (Taylor, 2007). Here we see the foundation of atomistic assumptions. Individuals "begin and end as [unchangeable], self-contained individualities" (Slife, 2005, p. 158) and what is real—whether it concerns an individual or a relationship—requires an understanding of the self-contained, and thus abstracted, properties of individuals.

Abstractionism and Relationships

But just because individuals are self-contained does not mean that individuals cannot be in relationships. The nature of these relationships, however, must necessarily follow from the ontological assumptions which characterize abstractionism. First of all, note that abstractions are essentially unified similarities. Consider the abstract definition of "cat." Suppose we define cats

as “four-legged, furry mammals that purr.” Our “abstraction” has included those things which all particular cats share (i.e., their four legs, mammalian status, and the fact that they purr). It has also *excluded* traits which cats tend *not* to share (e.g., color, size, etc.). The relationships between all cats are characterized from an abstractionist perspective by the shared similarities; that is how the abstract “cat” is defined.

In like manner the abstractionist defines human relationships based on what is similar, not what is different. From this perspective, abstractions are fundamental and thus relationships are *not* fundamental to reality; they must be created. In other words, relationships are secondary creations of abstracted individuals. And consistent with an abstractionist ontology, the relationships are both created and maintained by individuals through common abstractions – through similarities (Slife, 2005). That is, relationships are built when two abstracted individuals find commonalities by which they can be united. These commonalities serve as “contact points” for the self-contained individualities and serve as the foundation of any relationship. After all, if individuals are self-contained, each can only know the other insofar as the two are similar. And without the commonalities, there are no contact points between the two differing, self-contained individuals. Thus where commonalities do not exist, individuals wishing to create a relationship are left with two options: either one persuades the other, so that agreement is ultimately established, or the two choose to “tolerate” one another’s difference – that is, they agree to disagree. For the abstractionist, agreement is essential for creating and maintaining a relationship.

But even when relationships are created, they still do not represent a fundamental reality. Relationships are “what is ‘out there’” and must move from the self-contained individual to the world outside of the individual (Buber, 2000, p. 93). It is still possible for the relationship to

affect the individuals in relation, but only when what is “outside” the individual is brought to the inside of the self and becomes a property of the self-contained individual (Reber & Osbeck, 2005). For instance, when information is exchanged between two people, the information affects an individual, but only insofar as the information has been taken from the outside of the individual and “processed” within the individual. Thus understanding a relationship from this abstractionist perspective necessitates first and foremost an understanding of the *individuals* of the relationship, or the “thoughts, feelings, and behaviors of each party, for it is assumed that these factors ultimately determine whether and how the relationship is maintained” (p. 65).

With its focus on the autonomous individual, it is easy to see how individualism can be derived from abstractionism. Both the abstractionist and the individualist see the individual as primary – that is, prior to the relationship – independent and distinct from other individuals, and the individual is best understood as self-contained, abstracted from other individuals. From both perspectives, social relationships are secondary to the abstracted, autonomous individual. Indeed, it is also easy to see where self-interest and instrumentalism fit well within the abstractionist framework. Relationships, being secondary creations, are not understood to be created for the sake of the relationship; rather they are understood to be created for the sake of the self, for they ultimately become properties of the self anyway. It only makes sense, then, to see a relationship as fundamentally serving one’s self interest, thus the value of a relationship depends upon what the relationship can do for the self.

One can see the potential confusion in trying to determine the extent to which individualism is a part of any discipline, particularly one that is ostensibly relational. Even though individualism and its features find their roots in abstractionism, relationships can still be

important for those assuming abstractionism. However, relationality from this ontological perspective – with its focus on the individual – is ultimately just another form of individualism, given their common ontological foundation. Consequently, this sort of individualistic relationality will likely suffer from the same problems identified in Chapter 1. Thus avoiding individualism is not as simple as just *discussing* relationships and relationality. It may also be the case, however, that abstractionism offers the only form of relationality, in which case it would not matter whether we avoid individualism or not. Knowing whether this is the case necessitates understanding an alternative relationality – one whose ontological roots distinguish it fundamentally from individualism and abstractionism.

An Alternative Relationality

An alternative form of relationality is already being explored in the natural and social sciences (see Reber, 2007; Nelson, 2007; Slife, 2005; Prigogine, 1997; Prigogine & Stengers, 1984). This ontological relationality proposes that all persons and things are first and foremost in relationship to one another. That is, persons and objects share their being with the context of which they are a part and thus are best understood in relation to their context (Slife & Wiggins, in press). Consider once again the example of the hammer. The ontological relationist would claim that, because the hammer shares its being with the context, its identity can and does change as a consequence of a changing context. Its identity is best understood in relation to its context, as a nail-pounding hammer when it is pounding nails and a paperweight hammer when it is weighing down papers. Likewise, the identity of persons change when their context changes. A person is not considered independent in any way of his or her context, but rather his or her characteristics are at least partly dependent upon the context of the person.

Unlike the abstractionist, the unchanging is not understood as fundamental, with the changeable as secondary. A relationist attends to both the unchanging *and* the changing nature of the person as he or she navigates different contexts. The *fundamental* reality of any person consists *both* of the person and his or her constitutive relationships, which includes the changing and unchanging. It is true that the person may maintain similarities across contexts, but the relationist is just as concerned with the essential differences that occur when a person changes contexts. It is the similarities (unchanging or constant parts) *and* differences (those parts which do change) which constitute the whole of, and thus make up the fundamental reality of, a person or a relationship (Slife, 2005; Slife & Wiggins, in press). The best understanding, from this relational perspective, is an understanding of the whole.

It is important to note that abstractions and relationships exist in both ontological frameworks. The question from either ontology is not so much "what exists" as "what is considered fundamental." From an abstractionist perspective, the abstracted and unchangeable is fundamental, and relationships are considered secondary. In other words, the abstractionist acknowledges the existence of relationships—even values relationships—but sees the relationships as secondary to the self-contained individuals (Reber & Osbeck, 2005). Indeed, as I have mentioned, the abstractionist would even see relationships as internalized or a part of the individual. For this reason, abstractionism is sometimes called a weak relationality (Slife, 2005). On the other hand, from a relational ontology, relationships are fundamental and abstractions are secondary. Persons are always in relationship and the relationships are crucial to understanding the person. People cannot be understood *except* in relation, thus this sort of ontological relationality is called a "strong relationality" (p. 159). It should be noted that the adjectives

"weak" and "strong" used here are not meant to be value judgments, but are used merely to describe the type of relationality being assumed at the ontological level. In fact, in many philosophical contexts the "weaker" type of concept or system is often considered the more valid or truthful.

Strong Relationality

As I have already mentioned, a strong relationality assumes that relationships are the fundamental reality of human existence (Jackson, 2005). From this ontological perspective, even the "idea of an isolated [individual] is self-contradictory… [for apart] from this essential relation he does not exist" (Macmurray, 1999, p. 24). In other words, one's identity is constituted by her relations to others. Above, we saw that from a weak relationality, relationships must be created, and the worth of a relationship depends on personal fulfillment. But as relationships need not be created, and always and already exist as from a strong relationality, the focus is no longer on the individual, but on the relationship. This means that from a strongly relational perspective, as Slife and Wiggins (in press) point out, "relationships should be *good* rather than satisfying [to the individual]" (p. 20, emphasis added). That is, the value of the relationship is determined *not* by what it brings to the individual, but on whether or not it is good. Making self-interest or instrumentalism the focus would do violence to the relationship, and it would no longer be a "good" relationship (Buber, 2000).

Individualism versus Individuality

To summarize thus far, a strong relationality emphasizes the context of the person such that any one person's identity is inseparable from, and thus constituted by, her context and her relationships to others. In this way, strong relationality avoids the atomism of individualism.

Rather than an "individual" in the ontologically autonomous sense, the person is seen as deeply embedded in her unique nexus of constitutive relationships; that is, her identity – and likewise, her uniqueness, as we see below – stems from her particular situatedness in the greater context of human life. Ontologically, then, a strong relationality cannot allow for a self that is completely autonomous of other selves, and does not assume atomism. Nor does strong relationality favor self-interest, given the value of the relationship over the self. And likewise instrumentalism can be avoided, as it is often driven by self-interest, and as means and ends are no longer separable from each other if one is to remain true to the ontology.

Rather than assumptions of individualism, then, a strong relationality – with its focus on relationships – assumes a very different sort of uniqueness. A person, by virtue of her agency (ability to choose), is "always a constitutive part of [her] own [context]" (Slife & Wiggins, in press, p. 21). That is, she always bears at least some responsibility for her contextual situation. It is important to point out that this sort of agency is very different than what one would see from a weak relationality. Choice, from a weak relationality, is independent of the context. Agency from a strong relationality implies choice which is deeply contextual, and thus both enabled by and bound by the context: enabled because one's various choices are only made *possible* by the context she is in; bound because her choices are also *constrained* by the context, and are therefore never made independent of the context (e.g., one cannot choose kick a fence where no fence is available; see Slife & Williams, 1995). As co-constituter of the context, one is uniquely responsible for the context one is in, including the state of one's relationships. In other words, uniqueness comes not from one's *independence* from the context, but from one's *unique*

dependence on and responsibility toward the context. Rather than individualism, then, we have what might be called *individuality* – a uniqueness that is deeply contextual, deeply relational.

Marriage and Relationality

That there are two types of relationality – weak and strong – that differ so radically from one another brings us back to the question, from which relationality are marital researchers drawing? On the one hand, they could be avoiding individualism completely by assuming a strong relationality. On the other, they could be doing no better than assuming individualism by assuming a weak relationality. Given the distinctions in relationality that I have made thus far, it seems necessary to look at the methods of marital scientists at the ontological level. But the distinctions I have made thus far are also very thin. What remains is a thicker explication of these two forms of relationality, particularly how each would play out in marriage. What follows is a fuller explication of the differences between weak and strong relationality, and their various implications, in the context of marriage. This section serves both to refine the distinctions between abstractionism and strong relationality and to provide a framework by which the analysis can be guided.

I have organized this section based on the features of individualism I discussed above. As these features are the most noticed, and seemingly the most pervasive, in American culture, they seem a good starting place for fleshing out both types of relationality in marriage. I begin each subsection with a discussion of how each feature of weak relationality plays out in the context of marriage, and then provide a contrasting feature grounded in a strong relationality. To provide practical examples of each weakly relational assumption, I have drawn upon one book of Laura Denke's. Denke is an author who has written several books on marriage intended for lay

audiences. Though much of what she writes fits well within a weak relationality framework, my use of her book is by no means meant to represent a whole class of literature or a body of researchers. It is merely used to illustrate how the various features of weak relationality play out practically.

Atomism versus Holism

As I said previously, from a weak relationality, individuals are fundamentally self-contained, and therefore relationships are secondary creations, built upon sameness and similarities. This can mean a number of things about marriage. First of all, a good marriage from this perspective is one where agreement is foundational. Disagreements might occur, but it is important that a couple agree more than disagree. Further, agreement would be seen in the form of abstractions, such as thoughts, feelings, and behaviors – things that are, above all, personal (abstracted from the marriage itself). One can see this phenomenon occurring in the marriage culture today, where good marriages can be built on similar hobbies or values. From this perspective, it is difficult, if not impossible, to *know* someone who is different than you are when you are fundamentally self-contained. Knowing begins and ends where you are similar to the one you wish to know; it just becomes a matter of uncovering or of building those similarities. It is not uncommon to meet a couple, married or engaged, who make their similarities the focus of their relationship.

Of course, no matter how similar two individuals are to one another, there will inevitably be differences. While emphasizing similarities in a relationship does not necessarily mean one is assuming a weak relationality, how one views difference will generally give away one's assumptions. Consider the Denke's (1999) claim that when a couple takes her advice, all their

"petty differences…and differences of opinion [can] melt away" (p. 13). For Denke, some differences of opinion are not important enough to hold on to and can (and should) melt away. She goes on to say that, when differences arise in her own marriage and an agreement cannot be reached, "we…laugh, hug each other, and say something that would make the other laugh" (p.16). Ignoring differences or hoping that they "melt away" make differences appear to be a threat to the relationship. When marriage is built on similarities, as it must be from a weak relationality, then differences *must* be glossed over or the marriage is potentially in peril.

A strong relationality, on the other hand, views differences as just a valuable to the relationship as similarities, because they are *part* of the relationship. Sameness is not the focus of a marriage. Instead, a strong relationality acknowledges the differences within a couple as an important part of the relationship. When one ignores or glosses over the differences between her and her spouse, she refuses the personal relationship with her spouse (Macmurray, 1999). In other words, she fails to engage her spouse honestly by failing to engage with the whole of the relationship (both the similarities and the differences). A strong relationality values what might be called the reality of the relationship, the shared context and constitutive being. For a person to be able to live into her constitutive relationship and engage honestly with her spouse, she must embrace the relationship as a whole, including both the similarities *and* the differences which maintain a good relationship.

But it is not enough to simply engage with all similarities and all differences in a relationship. Some similarities and some differences will actually be detrimental to the marriage. For example, both a husband and a wife could "agree" that divorce is necessary. Though the couple is similar in their feelings toward their marriage, that similarity actually represents a

threat to the marriage. Relationships are not created from a strong relationality; consequently, the issue of quality has less to do with sameness and agreement, and more to do with whether the marriage is being nurtured or neglected. In other words, similarities and differences must be confronted, but not because one is better than the other; each needs to be confronted because either can be good or bad for the relationship. As I quoted before, marriages "should be good rather than satisfying" to the individuals (Slife & Wiggins, in press, p. 20).

Self-interest versus Shared Goods

Self-interest is in its own way a fairly subtle assumption made by many in the marriage culture. Few are willing to admit to pure selfishness in marriage, and even fewer believe the selfishness is good for a marriage. However, self-interest is still at the center of many marriages. Consider what Denke (1999) implies about happiness in marriage. In discussing unity in problem solving, she claims that it is important that both spouses feel good about the solution. If one spouse does *not* feel good about the solution, a new solution ought to be examined. Denke's emphasis on good personal feelings betrays her commitment to a weak relationality: any good solution in marriage necessitates that *each* individual feel good about it. Her emphasis is not on whether the solution is good for the marriage; rather she emphasizes that the interests of each self ought to first be met. Further, Denke warns that if this problem solving procedure is not followed, then unhappiness will likely ensue, which for Denke means the relationship is poor. But defining the good as happiness, coupled with the good feelings that arise at finding a mutually satisfying solution, focuses the couple's attention on their own personal interests, not necessarily the good of the relationship.

That is not to say that unhappiness is the mark of a good relationship, or that good feelings are characteristic of a bad marriage. But the focus on the self and on the self's interest – such as her happiness or her good feelings – manifests the weak relationality that is being assumed by Denke and others who think similarly about marriage. For the weak relationist, the individual's atomized state and relationship's secondary state both imply that self and its needs should be put above the relationship. Another example from Denke demonstrates the subtlety with which self-interest can creep into a marriage based on a weak relationality. Denke writes about what she calls her *Platinum Rule* of marriage, which is: "*Do unto your spouse as they would want you to do unto them*" (p. 171). While the *Platinum Rule* appears selfless, it cannot avoid the atomism that characterizes weak relationality, nor the focus on the self and the self's interest, even if the self in an other. The rule is to do what the other would *want*, not necessarily what is best for the relationship. The focus is, again, on the atomized self.

The strong relationist values the good of the relationship above the good of the atomized self. This good – a *shared* good – is one which belongs to both spouses simultaneously, to the marriage as a whole. Shared goods, as described by Fowers (2005), is the idea that "what is good for [one] is inseparable from what is good for others" (p. 45). Denke's *Platinum Rule* makes little sense from this perspective, as the doer of the deed can do nothing for the good of her spouse without doing what is best for her as well. All shared goods are shared by the whole of the relationship, including one's relationship to family and community. Because marriage is a particular relationship – contextually distinct from other communal relationships – a married couple will have shared goods that are specific to the couple and their relation to one another and the community. Belonging to both spouses, these shared goods should be pursued by both

spouses – even if pursuing the goods involves some sort of unhappiness or discomfort for either or both spouses.

Determining what these shared goods are will depend upon the context of the couple, both in their community and in the context of marriage functionally and historically. For example, one shared good might be a virtuous marriage. Determining how to define a virtuous marriage will depend upon the couple's situation within their community, their obligation to the community and their obligation to each other as members of that community. But a virtuous marriage will also depend in part upon what marriage is; that is, its function in the family and the community, both presently and historically. In this way, determining what the virtuous marriage is supposed to be cannot depend entirely upon the self, one's personal feeling about the relationship, or whether one is happy or not. Instead, it must depend upon the context of the marriage.

Instrumentalism versus Responsibly Relating

Once self-interest becomes the focus of a marriage, it is an easy step to instrumentalism. A marriage whose end goal is happiness or good feelings is one that has already separated the means (marriage) from the ends (personal fulfillment). Consequently, marriage is potentially reduced to a mere tool, one meant solely to satisfy the interests of the self. One sees clearly how this plays out in the marriage culture when one considers the way communication is discussed. Denke (1999) provides us with another good example of this. For her, one of the purposes of communication is for one individual to let the other know that her feelings have been hurt; that is, one should communicate when one's interests have not been satisfied. In this way, communication is an instrument that facilitates good marriages, which marriages in turn become

instruments to facilitate one feeling good. Self-interest and instrumentalism become the focus and weak relationality dominates our assumptions.

When instrumentalism is assumed, it can be difficult to see the value of any relationships, as working with others can so easily get in the way of personal fulfillment. Instrumentalism helps to explain to why some relationships are pursued by those for whom self-interest is a high priority. Social exchange theory is one way to explain how this happens (Reber & Osbeck, 2005). Any self-interested individual looking out for her own interests will ultimately run into problems when she is confronted with one whose interests differ; her interests will eventually get in the way of the other's interests, leaving the two at a potential impasse. To prevent this impasse from ruining the relationship, a social contract can be drawn – an agreement between the two individuals – that will assure that one serves the interests of the other as long as one's interests are served in return. In this way, one's satisfaction can be assured – even increased – through the instrumental use of another. This may seem a harsh way of looking at relationships, but in fact, it is not uncommon in the marriage culture to assume instrumentalism, and then use a language that merely softens this approach to marriage. In fact, we can use Denke's (1999) language to demonstrate how this can occur in marriage. As I stated above, Denke's ideal is a marriage that leads to happiness. If we understand the *Platinum Rule* in this context, then a couple's social contract may look something like this: do unto your spouse what they would want you to do unto them, otherwise your marriage will fail to make you happy. While it is true that Denke herself does not present her advice in this specific way, one can see how easily it is implied when one is assuming a weak relationality to begin with.

Instrumentalism in marriage implies a particular form of obligation. From a weak relationality, obligations always originate from within the self and always remain personal and self-contained. Obligations in relationships are not *to* the relationships, but are rather to the self. Consequently, as we saw above, one's obligation to marriage ends once the marriage fails to fulfill the individual. Practically, this means that one's decision to remain married – or in other words, one's commitment to the marriage – is an isolated decision based entirely on how one feels about the marriage. There is no real obligation to the marriage itself, to one's spouse, or even to one's family or community when it comes to making that decision. In this way, the only difference between marriage and other relationships are the commitments that a couple makes specifically to one another, such as monogamous commitments. This type of marriage, common in American culture, has been called the "companionate marriage," which Taylor (1989) says "leads to a greater place for contractual agreement….assertion of personal autonomy, and *voluntarily* formed ties" (p. 290, emphasis mine). The voluntary nature of these commitments makes them all the easier to break, particularly when the "contract" is broken. Thus instrumentalism unites all three features: one whose choice is self-contained is interested primarily in herself and therefore forms relationships which serve the self, her obligation only ever being primarily to herself.

Obligations take on a very different face when one assumes a strong relationality in that they put the relationship before one's obligation to the self. Indeed, for one to put self before the relationship is to isolate oneself, which as we saw above is impossible from a strong relationality. This is no small point, particularly when considering one's responsibility as co-constitutor of the context. A person's obligations are not owed to herself, but are always extended outward into the

relationships between the person and her context. Given a person's unique situation in her context, she is the only person capable of fulfilling those obligations, thus the responsibility alone is hers. In a marriage, one's obligation is first to the marriage. Even more, it is an obligation to the marriage in its context, which means that neither is the marriage itself isolated in any abstract way from other relationships. Thus one's obligation to the marriage must be informed by the marriage in the context of the couple, the family, and the community.

This difference might be better illustrated by an example. Consider a young man contemplating marriage. One of the most important choices he will make will be who he decides to marry. This choice carries with it certain obligations from both relational perspectives. From a weak relationality, he is only obligated to himself when making that choice. Fulfilling that obligation might consist in understanding whether his future spouse will make him happy, support him in fulfilling his dreams, and satisfy him sexually, and whether he can serve her needs to such an extent as to assure that she will continue fulfilling his. From a strong relationality, his obligations are always to his relationships to others in his context. For instance, he will also recognize that choosing who to marry will affect his family, and so be sure that he is considering his obligations to his family in making his choice. He might also consider the community of which he is a part, and whether his specific marriage will help fulfill his obligations to his community. And of course, his choice will perhaps more immediately affect his future spouse, so he ought to consider his love for her, and whether his love is good enough to build a marriage and fulfill any obligation to her implied by marriage. What are important from a strong relationality are the young man's relationships and his obligation as a co-constituter of his context.

These obligations are still voluntary, to a degree. Indeed, just like from a weak relationality, entering into a marriage voluntarily is part of what sets marriage apart from other relationships. However, that is not all that sets marriage apart. Marriage itself has a context and a history that cannot be ignored when it comes to choosing to marry and choosing who to marry. When one chooses to enter into marriage, from a strong relational perspective, that choice necessarily carries with it certain responsibilities, responsibilities that are as tied to the history and context of marriage as they are tied to family and community. Treating marriage as an object or a tool would not just do violence to one's particular marriage, but also to marriage in general. Instead, a person has certain obligations toward marriage by virtue of her relationship to marriage, to whom she is married, and to the community wherein the marriage occurs.

Communication will not center on how marriage can serve the couple. Instead, where communication needs to take place, it would need to center on how the couple can best serve their marriage and family. Figuring out what the good marriage is, however, will always be contextual. Given the contextuality of marriage, any communication must be humble communication, requiring openness toward others and toward changing circumstances, both of which will offer "new insights regarding our pursuit of what is good" (Fowers, 2005, p. 44). The goal of having a good marriage will not focus a couple's attention on getting happiness or satisfaction from the marriage, but rather on living a good marriage. In this way, marriage becomes an end, and actions and goals are the same. By avoiding instrumentalism and aligning the means and ends of a good marriage, couples can live into a wholeness that is only available when they are living into the truth of marriage.

Conclusion

I have by no means exhausted the implications of either weak or strong relationality in this chapter. However, what I have presented here should give the reader a good idea of the differences between the two, particularly as they relate to marriage. It should be clear first of all that assuming a weak relationality is, practically, the same as assuming individualism. The fact that individualism and one type of relationality can coexist demonstrates that avoiding individualism is not as easy as it seems. Strong relationality, on the other hand, is a viable alternative – one that avoids the individualistic assumptions scholars worry plague marriage. Determining which relationality marital scientists are drawing upon should therefore reveal whether and to what extent individualism is being assumed by the marital sciences.

By fleshing out each ontology's implications for marriage, this chapter has also served another important purpose. In Table 1, I have composed a summary of the primary differences between a weakly relational and a strongly relational marriage. As we come to the analysis in a later chapter, this table, in conjunction with the more fleshed out explanations in this chapter, will assist in determining which relationality is being assumed. The measures, in their implied conceptualizations of marriage and marital assessment, will also imply either a weak or a strong relationality, thus revealing the assumptions which underlie the measures themselves.

Table 1

Differences Between Weak and Strong Relationality

Weak Relationality (Individualism)	Strong Relationality
Atomism: individuals are fundamentally self-contained, and therefore relationships are secondary to individuals; relationships are exclusively built upon similarities	*Holism*: relationships are fundamental to reality and one's identity can only be understood in relation to others; similarities *and* differences are part of the whole relationship
Self-interest: an emphasis on fulfilling the individuals' needs and wants over the interest of the relationship	*Shared goods*: a focus on the interest of the relationship over the good of the self
Instrumentalism: a relationship serves as a means to an individuals' own good; self satisfaction is assured through social contracts; obligation is to the self rather than the relationship	*Responsibility Relating*: a relationship is the end, the purpose; obligations are to the relationship in context rather than the self

LITERATURE REVIEW

In the previous chapter, I constructed a rough framework for my analysis by describing the two ontologies which will guide the analysis. This brief chapter is devoted to describing the process which I underwent to determine which measures in the marital sciences would be most appropriate to analyze. When it comes to psychological measures in the social and marital sciences, there are hundreds of options to choose from. My goal here was to determine a group of measures that is both manageable for this type of project, as well as representative of measurement in the marital sciences. To accomplish this goal, I consulted the assessment literature from a number of different angles, which I describe below. Through this review of the literature, I identify the most often used measures that appear in the marital science literature, including five self-report measures and two behavioral observation coding systems. After describing the process for the literature review, I list and describe each of the measures.

Type of Measure

Before determining which measures to analyze, I first considered which *type* of measure I ought to include. Marital researchers rarely investigate marriage without attempting to understand more specific aspects of marriage, such as how the relationship affects more individual problems. As I am concerned primarily with how marital researchers view marriage, I decided to focus on those measures that claim specifically to measure marriage, or the status of the marriage. These types of measures have been called “global” measures and generally focus on marital satisfaction or adjustment (e.g., Whisman & Jacobson, 1992). Global measures can generally be distinguished from other instruments that are designed to measure more specific dimensions of a relationship, such as a couple’s disagreement about finances (Snyder, 1979).

There are two particular reasons that justify my focus on "global" measures for my analysis. First, these measures are more relationship-focused than other measures used by marital researchers (such as the Sexual Attitude Scale, intended to measure one's *individual* attitudes about human sexuality; see Fischer & Corcoran, 2007). As my goal is to understand how strongly relational the measures potentially are, I am more likely to find a strong relationality in a measure that is oriented toward the relationship than one oriented toward the individual. The second reason for focusing on global measures is that these measures are often used in conjunction with other more individually oriented measures anyway.

For example, McLean et al. (2008) used both the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS; a highly popular marital adjustment scale) and the Beck Depression Inventory (BDI; a highly popular measure of individual depression) to determine the effects of couple therapy on advanced cancer patients and their spouses. Though the focus of this study is on the effect of couple therapy as a treatment for an individual's depression, the DAS is used to determine whether the couple therapy is working as it should (that is, whether the couple therapy is also improving the couple's marriage). In other words, even when marital researchers are primarily concerned with individuals, they still use global measures in conjunction with their individual measures. This means that global measures are not only more relational than other measures, but are also more pervasive in marital research.

Literature Review

Initial Search

Given this criteria, I constructed an initial list of global measures that are being used currently in the literature. I am interested in the current state of the discipline, not its historic

state, so I limited my search to publications within the last decade. In order to get as broad a sample of measures as possible, I consulted two different sets of publications. The first set was books, such as instrument anthologies (e.g., Fischer & Corcoran, 2007) and marital therapy sourcebooks and handbooks (e.g., Stabb, 2005; Bagarozzi & Sperry, 2004; Johnson, 2002). These books pointed me to both research studies verified by global measures and the actual measures themselves. I kept a list of each global measure mentioned by the literature, as well as a tally of how often each measure was mentioned.

The second set of publications was journal articles. Several meta-analyses from the last decade were consulted in order to find sources that recorded successful marital therapy (see sources below). These sources were then consulted directly to determine which measures were used in conducting the studies. Because meta-analyses are always a few years behind more up-to-date research, I also consulted PsycINFO. PsycINFO is an internet database that indexes and abstracts more than 2,450 journals and hundreds of books and dissertations ("PsycINFO," 2009). Updated weekly, it is as up-to-date a database as there is. Using the search terms "marital therapy," marriage therapy," and "couple therapy," I looked through the last decade of results, consulting directly studies which were marriage focused, as opposed to individual focused. I added any new measures to the previous list, including a tally of those and the previous measures.

Overall, I surveyed 10 books (Bagarozzi & Sperry, 2004; Carr, 2000; Corcoran & Fischer, 2000; Fischer & Corcoran, 2007; Fincham, Beach & Kemp-Fincham, 1997; Gollan & Jacobson, 2002; Halford, Markman, Stanley, & Kline, 2002; Sholevar & Schwoeri, 2003; Johnson, 2002; Stabb, 2005), 10 meta-analyses (Baucom, Mueser, Shoham, Daiuto, & Stickle,

1998; Butler & Wampler, 1999; Gollan & Jacobson, 2002; Heyman, 2001; Johnson, Hunsley, Greenberg, & Schindler, 1999; Johnson & Lebow, 2000; Shadish & Baldwin, 2003; Snyder, Catellani, & Whisman, 2006; Spitalnick & McNair, 2005; Wood, 2004), and 46 studies (Allen & Olson, 2001; Andrews, Foster, Capaldi, & Hops, 2000; Aron, Norman, Aron, McKenna & Heyman, 2000; Atkins, Berns, George, Doss, Gattis, & Christensen, 2005; Atkins, Eldridge, Baucom, & Christensen, 2005; Baucom, Atkins, Simpson, & Christensen, 2009; Bradley & Furrow, 2004; Brown, 2007; Chambers, 2008; Christensen, 2008; Christensen, Atkins, Berns, Wheeler, Baucom, & Simpson, 2004; Christensen, Atkins, Yi, Baucom, & George, 2006; Clouteir, Manion, Walker, & Johnson, 2002; Cordova, Jacobson, & Christensen, 1998; Croyle & Waltz, 2002; Dalton, 2005; Denton, Burleson, Clark, Rodriguez, & Hobbs, 2000; Doss, Thum, Sevier, Atkins, & Christensen, 2005; Erwin, 2008; Feeny, 2002; Fincham, Harold, & Gano-Phillips, 2000; Gattis, 2005; Gee, Scott, Castellani, & Cordova, 2002; Gottman & Levenson, 2000; Goudelock, 2007; Hahlweg, Kaiser, Christensen, Fehm-Wolfsdor, & Groth, 2000; Hahlweg, Markman, Thurmaier, Engl, & Eckert, 1998; Halford, Sanders, & Behrens, 2001; Jacobson, Prince, Cordova, Christensen, & Eldridge, 2000; Johnson & Boisvert, 2002; Ledermann, Bodenmann, & Cina, 2007; Lundblad & Hansson, 2006; MacIntosh & Johnson, 2008; McLean, Jones, Rydall, Walsh, Esplen, Zimmermann et al., 2008; McMurray, 2006; Moore, McCabe, & Brink, 2001; Moynehan & Adams, 2007; O'Connor, McCabe, & Firth, 2008; Reinke, 2005; Scott & Cordova, 2002; Simpson, Gattis, Atkins, & Christensen, 2008; Tillotson, 2008; Tremblay, Wright, Mamodhoussen, Mcduff & Sabourin, 2008; Trudel, Boyer, Villeneuve, Anderson, Pilon & Bounader, 2008; Watson, Hubbard, & Wiese, 2000; Yasan & Gurgen, 2009)

Table 2 lists all 40 relevant measures mentioned in these sources, along with a count of how often each measure was mentioned.

Table 2

Initial List of Measures and Frequency Count

Measure	Initial Frequency
Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS)	39
Locke-Wallace Marital Adjustment Test (MAT)	13
Marital Satisfaction Inventory - Revised (MSI-R)	11
Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale (KMSS)	5
Quality of Marriage Index (QMI)	5
Communication Patters Questionnaire (CPQ)	4
Areas of Change Questionnaire (ACQ)	4
PREPARE/ENRICH	4
Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS)	3
Marital Status Inventory (MSI)	3
Marital Communication Questionnaire (MCQ)	3
KPI (Observational Measure)	3
Marital Conventionalization Scale (MCS)	2
Marital Happines Scale (MHS)	2
Positive Feelings Questionnaire (PFQ)	2
Primary Communication Inventory (PCI)	2
Marital Adjustment Balance Scale (MABS)	2
Couples Interaction Scoring System (CISS)	2
Couples Interaction Scoring System - Revised (CISS-R)	2
Specific Affect Coding System (SPAFF)	2
Marital Interaction Coding System - Revised (MICS-R)	2
Personal Assessment of Intimacy in Relationships - Revised (PAIR-R)	2
Maudsley Marital Questionnaire (MMQ)	2
Marital Interaction Coding System (MICS)	1
Couple's Critical Incidents Check List (CCICL)	1
Beier-Sternberg Discord Questionnaire (DQ)	1
Index of Marital Satisfaction (IMS)	1
Kansas Marital Conflict Scale (KMCS)	1
Marital Comparison Level Index (MCLI)	1
Marital Instability Index (MII)	1
Marital Quality Index (MQI)	1
SMU Relationship Questionnaire	1
Conflict Tactics Scale - Revised (CTS-2)	1
Frequency & Acceptability of Partner Behavior Questionnaire (FAPBQ)	1
Emotionally Focused Therapy Coding Scheme (EFT-CS)	1

Table 2 (cont.)

Measure	Initial Frequency
Miller Social Intimacy Scale (MSIS)	1
Oral History Coding	1
Marital Satisfaction Scale (MSS)	1
Self-Dyadic Perspective Taking	1
Other-Dyadic Perspective Taking	1
Couples Mutuality Questionnaire	1

Final List

My intent is only to understand how marriage is popularly understood by marital researchers through the most often used marital measures, thus I did not analyze all 40 of the global measures identified. Instead, I narrowed down the list of 40 measures to a more manageable list of those measures being used. To do so, I did another search using PsycINFO, this time adding several other databases to the search, including Academic Search Premier, Family and Society Studies Worldwide, PsycARTICLES, PsycBOOKS, PsycCRITIQUES, PsycEXTRA, Psychology and Behavioral Sciences Collection, Social Science Abstracts, and Social Work Abstracts. My intent was to access as many sources as possible where marital researchers might publish to give me as representative a sample of studies as possible. For the search term, I used the full name of the measure (with some exceptions; see notes in Table 3).

For this search, I attended primarily to the number of hits each of the measures obtained. Each measure and its respective number of hits are recorded in Table 3. I recorded three numbers for each measure: the first column contains the number of hits from the current decade (2000-2009); the second column contains the number of hits from the previous decade (1990-1999); and the final column contains the number of total hits. I did this to check for general trends in measure usage, in case a newer measure was showing substantial increased use. The only measure that fit this criterion was the Central Relationship Questionnaire (CRQ), however closer inspection of those studies wherein the CRQ is used reveals that none in the search deal specifically with marriage. Thus the only numbers I used in determining which measures to analyze are in the final column, containing the number of hits in the last decade.

Table 3

Final List of Measures and Frequency Count

Measure	Total	1990s	Last Decade
Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS)*	1368	651	442
ENRICH*[a]	192	63	96
Locke-Wallace Marital Adjustment Test (MAT)*	399	123	66
Marital Satisfaction Inventory - Revised (MSI-R)*	184	80	62
Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale (KMS)*	129	57	53
Personal Assessment of Intimacy in Relationships (PAIR)	75	28	37
Marital Satisfaction Scale (MSS) [b]	94	31	32
Specific Affect Coding System (SPAFF)* [c]	28	7	20
Communication Patterns Questionnaire (CPQ)	38	20	18
Marital Interaction Coding System (MICS)*	80	35	14
Maudsley Marital Questionnaire (MMQ)	25	6	11
Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS) [d]	17	7	8
Central Relationship Questionnaire[d]	9	1	8
Quality of Marriage Index (QMI)	18	9	8
Index of Marital Satisfaction (IMS)	41	24	8
Other-Dyadic Perspective Taking	16	8	7
Marital Status Inventory (MSI)	40	15	5
Couples Interaction Scoring System (CISS)	19	5	5
Marital Comparison Level Index (MCLI)	15	7	4
Primary Communication Inventory (PCI)	30	11	4
Areas of Change Questionnaire (ACQ)	50	15	3
Marital Happiness Scale (MHS)	23	2	3
Positive Feelings Questionnaire (PFQ)	10	0	3
Marital Conventionalization Scale (MCS)	28	15	2
Marital Quality Index (MQI)	8	4	2
Self-Dyadic Perspective Taking	5	3	2
KPI (Observational Measure)[e]	2	0	2
Kansas Marital Conflict Scale (KMCS)	2	0	2
Marital Instability Index (MII)	6	0	2
Oral History Coding	2	0	2
Beier-Sternberg Discord Questionnaire (DQ)[f]	4	0	2
Emotionally Focused Therapy Coding Scheme (EFT-CS)[g]	2	0	2
Miller Social Intimacy Scale (MSIS)	6	4	1
Frequency & Acceptability of Partner Behavior (FAPBQ)	1	0	1
Marital Communication Questionnaire (MCQ)	2	2	0

Table 3 (cont.)

Measure	Total	1990s	Last Decade
Marital Adjustment Balance Scale (MABS)[h]	12	11	0
Couple's Critical Incidents Check List (CCICL)	1	1	0
Couples Mutuality Questionnaire	0	0	0
Conflict Tactics Scale - Revised (CTS-2)[i]			

* Measures used in the analysis

[a]Using just "ENRICH" as a search term yielded thousands of hits, because of the often used verb *enrich*. Search terms "enrich AND marriage" were used. [b]Searching "Marital Satisfaction Scale" only overlapped with ENRICH and Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale. Search terms "Marital Satisfaction Scale NOT enrich NOT Kansas" were used. [c]Search terms "Specific Affect Coding System AND SPAFF" used because some studies use only the abbreviation. [d]This measure rarely used for marital studies. [e]KPI is also the acronym for a medical assessment instrument. Search terms "KPI AND marriage" were used. [f]Searching the name of the measure yielded no results. Search terms "DQ AND marriage" were used. [g]Searching the name of the measure yielded no results. Search terms "EFT AND CS" were used. [h]Searching the name of the measure yielded no results. Search terms "MABS AND marriage" were used. [i]Though mentioned in the literature, the CTS-2 is not a relevant measure; that is, it is not a global measure.

It is important to keep in mind that the number of hits in the past decade does not capture perfectly the number of times a measure is being used. However, given the breadth and scope of the databases searcher, the number of hits should give a general idea of a measure's proportional use in the literature. For example, the Marital Happiness Scale (MHS) obtained three hits in the last decade, whereas the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS) obtained 442 with the same search criteria. While it is quite likely the MHS has been used more than three times this decade, it is likely also true that the DAS has been used more than 442 times. Thus the number of hits should give us a rough idea of how the MHS and the DAS are used in proportion to one another: for every time the MHS is used, we can safely assume the DAS is used around 100 times or more.

If one refers to Table 3, it becomes clear which measures are the most popular. The DAS is used with far more frequency than any other global measure; four times more frequently than the second most popular measure, ENRICH. This should come as no surprise to those familiar with marital assessment, as it is often used as a benchmark for measurement of relationships in the marital sciences (see, for example, Johnson & Jacob, 2000; Whisman & Jacobson, 1992) and is pervasive in marital research. Second on the list, the ENRICH inventory is still moderately popular, but after that, the popularity of other measures significantly diminishes in comparison to the DAS. A measure with fewer than 50 hits (1 hit for every 9 DAS hits) is obviously used with far less frequency than the DAS so will not get nearly the attention that the DAS will receive in research. The Locke-Wallace Marital Adjustment Test (MAT), the Marital Satisfaction Inventory (MSI), and the Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale (KMS), all obtained over 50 hits, and will be included in the analysis.

I should point out that the five scales that obtained over 50 hits are all self-report scales. Self-report refers to the fact that these scales are administered directly to individuals in a marriage, who then answer the set of questions required by the scale. In other words, married individuals themselves report on the state of their marriage by responding to the questions in the measure. This type of scale dominates the marital sciences but is not the only type of scales available to marital scientists.

Behavioral observation coding systems, while not as often used as self-report, are also an important part of the marital sciences (Weiss & Heyman, 1990). This type of measure focuses not on the couple's own report of their marriage, but rather on the trained observation of couples interacting. The couple's behaviors are coded according to categories which determine whether the couple is distressed or well-adjusted. In order to account for these important measures, I decided to include the two measures which obtained the most hits on my search, the Marital Interaction Coding System (MICS) and the Specific Affect Coding System (SPAFF), both of which obtained more than 10 hits in the last decade. These two are the most consistently mentioned measures in the literature and, according to Table 3; the next observational measure mentioned (Couples Interaction Scoring System) received only 5 hits.

When one compares their hit count to the others, their use seems minute compared to the use of the DAS, or even ENRICH; however, two reasons justify their inclusion in this analysis. First of all, their seeming lack of popularity is primarily due to the cost (both in time and money) associated with using these measures (L'Abate & Bagarozzi, 1993). In contrast to self-report measures, their popularity is limited somewhat by expense. Consequently, 20 hits for a behavioral measure cannot exactly compare to a larger number of hits for a self-report measure.

Second, proponents of behavioral observation measures point out that in spite of their cost, they have a very different perspective on marital interaction – one that couples may or may not notice (and therefore may or may not report) and one may therefore more accurately measure the success or failure of the relationship (see Gottman, 1999). Given these two reasons, it seemed prudent to include these two measures in the analysis.

All measures used for the ensuing analysis are denoted by an asterisk in Table 3. Below, I list each of the measure and briefly describe the measure and its context in the literature.

Measures Included in the Analysis

The Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS)

In 1976, Spanier, in hopes of addressing some of the methodological problems to which other measures of marriage were subject – including the MAT, described below – developed the DAS. The DAS is in part meant to "assess the quality of adjustment in marital relationships" as well as other relational dyads (p. 15). It is by far the most often used measure today, both in marital research and in the development of other measures, receiving 442 hits for the last decade (see, for example, Schumm, Paff-Bergen, Hatch, Obiorah, Copeland, Meens et al., 1986).

ENRICH Marital Satisfaction Scale (EMS)

The ENRICH Inventory (evaluation and nurturing relationship issues, communication, and happiness) is a large measure designed to measure differing dimensions of marital interaction. One item from each of the ten dimensions was added to a five-item Idealistic Distortion scale to create the EMS (Fowers & Olson, 1993). The EMS is one of only a few marital measures that have readily available national norms and is "administered to thousands of couples seeking marital therapy or enrichment every year" (p. 178). Another unique feature of

the EMS is that it presents with a positive couple agreement score, designed to provide a dyadic measurement by measuring the couple as a unit. It received the second most number of hits, 96 in the last decade.

The Locke-Wallace Marital Adjustment Test (MAT)

The MAT was intended to be a "short, but reliable, and valid, marital-adjustment [test]" in contrast to the longer tests which had, up to the point at which it was written, been in use (Locke & Wallace, 1959, p. 251). After its development, it quickly became the most widely used measure in the marital sciences (Snyder, 1979). While its use has declined somewhat in recent years (see Table 3), it is still one of the most often used measures and has played an important role in the development of other measures, obtaining 66 hits in the last decade (see, for example, Snyder, 1979; Roach, Frazier, & Bowden, 1981; Gottman & Krokoff, 1989).

Marital Satisfaction Inventory (MSI)

The Marital Satisfaction Inventory received 62 hits in the last decade. It was developed in part in reaction to other measures, such as the MAT and the DAS, criticized as assessing "not the marital relationship itself, but rather individual adjustment to that relationship" (Snyder, 1979, p. 814). The measure was intended to address this problem. The measure includes eleven different scales, including a global affective scale, a validity scale, and nine scales measuring specific dimensions of marital interaction. Of the eleven scales, I will be using the global affective scale, entitled the Global Distress Scale.

Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale (KMS)

The KMS is meant to be "a valid but briefer measure" of marital adjustment (Schumm et al., 1986, p. 381). Relatively later to come on the scene, the three-item KMS has become a

frequently used measure in the marital sciences, primarily because of its short nature combined with its validity. It received 53 hits in the last decade.

Specific Affect Coding System (SPAFF)

The SPAFF is a behavioral coding system used to identify distressed couples based on their behavior. Based on the empirical findings of several researchers, Gottman and Krokoff (1989) concluded that negative interactions are far more prevalent in unhappily married couples. The SPAFF was designed to "[separate] the global category of negative interaction into its components to determine whether [certain 'negative' emotions are] in fact the key to understanding marital distress" (p. 47). In other words, the SPAFF is used specifically to identify key negative behaviors most associated with those couples whose marriages are most likely to end in divorce. The SPAFF received 20 hits.

Marital Interaction Coding System (MICS)

The MICS began as an observational coding system for families with problem children (L'Abate & Bagarozzi, 1993). In 1970, it evolved into a coding system used for marital interaction and quickly became the most statistically sound and popular behavioral measure of marital interaction. It is used primarily to code the behaviors of married couples according to a system meant to determine whether the couple's behavior is like that of a well-adjusted or maladjusted couple. Its categories focus both on the behavior and the verbal and nonverbal affect of a couple (Weiss & Heyman, 1990). The MICS received 14 hits in the last decade.

These seven measures will provide the data for my analysis, which will be described in detail in the next chapter.

METHOD AND ANALYSIS

In this chapter, I present the analysis of those measures discussed in the previous chapter. This is an ontological analysis, drawing upon the two contrasting ontologies which I described in chapter two, abstractionism, or weak relationality, and strong relationality. I begin this chapter by describing the manner in which I performed the analysis, or the method, called contrasting relations. My methodological description includes a description of how I use the contrasting ontologies to understand the underlying assumptions of the measures. After describing the method, I give an account of the actual analysis. As I stated previously, I am analyzing the content, the process, and the practice of the measures, so this section is divided into three parts. Within each section, self-report measures and behavioral observation systems are analyzed separately. The contents of this analysis should indicate to the reader whether a weak relationality is at the foundation of the outcome measures most often used by marital scientists, or whether marital scientists are using measures that truly assume a strong relationality.

Method: Contrasting Relations

The method used in this analysis is called a contrasting relations approach, but it is better known historically as the dialectical method. The basic idea is to understand ideas and assumptions underlying the measure by comparing them to contrasting ideas; that is, by understanding what the current underlying ideas and assumptions are not. Relations of similarity are also analyzed, but the analysis here requires distinguishing between ontological conceptions that are often taken-for-granted or given axiomatic status. As Rychlak (1981) and Slife (2004) contend, “hidden assumptions” are not visible or made “alive” to us by describing what they are like (similarity relations). With axiomatic assumptions, similarity relations are often experienced

as statements of fact or “the way things are,” rather than statements of assumptions or points of view. Consequently, contrasting relations are pivotal to assumptive analyses, especially deeply rooted presuppositions, such as ontological conceptions. Indeed, when educators of critical thinking advocate the development of alternative assumptions, it is primarily with this function of contrasting relations in mind (e.g., Brookfield, 1987).

This is not a new approach to understanding. Indeed, it is at least as old as the ancient Greek philosophers (Rychlak, 1981). Socrates used contrasting (dialectical) relations to come to an understanding of truth. He believed that we should subject all of our notions – our opinions or beliefs about what is true – to criticism (Seeskin, 1987). Doing so “requires that two voices be heard,” one countering the other (p. 1). Plato employed a similar dialectic in his dialogues, where he reveals his philosophy not through demonstration, but through conversations between opposing parties. Contrasting ideas pitted against one another enable the reader to make her own judgments between the ideas by virtue of the ideas’ relation to one another.

More modern philosophers have also depended on contrasting relations in their philosophies. Hegel is somewhat famous for his use of the dialectic in his account of history (Robinson, 1995). His method of understanding the progress of history begins with a “thesis,” which is then countered by its “antithesis.” For Hegel, understanding something required knowing not just what it is, but also what it is not (Low, 1987). Getting to truth, then, follows this process of confrontation of ideas, “in which the reality of one point of view is shown from the refutation of an earlier point of view” (Williams, 1987, p. 4). In other words, as with Socrates, truth is arrived through contrasting opposing ideas with one another.

Marx also employed contrasting relations in his *Capital*, where instead of offering a set of definitions, concepts associated with his philosophy were defined by their relation to the whole (Low, 1987). For example, Marx explains "commodity" by tracing its development through its many historical forms (i.e., what "commodity" has meant historically in contrast to what it means today), as well as the concept itself in contrasting relation to the totality of concepts from which it derives its identity (such as "property" or "labor"). The method itself focused on the whole, or on "relations and connections" (p. 190). This type of oppositional thinking will be the foundation of my method. I will, in essence, put contrasting ideas next to one another, in hopes of understanding and refining each concept. Doing so, I believe, is the best way to understand underlying assumptions – particularly ontological assumptions, given their hidden nature. As I mentioned above, ontological assumptions can seem like common sense, and if they are not contrasted with other ontological perspectives, it is sometimes difficult to understand "common sense" as anything other than fact.

My own use of the dialectic has characteristics unique to this dissertation. I draw in part on the method used by Whoolery (2004). I begin by carefully evaluating the content of the measures. By this, I mean to say the actual meanings of the items used to make up the measures. In evaluating the content, I first identify the assumptions that likely led to the inclusion of the content. Part of identifying the assumptions involves looking for themes in the data – in this case, the measures' items – that characterize the different items. These themes both organize the data and assist in the analysis, helping to illuminate how the content was conceptualized. I then briefly describe an alternative way to conceptualize the content, drawing on an alternative ontology as a contrast to and clarification of the current underlying ontology. In the case of this

dissertation, these opposing assumptions originate either in a weak or a strong relationality, which I described in chapter 2. In other words, I evaluate the measures based on whether weakly or strongly relational assumptions are being made in the content. If weak relational assumptions are made, I attempt to show that by contrasting what the content would look like had strong relational assumptions been made, and vice versa. In sum, I use the following steps in completing the analysis:

1) Identify the assumptions underlying the inclusion of specific content in the measures, by identifying themes into which each item falls;
2) Contrast the themes and assumptions with alternative assumptions, specifically by offering examples of how the content would change or be different by making the alternative assumptions;
3) Draw conclusions about the general assumptions being made through the use of their meaning content, based on the contrasting relations in the first two steps.

I follow these same steps for both the process and practice of each measure. By process, I mean the organizational development and structure of the measure; by practice, I mean how the measure is used practically by researchers and clinicians in the marital sciences. In sum, in this chapter I look carefully at the content, process, and practice of each measure identified in chapter 3 to analyze which assumptions underlie the measures. I draw upon the two categories of ontological assumptions – weak relationality and strong relationality – to frame the analysis. I anticipate that most of the assumptions being made will fit within the framework of either a weak or a strong relationality, though it is possible that elements of the content, process, or practice do not fit either ontology. Most scholarship on ontological assumptions stresses the prevalence, if

not exclusive hold, of abstractionist ontologies on western culture and academia, often with only a “dash” of strong relationality here and there (e.g., Taylor, 1989). Even materialism, perhaps the most popular ontology currently, is a type of abstractionism because it takes no account of context. Still, if I find conceptions that seem to fit with neither category of ontology, I will note them and explore them. Otherwise, my primary purpose will be to identify the weak or strong relational assumptions which underlie the measures.

Content Analysis

The purpose of this section is to present an analysis of the content of the measures delineated in chapter 3. Because the content of self-report measures differs so much from the content of behavioral measures, this section is divided into two parts. In the first part, I deal exclusively with the content of the five self-report measures, including the Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale (KMS), the Locke-Wallace Marital Adjustment Test (MAT), the ENRICH Marital Satisfaction Scale (EMS), the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS), and the Global Distress Scale of the Marital Satisfaction Index (MSI). In the second part, I deal exclusively with the content of the behavioral measures, the Marital Interaction Coding System (MICS) and the Specific Affect Coding System (SPAFF).

Self-report Content

The content of the self-report measures is listed in its entirety in Table 4. Each individual measure is listed with its respective items listed in the order they appear on the measure itself. The exception is the MSI, which lists only those items in the Global Distress Scale along with the numbering of each of the item. Each item on Table 4 has also listed next to it its scoring value. That is, the numbers that appear next to the items are actual values that an administrator

would award to that particular response. This would mean in some cases different points for similar answers on different items. For example, if a respondent were to answer “Always Agree” on MAT5, she would be awarded 5 points; if she answers “Always Agree” on MAT6, she would be awarded 15 points. The first four measures are scored quantitatively, so each item has next to it the numerical scores for each respective response. The final measure listed in Table 4 – the MSI – consists of dichotomous items, requiring either a true or false response. On Table 4, I have listed for these items the coded response, or that response which adds to the final score of the respondent.

Table 4

Self-Report Measures Analyzed

Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale

Item	Extremely Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied	Somewhat Dissatisfied	Mixed	Somewhat Satisfied	Very Satisfied	Extremely Satisfied
1. How satisfied are you with your marriage?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2. How satisfied are you with your husband as a spouse?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3. How satisfied are you with your relationship with your husband?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Marital Adjustment Test

1. Check the dot on the scale 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.

	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

Table 4 (cont.)

Marital Adjustment Test (cont.)

4. Demonstration 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 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)?

ENRICH Marital Satisfaction Scale

Items	Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree
(+) 1. My partner and I understand each other perfectly.	1	2	3	4	5
(-) 2. I am not pleased with the personality characteristics and personal habits of my partner.	1	2	3	4	5

Table 4 (cont.)

ENRICH Marital Satisfaction Scale (cont.)					
(+) 3. I am very happy with how we handle role responsibilities in our marriage.	1	2	3	4	5
(+) 4. My partner completely understands and sympathizes with my every mood.	1	2	3	4	5
(-) 5. I am not happy about our communication and feel my partner does not understand me.	1	2	3	4	5
(+) 6. Our relationship is a perfect success.	1	2	3	4	5
(+) 7. I am very happy about how we make decisions and resolve conflicts.	1	2	3	4	5
(-) 8. I am unhappy about our financial position and the way we make financial decisions.	1	2	3	4	5
(-) 9. I have some needs that are not being met by our relationship.	1	2	3	4	5
(+) 10. I am very happy with how we manage our leisure activities and the time we spend together.	1	2	3	4	5
(+) 11. I am very pleased about how we express affection and relate sexually.	1	2	3	4	5
(-) 12. I am not satisfied with the way we each handle our responsibilities as parents.	1	2	3	4	5
(+) 13. I have never regretted my relationship with my partner, not even for a moment.	1	2	3	4	5
(-) 14. I am dissatisfied about our relationship with my parents, in-laws, and/or friends.	1	2	3	4	5

Table 4 (cont.)

Dyadic Adjustment Scale

Most persons have disagreement in their relationships. Please indicate below the approximate extent of agreement of disagreement between you and your partner for each item on the following list.

Item	Always Agree	Almost Always Agree	Occasionally Disagree	Frequently Disagree	Almost Always Disagree	Always Disagree
1. Handling family finances	5	4	3	2	1	0
2. Matters of recreation	5	4	3	2	1	0
3. Religious matters	5	4	3	2	1	0
4. Demonstration of affection	5	4	3	2	1	0
5. Friends	5	4	3	2	1	0
6. Sex relations	5	4	3	2	1	0
7. Conventionality (correct or proper behavior)	5	4	3	2	1	0
8. Philosophy of life	5	4	3	2	1	0
9. Ways of dealing with parents or in-laws	5	4	3	2	1	0
10. Aims, goals, and things believed important	5	4	3	2	1	0
11. Amount of time spent together	5	4	3	2	1	0
12. Making major decisions	5	4	3	2	1	0
13. Household tasks	5	4	3	2	1	0
14. Leisure time interests and activities	5	4	3	2	1	0
15. Career decisions	5	4	3	2	1	0
	All the time	Most of the time	More often than not	Occasionally	Rarely	Never
16. How often do you discuss or have you considered divorce, separation, or terminating your relationship?	0	1	2	3	4	5

Table 4 (cont.)

Dyadic Adjustment Scale (cont.)						
17. How often do you or your mate leave the house after a fight?	0	1	2	3	4	5
18. In general, how often do you think that things between you and your partner are going well?	0	1	2	3	4	5
19. Do you confide in your mate?	0	1	2	3	4	5
20. Do you ever regret that you married? (*or lived together)*	0	1	2	3	4	5
21. How often do you and your partner quarrel?	0	1	2	3	4	5
22. How often do you and your mate "get on each other's nerves?"	0	1	2	3	4	5

	Every Day	Almost Every Day	Occasionally	Rarely	Never
23. Do you kiss your mate?	4	3	2	1	0

	All of them	Most of them	Some of them	Very few of them	None of them
24. Do you and your mate engage in outside interests together?	4	3	2	1	0

How often would you say the following events occur between you and your mate?

	Never	Less than once a month	Once or twice a month	Once or twice a week	Once a day	More often
25. Have a stimulating exchange of ideas	0	1	2	3	4	5
26. Laugh together	0	1	2	3	4	5
27. Calmly discuss something	0	1	2	3	4	5
28. Work together on a project	0	1	2	3	4	5

Table 4 (cont.)

Dyadic Adjustment Scale (cont.)

These are some things about which couples sometimes agree and sometimes disagree. Indicate if either item below caused differences of opinions or were problems in your relationship during the past few weeks. (check yes or no)

	Yes	No
29. Being too tired for sex.	0	1
30. Not showing love.	0	1

31. The dots on the following line represent different degrees of happiness in your relationship. The middle point, "happy," represents the degree of happiness in most relationships. Please circle the dot which best describes the degree of happiness, all things considered, of your relationship.

0	1	2	3	4	5	6
*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Extremely Unhappy	Fairly Unhappy	A Little Unhappy	Happy	Very Happy	Extremely Happy	Perfect

32. Which of the following statements best describes how you feel about the future of your relationship?

5 I want desperately for my relationship to succeed, and *would go to almost any length* to see that it does.

4 I want very much for my relationship to succeed, and *will do all I can* to see that it does.

3 I want very much for my relationship to succeed, and *will do my fair share* to see that it does.

2 It would be very nice if my relationship succeeded, but *I can't do much more than I am doing now* to help it succeed.

1 It would be nice if it succeeded, but *I refuse to do any more than I am doing now* to keep the relationship going.

0 My relationship can never succeed, and *there is no more that I can do* to keep the relationship going.

Table 4 (cont.)

Global Distress (GDS)

Item Number and Full Text	Coded Response
16. There are many things about our relationship that please me.	F
18. Even when I am with my partner, I feel lonely much of the time.	T
21. Our relationship has been very satisfying.	F
24. The good things in our relationship far outweigh the bad.	F
27. Two people should be able to get along better than my partner and I do.	T
30. Our relationship is as successful as any that I know of.	F
35. I have often considered asking my partner to go with me for relationship counseling.	T
53. Our relationship has been disappointing in several ways.	T
55. My partner and I have never come close to ending our relationship.	F
58. I get pretty discouraged about our relationship sometimes.	T
61. My partner and I seldom have major disagreements.	F
64. I have never felt better in our relationship than I do now.	F
67. The future of our relationship is too uncertain for us to make any serious plans.	T
72. My partner and I are happier than most of the couples I know.	F
90. I have important needs in our relationship that are not being met.	T
92. At times I have very much wanted to leave my partner.	T
95. There are some serious difficulties in our relationship.	T
98. I might be happier if I weren't in this relationship.	T
101. I have often wondered whether our relationship may end in separation or divorce.	T
104. I believe that our relationship is as pleasant as that of most people I know.	F
109. I have known very little unhappiness in our relationship.	F
128. I believe that our relationship is reasonably happy.	F

I should note that meaning content is also decided by item "scoring." The way in which each item is scored by the administrator of the measure has implications for the content underlying the item itself. For example, if an affirmative response to an item asking "Are you honest" is awarded a better score, then honesty is valued. If, on the other hand, a negative response is awarded a better score, dishonesty is valued above honest. Consequently, I will make reference to the instrument's prescribed scoring of the items as I narrate the content analysis. As I mentioned above, Table 4 includes this scoring for each item. Note that for every measure, except the MSI, higher scores represent "better" scores (a "better" score on the MSI is actually a lower score; see Snyder, 1979), and for those employing the measures, better scores represent better marriages.

As I prepared for this portion of the analysis, I noted that the content of many of the items were highly related. These relationships suggested themes that are actually quite common in psychology, namely affect, cognition, and behavior. That is, each of the items seemed to inquire into the affect, cognition, or behavior of the individual to which the measure is administered. These themes have been used frequently in psychology as a way of organizing psychological phenomena (e.g., Kosslyn & Rosenbern, 2004), so these basic themes should not be especially controversial in organizing these meanings. I used these three themes to organize the content and classify each item into one of these categories. In the affect category, I have placed each item that seems to inquire primarily into the affect, or the feelings and emotions of the married respondent. In the cognition category, I have placed each item that seems to inquire primarily into various cognitions, or the thoughts or beliefs the respondent might have about marriage. And

in the behavior category, I have placed questions which inquire primarily into specific behaviors, or those actions taken or considered by each married respondent.

Again, I was alert to any exceptions. If an item fit none of these categories, I noted it, and if an item fit more than one category, I put it in all the relevant categories. In Table 5, I have listed each of the three categories, as well as the various items included from each measure listed under its respective category. The category label also has a cross-listing symbol next to it which is used to indicate items in other categories that might also fit in the first category. For instance, I have categorized EMS10 under affect, but it might also fit in the behavior category. Therefore, I have noted the 10 in the EMS row with an asterisk, referring the reader to the behavior category also noted by the asterisk. Notice that several items fit into more than one category. Below, I include a more detailed description of the category in its respective section, as well as an explanation for the inclusion of each of the items. I will refer to Table 5 in this explanation, providing a justification for my inclusion of the various items in their respective categories.

Table 5

Categories and their Respective Items

Affect[+]

Measure	Items												
DAS	16[‡]	17	18[‡]	22	31	32							
MAT	1												
EMS	2	3	4[‡]	5	7	8	9	10*	11	12	13[‡]	14	15[‡]
KMS	1	2	3										
MSI	16	18	21	24[‡]	53	58	64	72	90	98	104	109	128[‡]

Cognitive[‡]

Measure	Items																	
DAS	1	2	3	4[+]	5	6[+]	7	8	9	10	11*	12	13	14	15	20[+]	29[+]	30[+]
MAT	2	3	4[+]	5	6[+]	7	8	9	10	13[+]	14[+]							
EMS	1	6																
KMS																		
MSI	27[+]	30[+]	35	61	67	92	95	101										

Behavioral*

Measure	Items						
DAS	19	23	24	25	26	27[+]	28
MAT	11	12[‡]	15				
EMS							
KMS							
MSI	55						

Affect

The first category is labeled “affect.” Each item within this category inquires into the feelings or emotionality of the person to whom the measure is administered. As we see below, this includes items that almost exclusively purport to measure feelings such as satisfaction and happiness, insofar as the emotions affect the marriage. This section includes a large percentage of all items, as noted in Table 5, including several other items cross-listed in other categories.

As I performed the analysis of these items, I noted that the meanings of the items could be grouped into four main themes. The four themes here identified help to capture the various emphases on meanings implied by the “Affect” items, their wording and their scoring. Under the first theme, entitled “Emphasis on Affect,” I discuss the meanings which seem to drive the emphasis placed on affect by these items. The second theme, which is called “The Role of Context,” I discuss how the items deal with the context of the affect and of marriage. The third theme I have entitled “Emphasis on Self” wherein I investigate the role of the self implied by the items, and whether the emphasis on the self suggests a weak or strong relationality. And finally, the forth theme, I demonstrate the emphasis placed on self by these items. Under the final theme, “Instrumental or Responsible Relating,” I discuss whether the meanings driving the content of the “Affect” items suggest an “instrumental” or a “responsible” approach to relating, based on the distinction I made between instrumentalism and responsible relating in Chapter Two.

Emphasis on Affect. The first meaning emerges when one considers the emphasis placed on affect. One can see clearly how this emphasis plays out in both the KMS and the EMS. The KMS, with only three questions, is entirely composed of items which inquire into the individual’s satisfaction (with the marriage, the spouse, and the relationship with the spouse; see

Table 4). Likewise, the EMS is also almost entirely "Affect" items, using key words such as "happy" (items 3, 5, 7, & 10), "unhappy" (item 8), "pleased" (items 2 &11), "satisfied" (items 12 & 14), and "feel good" (item 15) to understand the emotional response of each person in respect to his or her marriage. Other measures include items which use similar terms (e.g., DAS31, MAT1, MSI 72 & 98 use happy or happiness). In all cases, those which are considered positive emotions (e.g., happiness, satisfaction, or pleased, as opposed to unhappy or dissatisfied) score better. In other words, the happier or more satisfied one is in marriage, the better one scores, particularly on the KMS or EMS, which then supposedly translates into a better marriage. What are valued above all by these items are the good feelings of the couple.

Recall that a key feature of weak relationality was atomism. As the atomized self is fundamentally independent of others, he or she is often also considered the origin of the good – in this case the good marriage. That is, the good marriage depends from this perspective on the good of the isolated, atomized self. As no morality exists beyond what is self-contained, the good from this perspective is often assumed to be the "positive" experiences of the self, often expressed in personal emotionality (see Slife & Richardson, 2008). Valuing positive, private emotions is a sign of weak relationality. That is, a weak relationality would likely assume that the positive individual emotions are a key indication of the good marriage, which seems to be the case with several of the affect items.

Had a strong relationality been assumed in the writing of these items, they certainly would not focus on the positive affect of the individual. The strong relationist contends that happiness and personal satisfaction do not necessarily indicate a good marriage, but that the good marriage can be characterized by both positive *and* negative emotions. Consider for example, a

marriage in which personal illness – perhaps even a terminal illness – has become an issue. This marriage might require one spouse to sacrifice much of her time and efforts in taking care of the afflicted. If the good of this marriage requires this type of sacrificing, it is possible that happiness might be given up or play a rather limited role. Thus asking this couple how good they feel or how satisfied they are might be to misunderstand the goodness of the marriage. Consider, on the other hand, a perfectly healthy husband, who might spend several hours of his life in the brothel while all the while cultivating a poor marriage at home, all for the sake of his happiness. His marriage is poor *in spite of* his happiness.

The origin of the good for the strong relationist would not be the atomized individual, but the relationship itself. In this case, "marital satisfaction" would have less to do with the individual's satisfaction and more to do with how satis*factory* the *marriage itself* is. Individual emotionality (satisfaction) is here replaced by moral quality (satisfactory). In fact, many strong relationists do not believe in a private, subjective sphere of evaluation at all (e.g., Gergen, 2009). Because this evaluation is relational, and thus shared, the criteria of evaluation are moral or ethical criteria about the quality of a good marriage. Evaluation is no longer a personal preference (with no external criteria) but rather a shared assessment of the common good (with reference to the criteria of the community). Thus, the items' focus on happiness and satisfaction would change to a focus on the good of the marriage, reading, for example, "How good is your marriage?" rather than "How satisfied are you with your marriage?" (KMS1) and "How good is your relationship with your husband?" rather than "How satisfied are you with your husband as a spouse?" (KMS2). In this way, the items would evaluate the *relationship* as opposed to just the affect of the individual.

Role of Context. Emphasizing positive affect as a key indicator of the good marriage also tends to remove the marriage from its context, another key indication of weak relationality. This can be demonstrated by considering not just how positive affect is viewed, but also negative affect. Consider the several negatively scored items in the DAS, the EMS, and the MSI. Examples include DAS22, which asks "How often do you and your mate 'get on each other's nerves,'" EMS8, which reads "I am unhappy about our financial position and the way we make financial decisions," and MSI53, which reads "Our relationship has been disappointing in several ways." By scoring these items negatively, it is assumed that the marriage is not only *good* when positive affect is pervasive, but it is *bad* when negative affect is present.

Not all good marriages can be determined simply by considering levels of positive or negative affect. Consider the couple with the terminally ill husband I mentioned above. In administering to the husband, the wife might feel quite disappointed about the marriage: that it has not turned out how it should have, that it is a lot harder than she thought it would be, or that death might end it soon. But this negative affect (disappointment) could very well indicate the fact that her marriage is good. The mere fact that she had hopes that it would turn out better indicate that her relationship with her husband before the illness was at *least* promising, if not good. But her disappointment might also evidence her willingness to stay with him and nurture him, another possible indication of a good marriage. Simply calling "negative affect" bad would ignore the potential goodness of this particular marriage.

Contrast the universal undesirability of negative affect implied by these items with the strong relationist's approach to this particular situation. Rather than de-contextualizing the relationship, the strong relationist must take the greater context into account and consider

whether “goodness” is achieved even in the face of disappointment. Were the items based instead on strong relational assumptions, they would not necessarily cast negative affect in such a bad light. Indeed, the items would acknowledge that negative affect *could* be in the best interest of the marriage, or in the interest of the shared good, which interest is the focus of strong relationality.

Let us return to the couple above, the wife of which might feel considerable negative affect given the context of her marriage. If the wife were to respond affirmatively to MSI53 (“Our relationship has been disappointing in several ways”), her response would not automatically garner a poor score from a strongly relational perspective. Instead, the item might be followed up with a question that would put her response in context. For example, one might follow up with items such as “How does your disappointment reflect on the goodness of our marriage?” or “How does you disappointment contribute to or detract from the moral quality of your relationship?” These new items are contextually specific for the couple and allow for negative affect to actually be good for the marriage, or at least indicate to the couple that it arises because the marriage is good.

Consider another example: EMS8 inquires into how happy one is with one’s financial situation. If one is unhappy with one’s financial situation, then the individual scores low and therefore (automatically) has a poorer marriage than one who is happy with their situation. Again, the item fails to take account of the couple’s context. It is possible that one’s unhappiness (negative affect) about a financial position may actually be *good* for the marriage if it leads to a discussion about change in finances. Indeed, without the negative affect, the marriage might ultimately founder in financial ruin. Unfortunately, asking simply if one is unhappy about a

couple's financial situation will not indicate whether that unhappiness actually indicates a good marriage – or at least a commitment to the good of the marriage.

EMS8 as it stands assumes a weak relationality, as it de-contextualizes that marriage and simply assumes that unhappiness about finances will make a marriage worse. But as I said previously, "happiness" and "goodness" are not necessarily the same thing when it comes to evaluating marriages. For that reason, the strong relationist is concerned with understanding the marriage contextually. If a "happy" marriage is to be a part of a strongly relational assessment, then the examiner must understand the role of that happiness in contributing to or detracting from the moral quality or shared good of the marriage. This might be done by leaving the item worded as it is, but would again require following it up with an inquiry into the role that happiness plays in the goodness of the marriage. These questions would of course depend upon the particular couple, but might read something like the following: "Does this happiness (or unhappiness) move you toward a better marriage?" Again, the focus of the strong relationist would not be on the decontextualized affect, but on the good marriage, to which the affect can – and should – contribute. In this way, a strong relationality is assumed.

Emphasis on Self. Maintaining positive affect as a key marker of a good marriage also seems to imply that self-interest is being valued, another indication of weak relationality. The three items that make up the KMS demonstrate this emphasis, asking "How satisfied are *you*" with your marriage, spouse, etc (emphasis added). The focus on the individual seems to imply not only that positive affect is valued, but also *private* affect. Asking how satisfied one is with marriage, as these items do, would make sense from a weakly relational perspective because

one's primary concern is the interest of the self, and the marriage is intended to serve one's individual interest.

This point is made clearer when one considers the language of the EMS and the MSI, several items of which ask whether the individual is "pleased," "happy," or "satisfied" with various aspects of the marriage, always inquiring into the *individual's private* emotion. For example, EMS5 reads "*I* am not happy about our communication," EMS7 reads "*I* am very happy about how we make decisions," and EMS15 reads "*I* feel very good about how we practice religion" (emphasis added in each). Indeed, 12 of the 15 items on the EMS begin with "I," followed by the emphasis on affect discussed above. 8 of the 13 affect items on the MSI combine the emphasis on affect with a focus on the self in a similar way, along with the three items making up the KMS. The primary concern from the perspective of these items is that the *individual* is experiencing good or positive feelings. The interest is in the self, not in the relationship, a key indicator of weak relationality.

The weak relationality being assumed by these items will be made clearer using the contrasting relations approach. The focus from a strong relational perspective will again be the relational quality or moral goodness of the marriage. The strong relationist might therefore inquire into the goodness of one's co-actions with the other as a spouse, and whether those actions are good for the marriage – a *relational*-interest in contrast to a *self*-interest. For example, EMS5 might read "Our communication as a couple is good for the marriage;" likewise, EMS7 might read "How we make decisions is good for the marriage," and EMS15 might read "How we practice religion is good for the marriage." In this way, the items avoid focusing simply on the self's interest and focus instead on understanding the quality of the marriage. In this way, the

items can avoid the weak relational assumptions that exist as a consequence of focusing on personal, private affect.

One item appears to inquire into relational-interest, a possible exception to weak relationality. DAS32 asks, “Which of the following statements best describes how you feel about the future of your relationship?” with the responses ranging from “I want desperately for my relationship to succeed, and *would go to almost any length* to see that it does,” through “I want very much for my relationship to succeed, and *will do my fair share* to see that it does,” to finally “My relationship can never succeed, and *there is no more I can do* to keep the relationship going” (emphases in original). This set of meanings could be interpreted as either weakly relational or strongly relational. One could say that the various responses measure how committed the person is to seeing that the relationship succeeds, which could be interpreted as a strong relational bent – as relational-interest rather than self-interest. For example, it seems possible for one, in responding to this item, to be willing to endure “negative affect” for the sake of seeing that the relationship succeeds. Unfortunately, given the tenor of the other items, and the individual-focused wording of this item, it seems unlikely it would be read this way. In other words, the surrounding context of this one item is likely to have some bearing on its interpretation. It is also possible, in other words, that making a relationship “work” means making the relationship into one that brings the positive affect so coveted in the other items, in which case even in responding to this item one embraces weakly relational assumptions.

Instrumental or Responsible Relating. So we see that most affect items make weak relational assumptions, generally through the de-contextualizing of the marriage or by emphasizing self-interest. One more important point ought to be raised. Recall that in chapter

two, I discussed instrumentalism as a characteristic of weak relationality. Assuming affect, particularly personal affect, to be paramount in a good marriage can easily lead one to assume instrumentalism, as he might begin to believe that the purpose or goal of marriage is to bring him happiness. In other words, he might see marriage as an instrument, rather than as an end. The fact that the items in this category place so much emphasis on individual positive affect should indicate that this particular facet of weak relationality is at least implicit in these items. But we also see that it is also somewhat *explicit*.

Consider EMS9, which reads "I have some needs *not being met* by our relationship" (emphasis added). Wording the item in this way implies that the relationship *ought* to meet individual needs. That this item is scored lower when responded to affirmatively suggests that the individual's needs are valued *above* the needs of the relationship. The strong relationist would not be so concerned about the needs of the individual being met as the needs of the relationship, wording this particular item something like, "I am not meeting the needs of my relationship" or "The needs of the relationship are not being met," with affirmation yielding a worse score. Instead, an instrumental language is being used, making marriage not the end, but instead an instrument in the service of the individual, thus assuming a weak relationality.

Consider also MAT1, which when inquiring into the happiness of the individual's marriage, it asks the examinee to reply in the context of the happiness that most people "*get* from marriage" (emphasis added). This particular item is scored by far the highest among all items on the MAT (see Table 4), emphasizing not just that individual positive affect is highly valued, but also suggesting that marriage should above all be *instrumental* in achieving that affect (one ought to *get* happiness from marriage).

In contrast to the instrumentalism characteristic of a weak relationality, the strong relationist would be in favor of what was labeled in Chapter 2 *responsible relating*. From a strong relationality, one who has chosen to marry has simultaneously chosen to accept certain responsibilities associated with the good marriage, such as a commitment to the shared good, involving obligations to the culture and community wherein the marriage exists. Those responsibilities should mean putting the marriage before one's self-interest; that is, seeing the shared good of the marriage as the end, rather than the other way around. This is responsible relating. None of the items mentioned above seem to understand marriage in this way; instead, if any obligations are implied by the items above, they seem to be only to one's own happiness or satisfaction.

Using a contrasting relations approach, then, the items would need to value the good marriage as an end, not a means. Any "needs" not being met are of concern to the strong relationist if they are primarily needs of the marriage, explaining the rewording of EMS9 to "The needs of the relationship are not being met." Even more importantly, though, understanding whether a marriage is characterized by responsible relating necessitates first an understanding of the moral quality of the relationship. That is, there must be some way to first understand what the good marriage is, particular to the couple's context. Only with this understanding can the strong relationist presume to know how to evaluate the goodness or badness of any particular marriage.

Conclusion. Other than one unlikely exception (DAS32), the items in this category are clearly based on the weakly relational characteristics I identified in Chapter 2. Indeed, the four meanings implied by the items composing the affect category overwhelmingly point to all three characteristics mentioned in Chapter Two: atomism, implied by the focus on affect and the de-

contextualizing of the relationship; the emphasis on personal, positive affect evidences self-interest; and seeing marriage as a means to an individual end is explicitly instrumental.

Underlain with weakly relational assumptions, we can conclude that these items do not avoid individualism. Indeed, the individualism expressed by the wording and scoring of these items seems quite obvious. As I argued in Chapter Two, self-interest was the epitome of individualism, putting the individual above all else. Instrumentalism follows closely behind, as it parallels the utilitarian – and even the expressive – individualism discussed by Bellah and colleagues (1996). Even atomism assumes the fundamental autonomy of the individual, another key characteristic of individualism. A strongly relational approach would necessitate the overturning of all three of these assumptions, demanding first an understanding of the shared good of the marriage.

Cognition

The second category of items is called "Cognition" because each deals at some level with thoughts, ideas, or beliefs. As we will see below, the bulk of this category is made up of items that deal with a couple's agreement on these thoughts and beliefs. Other items deal with thoughts and beliefs about the relationship that are either supposed to be good or bad for the relationship. Cognition items make up another large part of the content (see Table 5).

As I did in my analysis of the affect items, I identify here the underlying assumptions or meanings that seem to drive the inclusion of the various items in this category. During the course of the analysis, the meanings seemed to group into four themes which emerged specifically from the data. These themes capture the various emphases on meanings implied by the "Cognition" items, their wording and their scoring. I develop these four themes below. The first section,

"Emphasis on Agreement," deals with the first theme and discusses how agreement is emphasized through the wording and scoring of the items. The second section is devoted to the second theme, "Agreement and the Role of Context," wherein I discuss how the items deal with the context of agreement and disagreement in marriage. In the third, called "The Couple in Context," I discuss the meaning of the context for the couples assumed by these items. And finally, the section entitled "Cognitive Appraisals and the Good," I deal with the items that presume to make cognitive appraisals, discussing what "good" and "bad" appraisals mean for the cognition items.

Emphasis on Agreement. In these items, there is a significant emphasis on agreement. For example, for items 2 through 9 on the MAT (8 of the 15), examinees are asked to "State the approximate extent of agreement or disagreement between you and your mate on the following items." Then follows different matters for which agreement is seen to be important in marriage, at least from the perspective of the measure, such as "Handling family finances" (MAT2), "Sex relations" (MAT6), or "Philosophy of life" (MAT8; see Table 4). The DAS has a similar section (the first 15 of the 32 items) devoted to agreement, quite similar in content, but adding other items on which couple's ought to agree, such as "Religious matters" (DAS3), "Aims, goals, and things believed important" (DAS10), and "Leisure time interests and activities" (DAS14; see Table 4). On all of these items, individuals score higher the more that they agree with their spouse. And as the couples score higher, their marriage is said to be better, thus demonstrating that agreement (at least on these issues) is valued over disagreement.

The emphasis on agreement in this category appears to point fairly strongly to a weak relationality. As I stated in Chapter 2, because of the atomistic assumptions of a weak

relationality, relationships must be created. No relationships exist already or naturally, so the only (or perhaps the best) way relationships can be built is thought to be through agreement, or agreement of internalized abstractions. Recall that a weak relationality is also called abstractionist ontology, because abstractions are the most fundamental. Indeed, as I stated in Chapter 2, abstractions are themselves dependent upon similarities, as they essentially unify all that is similar from a set of particularities. Relationships from a weak relationality occur only where these similarities occur. Thus it follows that a weak relationality would focus on a couple's similarities, indeed their atomized similarities, or how often they agree on specific abstractions.

Contrast this with the strong relationist approach, where relationships are fundamental. Because relationships are not created, but always and already exist, we can assume that any similarity *and* any difference we observe is part of that relationship. Thus it would be important for the strong relationist to understand *both* where the couple agrees *and* where they disagree. If a marital researcher were to just focus on where a couple agreed, and the couple has significant – even substantial – disagreements that were ignored or glossed over, the researcher could hardly claim to understand the *whole* of the marriage. The strong relationist's understanding of marriage is in this way more holistic, avoiding as much as possible the atomistic understanding of the weak relationist.

One way in which the strong relationist could do this would be to change how these items are scored. Instead of merely scoring the items better for more agreement, the scoring would need to be more open. For example, the items might provide space for the couple to respond about their experiences agreeing and disagreeing. For example, in responding to DAS3, which

inquires into agreement about “Religious Matters,” a couple might answer that they agree sometimes and disagree sometimes. The open scoring would allow for the couple to elaborate both the agreement and disagreement on religious matters, enabling the researcher to better understand the context – the whole – of the agreement and disagreement. In this way, the evaluator can get a more holistic picture of the relationship, and how similarities and differences constitute the relationship.

The trend of most of the items in this category is to emphasize agreement and, through ignoring it, to deemphasize disagreement. As I have argued, the weak relationist argues that agreement is the foundation of relationship and disagreement is more of a threat to marriage. Thus in emphasizing agreement and ignoring disagreement, these items are based on a weak relationality.

Agreement and the Role of Context. The role that context plays in these items is also revealed by looking at the agreement items. Consider MAT10, which states “When disagreements arise, they usually result in: husband giving in (scored as 0), wife giving in (scored as 2), agreement by mutual give and take (scored as 10).” There is no mention of the context of the disagreement (or the “agreement by mutual give and take,” for that matter); instead, agreement – no *matter* the context – is the *better* end of a disagreement. Similarly, MSI61 states “My partner and I seldom have major disagreements,” and is scored better when answered affirmatively. It is impossible, at least from the perspective of these two items, for disagreement to actually be *good* for the marriage.

But as I argued in Chapter Two, some agreements can be detrimental to the marriage, while some disagreements are not necessarily harmful for marriage. For example, agreeing to a

divorce, where “mutual give and take” epitomizes the distribution of material goods among the divorcees, would score a 10 on MAT10, but that agreement might be bad for the marriage (indeed, it might well *end* the marriage, often the mark of a failed or poor quality marriage). The strong relationist is not so much concerned about whether couples agree or disagree more, but whether their agreements and disagreements are good for the marriage. The context of the agreement needs to be taken into account before one can say whether it is good or bad for the marriage. The absence of any mention of context points to abstractionist assumptions in the formulation of these items.

It may appear that those items mentioned at the beginning of this section are more context specific (e.g., MAT8 – 15), thus overcoming the problems I raise here. After all, marital scientists will claim that marriages are not ruined by just any old disagreement. However, even these seemingly “context specific” items de-contextualize agreement to a large degree. Consider MAT3 (also DAS2), which asks how often couples agree in their matters of recreation. In one context, agreeing on matters of recreation might be ideal. For example, a couple might *agree* on going to the movies together once a week, a matter of recreation that might bring the couple together.

In another context, however, disagreeing might be better for the marriage. For example, a wife might be very musically inclined and wish, as a matter of recreation, to play for a local symphony; her husband might be somewhat athletic and wish to play softball in a local league. If the husband is musically inept and the wife has a difficult time throwing a softball, *agreeing* to participate together might make both uncomfortable and might even be impossible, a potentially counterproductive agreement. Similarly, deciding against participating in either of the activities

might lead one or the other (or both) to spite their spouse, which again might be counterproductive. On the other hand, it could be that the respective matters of recreation give each spouse some needed "down time," which might ultimately be in the best interest of the marriage. In this case, *disagreeing* might actually be better for the marriage.

Knowing whether differences and disagreements help or hurt the marriage will depend upon the context of the disagreement and the moral framework by which that context is judged. The items are neither worded nor scored in such a way as to take account of this moral framework. Instead, they simply value agreement as a key indication of a good marriage. Using the contrasting relations approach to understand this better, the strong relationist would at least need to take account of the context when asking whether a couple agrees or disagrees. In the example above, a discussion of recreation would likely be the best way to understand the two different couples, one of which agrees, the other which disagrees, on matters of recreation. MAT3, as well as the other items in this category, would need to be more open, enabling the couples to discuss the context of their agreement and disagreement, as well as encouraging the couple to consider the relational moral framework and the value of agreement or disagreement given that context.

By de-contextualizing agreement, the meanings of the cognition items seem again to imply a weak relationality. In abstracting agreement, the items fail to take into consideration the moral framework of agreement and disagreement. That is, they fail to consider the moral context of the couple in placing judgment upon agreement and disagreement.

The Couple in Context. It should also be pointed out that the valuing of (general, abstract) agreement over disagreement has another important implication: abstracting the couple from the

context of its family or community. Consider, for example, a couple who both *agree* on treating their parents and in-laws with immense disrespect (see DAS9; MAT9). While this agreement will help to categorize this marriage as a "good" one (because they agree), it is a marriage with no consideration toward the shared good of the couple's immediate context: their family. Likewise, a couple might agree on how to handle the family finances (see DAS1; MAT2) in such a way as to lead the couple to financial ruin. This is not only a potential threat to the marriage (see Waite & Gallagher, 2000), but it also a potential threat to the community: the couple's children might suffer, debtors might not get paid, and the state welfare system might have to bear a larger burden as a consequence, thus taking money from the pockets of other people in the community who may need it as much or more. The marriage, according to the DAS1 or MAT2, is a "good" marriage, though it seems to act contrary to the interest of any shared good. The same accusation can be made of almost all these agreement items; couples can agree on their friends (DAS5; MAT5), their philosophy of life (DAS8; MAT8), conventionalities (DAS7; MAT7), or career decisions (DAS15), and still neglect or even endanger the shared good of the community. Showing little concern for the wider social context of the marriage indicates weakly relational assumptions.

This point can be made clearer by contrasting these meanings with a strongly relational set of cognitive items. At the outset, the strong relationist is concerned with the moral quality of the marriage. By virtue of the couple's relationships to others in their immediate context, the moral quality of their marriage *depends* upon the couple's relationship to their family and community. The good marriage is a good shared by all community members. Ignoring this connection and assuming the couple is isolated (or atomized) from the community would be to

misunderstand the moral framework, and thus misunderstand the good marriage. So when asking about agreement and disagreement, the strong relationist is not only concerned with the immediate moral context of the couple, but whether the couple's agreement and disagreement contributes to the shared good of the community. An example of how one might do this would be to reword DAS9 to read "How are your dealings with your in-laws good for marriage?" Likewise, DAS1 might read, "How is your handling of the finances good or bad for the marriage?"

Notice the open-endedness of the rewritten items. The strong relationist recognizes that often the definition of the good marriage changes to some degree from couple to couple, especially when the context or culture of the particular couple is taken into account. Recall that in Chapter 2, I argued that determining the shared good of the couple necessitated a discussion of marriage in its moral context. This sort of discussion seems necessary here, before one can decide which agreements (or disagreements) are good for the relationship, and how. That is, researchers must first understand what the "good marriage" is for a particular couple, their community, and their culture before truly characterizing agreements and disagreements as good or bad. This good must above all be shared – by both the couple and the community. If a researcher's goal is to understand, from a strong relationality, whether a marriage is good or bad, then this sort of a discussion ought to be somehow induced through its items. Otherwise, the researcher will not know which agreements or disagreements are good or bad for the marriage.

In sum, we see also that the couple is also removed from their particular context, indeed their moral context. Their agreement or disagreement does not depend upon their moral context, and this de-contextualizing implies a weak relationality.

Cognitive Appraisals and the Good. A final point ought to be made concerning the role of context and the shared good in assessing marriage. Several items in this category deal primarily with what one might consider potentially damaging cognitions (EMS6; MSI27, 35, 67, 92 and 101). That is, cognitions that pose a potential threat to the marriage. These items inquire into differing cognitive appraisals concerning the marriage. Each item is scored such that they each value strictly those cognitions that reflect the spouse or the relationship positively. For example, MSI35 states "I have often considered asking my partner to go with me to relationship counseling." Answering "True" on this item yields a poor score, implying that thoughts about pursuing counseling are negative and thus bad for the relationship. But simply making blanket "positive" or "negative" evaluations about cognitions is assuming a weak relationality, as it again detaches the cognitions from the context of the relationship.

While it is likely true that these "negative" thoughts might indicate an unsatisfactory marriage, even marital distress, answering "True" does not mean that the marriage itself is bad. On the contrary, one who has thoughts about going to counseling might be demonstrating a commitment to the shared good, in which case answering true might indicate a good marriage. Reaching out to others in the community for help might also indicate that the couple sees their marriage as bigger than just themselves, seeing it as part of the larger context. But again, knowing whether a "True" answer indicates this commitment to the shared good requires first an understanding of the shared good, which understanding this item does not inquire into. And indeed, such is the case for the remainder of these "negative cognition" questions: to classify a cognition as "negative" is to assume it is negative in all circumstances, which is to essentially to neglect the context of those circumstances.

If we are to contrast the items as they are with how the items would be had a strong relationality been assumed, then we would see the items written or scored somewhat differently. For instance, MSI35 might still read the same, but the scoring would be open rather than closed. That is, an affirmative response would not be a priori considered negative, but would be followed up by an inquiry into why counseling had been considered. In responding to "why," a couple can reveal the context of the desire for counseling and a discussion can follow about how good or bad that consideration is for the marriage. While I have mentioned it previously, it bears repeating: from a strongly relational perspective, one needs to first have an understanding of the shared good or morality of the particular marriage before we can possibly decide whether these cognitions are truly negative. Rephrasing the items, or opening up the scoring as I suggest above, is one way to avoid the weak relationality being assumed by these particular "Cognition" items.

Thus we see that even these items that make cognitive appraisals do not avoid weak relationality, primarily because they make assumptions about a moral framework that applies to all couples, instead of a contextual morality that would change from couple to couple.

Conclusion. The four meanings identified in this category – the emphasis on agreement, agreement and role of context, the couple in context, and cognitive appraisals and the good – point to a weak relationality. Specifically, they seem to capitalize on atomism by abstracting individuals from one another and from their context, as well as abstracting couples as a dyadic unit from their context. Consequently, these items also fail to avoid individualism. Indeed, focusing on individual cognitions is itself a form of individualism, as it assumes the autonomy of the individual.

But we also see here that individual *couples* are also considered independent of the context, or of the shared good. While it seems the couples are being considered a single unit, the removal from context follows from individualistic assumptions (Bellah et al., 1996). One consequence of this de-contextualization is the isolation of couples "from the mass" of its community, which Bellah and colleagues argue is just as dangerous as liberal individualism (p. 112). Thus, ignoring the context as these items do fails once again to move away from individualism.

Behavior

The final category of self-report items deals with measures of behaviors associated with good or bad marriages. That is, they purport to measure various behaviors manifested by the couple. For example, a couple of behavior items inquire into steps taken toward ending the marriage, whereas others inquire into behaviors in which the couple has engaged together. These items make up a minority of items, most of which come from the DAS, with three items from the MAT and one item from MSI (see Table 5). Consequently, the ontological analysis of these items is considerably reduced over the previous two.

In analyzing these few items, the meanings of the items seemed to imply only a single theme, under which all of the behavior items fit. I have entitled the theme "Behavior and the Good." As we will see, the behavior items make assumptions about behaviors that are good for marriage and those that are bad. The question I address in the brief section is this: Is the good implied by these items one that appears to make weakly or strongly relational assumptions?

Behavior and the Good. The most frequent questions in this category are what I would call togetherness items; that is, items that inquire into how much time is spent together or

whether certain activities are completed together. They range from abstract, such as DAS24, which reads “Do you and your mate engage in outside interests together?” to more concrete, such as DAS23, which reads “Do you kiss your mate?” For both of these items (as well as the other behavior items) the couple scores better when engaging in the behaviors selected. Here again, a weak relationality is being assumed, as the specific behaviors selected (like the cognitions) are considered positive with no regard to the context.

Behaviors such as engaging in outside interests together or kissing may or may not indicate whether the marriage is good. The couple mentioned in the above section who engaged in different outside interests (softball and symphony) might have a good marriage, as I argued, though they might answer this item negatively. Similarly, another couple may kiss often but be so wrapped up in one another that they fail to acknowledge the whole, or the community, of which they are a part and neglect the shared good of the community, thus living in what a strong relationist might call a poor marriage.

Given the emphasis on contextuality in a strong relationality, it is difficult to make any general claims about marital quality such as those implied by these items. Instead, questions of which behaviors characterize a good or bad marriage would arise for the strong relationist only *after* the “good marriage” of a couple is considered, and/or when the moral context of the marriage is properly understood. That would mean understanding, for instance, that engaging in differing outside interests for one couple might actually be good for the marriage, while for others it might be harmful. Likewise, it would mean that understanding that kissing often, while a behavior often indicating good marriages, might occasionally indicate a weakness in the marriage of some. As I have repeated in the past two sections, the strong relationist will seek to

understand the couple's moral framework before they decide which behaviors will characterize the good marriage and which the bad. The items in the category fail to push for any such understanding, and consequently the behaviors are de-contextualized and imply a weak relationality.

Conclusion. As with the affect items and the cognition items, the behavior items also make weakly relational assumptions. Again, it is the main feature of abstractionism—the presumed acontextuality of the behavior—that indicates these assumptions. But as I allude to above, once the moral context of the couple is considered, the strong relationist might be able to make use of these behavioral items. If, for example, one understands certain behaviors as characterizing a couple's particular good marriage (assuming this is understood) then these items could be used as a way to detect those behaviors Indeed, something similar can be argued for many of the self-report items analyzed in this larger section here. I will discuss the strong relationist's potential use of these items in the next chapter. Suffice it to say, as they stand now – with no inquiry into the context of the marriage – the behavior items – as well as the affect and cognition items – overwhelmingly point to a weak relationality.

Behavioral Observation Content

This next section deals with the content of the Specific Affect Coding System (SPAFF) and the Marital Interaction Coding System (MICS), both behavioral observation coding systems. By coding systems, I mean a system of codes used to categorize behaviors observed by trained coders. In other words, using this measure requires that coders observe couples interacting, identifying the various behaviors manifested by couples and matching each with a specific code. As couples are not directly questioned by these measures, the content analyzed here consists of

the behaviors making up the coding systems; that is, those behaviors used by coders to categorize marriages. As with the self-report items, this analysis also includes the scoring, or coding, of the behaviors.

As we will see below, the content for these two measures is presented much differently than the self-report content. Consequently, the analysis is a little different, as I describe. In performing the analysis observation content, the content again seemed to gather under a single theme, which is called "Behaviors and Context." As the title of the theme suggests the analysis deals with the role of context in behavioral observation. The meanings underlying the observation content all seemed to fit singularly under this one theme.

Behaviors and Context. Both the SPAFF and the MICS use behavioral observation to determine whether marriages are good or bad. Each measure codes for many different types of behaviors. In particular, the SPAFF codes "emotional communication in any interaction over time" and is used to determine whether couple's interactions are positive, negative, or neutral based on the type of affect which each person expresses in a particular interaction (Yoshimoto, Shapiro, O'Brien, & Gottman, 2005, p. 371). Similarly, the MICS codes "behavioral difference between distressed and non-distressed couples" (Heyman, Weiss, & Eddy, 1995, p. 737), classifying those behaviors associated with distressed couples as negative and those behaviors associated with non-distressed couples as positive.

In developing the observational measures, scholars relied primarily upon self-report measures (e.g., Heyman, Weiss, & Eddy, 1995; Gottman, 1994). The basic procedure including administering self-report measures – including particularly the MAT (see Waldinger, Hauser, Schulz, Allen, & Crowell, 2004; Gottman, 1999) to first determine whether a marriage was

distressed or not. Then the researchers would catalog behaviors of distressed couples and of non-distressed couples. What has resulted from the development of these coding systems are classes, or codes, said to characterize certain behaviors in marriage as positive or negative. The content of these measures, then, are the specific behaviors being coded; the scoring is the coding itself, which can be either positive, negative, or neutral. Where the positive behaviors outnumber the negative behaviors (sometimes based on a ratio; see Driver & Gottman, 2004), the marriage is considered good; where the opposite occurs, the marriage is considered bad.

The behaviors used in both the SPAFF and the MICS are those categorized as positive or negative given previous investigation. Now they have been determined, researchers assume – prior to observing any particular marriage – which behaviors observed in any particular couple will be positive or negative. The decision to characterize behaviors does not depend on the context of the particular couple, but on an ideal abstracted from previously investigated marriages of which behaviors should or should not be expressed in marriage. For example, researchers in developing both sets of codes decided that criticism is a negative behavior, and that humor is a positive behavior. Now, when employing the measures, any observed criticism is considered negative, regardless of the context; likewise, humor is considered positive, no matter the context.

That behaviors cannot be coded any differently, given particular contexts, implies a weak relationality. Take, for example, defensiveness – which Gottman (1999) argues is, universally, one of the "most corrosive" behaviors in marriage (p. 41). He defines defensiveness as "any attempt to defend oneself from a perceived attack" (p. 42). Without taking the relational context into account however, one can never be absolutely sure if defensiveness really is corrosive.

Consider a context where a husband is being verbally attacked by his wife, who believes he is having an affair. Attempts to defend his self could seem quite in order if the attack is unwarranted, and in fact his lack of defensiveness might even make him seem guilty. But these behavioral measures cannot account for the context of the defensiveness, so that even in this case, the behavior itself will be considered "negative," or bad. Instead of judging the goodness or badness of the behavior – or the morality of the behavior – contextually, a morality is assumed by determining negativity or positivity before actually observing the behaviors. This sort of universal morality – one that cuts across all behavioral contexts – is a sign of weak relationality, taking no account of context.

Contrast the above approach with a strong relational approach. One would not necessarily assign a morality to certain observed behaviors without first considering the moral context of the couple. That is, prior to determining whether behaviors are positive or negative, one would have to have an idea of the couple's particular good marriage. That sort of understanding might include, for example, a discussion of the defensiveness itself – or lack thereof – and whether it is good for the marriage. In our example, the wife might reveal that she never truly suspected her husband of an affair, wished only to seek some sort of validation, and failed to receive it when her husband failed to be defensive, and only *then* became *truly* suspicious. Thus, it might be that, in this case, we ought to see defensiveness as a *positive* behavior. From a strong relational perspective, moral judgment can come accurately only in the context of the marital good.

Conclusion. As we see, the content of both the SPAFF and the MICS imply a weakly relational approach to understanding marriage. Both do so by suggesting a morality that cuts across all particular marriages and take the moral context of the couple into account. While it is

likely true that behaviors such as defensiveness is often bad for marriage, it is possible from a strong relationality that defensiveness – or any behavior for that matter – will be either good or bad based on the context. But as I have already said, the coding of behaviors for both of these measures does not allow for the context to help constitute the good or bad marriage. Instead, the good or bad marriage is determined before observations of the marriage even occurs and are thus underlain with weakly relational assumptions.

Content Analysis Summary

To summarize the content analysis, in the case of both self-report and behavioral observation measures, a weak relationality is being assumed almost without exception. Let us just run through the various sections one by one and discuss the themes as they arose in the data, beginning with the self-report measures and ending with the behavioral observation measures.

From the self-report measures arose three larger themes, each of which could be divided into smaller themes. The first large theme was “Affect.” Under this theme I analyzed all self-report items that seemed to emphasize emotions and feelings. In the first sub-theme, “How Affect is Emphasized,” we saw that the particular affect emphasized is personal as opposed to relational. In the second sub-theme, “Role of Context,” we saw that the items de-contextualized affect, another trait of weak relationality. The third sub-theme, “Emphasis on Self,” showed how the self is emphasized above the marriage for the “Affect” items. The final sub-theme in this section, “Instrumental or Responsible Relating,” demonstrated that the meanings of these items implied an instrumental view on relating, as opposed to the strong relational “responsible relating.”

The second large theme dealt with in the self-report measures was “Cognition,” where I analyzed all the items dealing with beliefs or thoughts. This theme was also divided into four sub-themes. In the first, “Emphasis on Agreement,” I argued that the manner in which agreement was favored over disagreement implies weakly relational assumptions. In the second sub-theme, “Agreement and Context,” I argued that these agreements being favored by the items was an agreement that is de-contextualized, again implying a weak relationality. The third, “Couple in Context,” showed that the meanings of the items strongly suggested a weak relationality in the way in which the meanings implied a couple detached from the larger moral context of family and community. And finally, under the fourth sub-theme, “Cognitive Appraisals and the Good,” I argued that many of the “Cognition” items suggest that certain appraisals ought to be made of the marriage regardless of context, again de-contextualizing the couple and suggesting weakly relational assumptions.

The final large theme of the self-content items was entitled “Behavior,” dealing specifically with the items that purported to measure behavior. Only one sub-theme emerged in the analysis of these items, under which all of the few items in the category fit. Entitled “Behavior and the Good,” this theme dealt with the manner in which behaviors were judged according to the items’ wording and scoring. I argued here that behaviors are judged to be positive (good) or negative (bad) regardless of the context. In my analysis of the behavioral observation analysis, I came to a similar conclusion – under the theme entitled “Behavior and Context” – where I argued that coding behaviors as positive or negative, regardless of the context, assumed a weak relationality.

But content alone does not reveal everything about a measure. Indeed, I have already mentioned that the strong relationist could use some of this content in their assessment of marriage, provided they use it contextually. Consequently, we need to analyze its use in order to determine whether the measures can in some way avoid individualistic assumptions. It is the use of the measures to which we turn next.

Process Analysis

I have divided the use of the measures into two sections. This first deals with the process of the items. As I stated above, process refers to the manner in which the measures should be administered. That is, how researchers are instructed to administer the measures. As with the section above, this is also divided into two subsections. In the first part, I deal exclusively with the process of the five self-report measures; in the second, I deal exclusively with the process of the behavioral measures.

Self-report Process

As I performed the analysis of the self-report process, it became clear that there is little difference in administration among the various self-report measures (cf. Snyder, 2004; Fowers & Olson, 1993; Schumm, et al., 1986; Spanier, 1976; Locke & Wallace, 1959). Consequently, this analysis is for the most part a general analysis of self-report process, at least insofar as the generalities are applicable to the measures. Where each of the measures varies, I also include a discussion of these differences, in each case mentioning the measure and the difference, as well as analyzing the difference for weak or strong relational assumptions.

In performing the analysis of the self-report measures, two main themes emerged concerning the process of administration, each of which I explore below. The first theme is

called “Assumptions about the Self.” Under that heading, I deal with the meaning of the self as implied by the general instructions regarding administering the various self-report scales. The second theme I identified I have entitled “Assumptions about the Couple” and under this theme, I explore meanings associated with how *couples* are assumed to be understood.

Before I continue, I should make a note on the references. In performing this analysis, I drew heavily upon literature for all five measures. Where the analysis is general (that is, where I refer to all five measures at once), this means that the list of references is at times quite extensive. For the sake of space, I do not list references in the text where the analysis is general. Instead, I have distinguished these studies from the other references by marking each with an asterisk in the reference section. Otherwise, I only list specific references in the text when I discuss a particularity about just one measure.

Assumptions about the Self

One of the most striking things to note about the process of “self-report” measures is what exactly “self-report” means. Without prior knowledge of psychometrics, one might consider the term “self-report” and guess that it implies an open-ended response to the subject matter, in this case marriage, allowing the self to report whatever seems applicable concerning the well-being of the marriage. In other words, if one is trying to measure the quality of a marital relationship, hearing “self-report” might lead the uninitiated to expect a lot of latitude in his or her response to the assessment. This is, of course, not the case for self-report measures. Instead, the individual is expected to respond to a series of pre-determined questions concerning the subject, and in the case of those measures being analyzed here, can only respond using pre-determined answers. This is not uncommon for self-report measures; but as this is characteristic

of all five self-report measures, it is important to understand what assumptions underlie this particular practice.

First of all, simply replying to the items' pre-determined answers requires that one abstract oneself from one's context and ignore parts of the context that do not fit the items. The only other real option is to skip the item. Take as an example the MSI, which consists entirely of true/false items. It seems quite obvious that, contextually, few things are ever true or false *all* the time. One might feel that even responding to any one item might misrepresent the relationship. As I point out in the previous section, the items themselves make assumptions and the couple may not make those same assumptions, and thus may not even wish to respond to certain items.

As for the process, though, whether the items appropriately represent the couple or not seems to be irrelevant. Individuals taking the MSI are required to reduce their contextual experience down to either true or false. Snyder (2004), the creator of the measure, instructs that even if one is reluctant to give "simple 'true' or 'false' responses," the administrator is still to "discourage them from skipping any inventory items…[and instead encourage] examinees to mark the responses that *come closest* to describing their feelings" (p. 7, emphasis added). In other words, rather than allow one to consider the whole of one's context in responding (or not responding) to the quality of one's marriage, one ought instead to reduce one's experience down to a single, acontextual response that fits the measure. Cutting out the context of a couple's responses in attempting to understand the marriage is a sign of weak relationality.

We can use a contrasting relations approach to see this point a little clearer. Instead of requiring a couple to stick to *either* true or false, the strong relationist would be willing to open up the response to items on the MSI in such a way as to allow the couple to speak to the context.

The strong relationist would argue that understanding a marriage would require understanding the couple's feelings about the marriage, not the best approximation. For instance, if a couple were to claim that answering either "True" or "False" does not adequately describe their feelings, rather that encouraging the couple to "mark the response that *comes closest*," the strong relationist would be interesting in understanding why the dichotomous responses are insufficient. Otherwise, the strong relationist would argue, the relationship cannot be completely understood. In order for the MSI to be open to strongly relational assumptions, its process would have to open up to allow this sort of response.

Of course, dichotomous items make only a limited appearance in the other measures, which use primarily Likert scale type items. In employing the Likert scale, a little more latitude is allowed in responding "contextually" (i.e., couple's do not have to limit their responses to either/or). But this concession is a small one considering the limitations placed on the individual by the items themselves. We have already seen that the content of the measures is based on weak relational assumptions. If the content analysis proves correct, then when responding to these self-report items, one has no choice but to represent oneself according to the assumptions made by the items; that is, as an atomized, self-interested individual. For example, one being administered the KMS can only respond that they are either satisfied or dissatisfied with their marriage, their spouse, and their relationship; they cannot respond, assuming this to sometimes be case, that being satisfied is not as important to them as whether they are successfully satisfying their spouse. Constructing a "self-report" measure in this way places limitations on how one can present the self, effectively de-contextualizing the "self" and therefore implying a weak relationality.

A brief example might further illuminate the weak relationality that manifests itself in administering the items as they stand. Consider a man who has just lost a child. It is quite possible that he feels a great deal of grief day by day. If asked to take the EMS, it is quite likely that he would score low, as almost all of these items inquire about affect and assume that positive affect typifies a good marriage. It is quite possible, however, that his low score is due primarily to his generally low affect, which might tend to skew his responses. It could legitimately be argued that this man does not have a poor marriage, but instead has a very healthy marriage. But the measure cannot take this man's relationship to his context (i.e., the passing of his child) into account because of the manner in which it is administered. Administering the EMS as is, with no adaptation for differing contexts, one misses the richness of this man's experience and instead of attending to the fact that he is grieving his lost son, attends to the poor score, which then translates to a "poor" marriage that may or may not even exist. In other words, administering the measure as it ought to be puts limitations on how individuals can "self-report," which fails to acknowledge the context of the person's marriage and implies a weak relationality.

Contrast this manner of "self-report" with how a strong relationist might perform a self-report. For the strong relationist, differences in particular contexts would necessitate a more open approach to administration. Self-report, from this perspective, would mean to report a self in context, in particular the moral context. At the *least*, that would mean allowing the couple to respond openly to the items in the measures. With this sort of openness, the items might then merely guide a discussion of the "good" marriage of the couple, and how couples understand their moral framework. For example, in responding to the KMS, couples would not just note how satisfied they are on scale of 1 to 7, but would be able to talk about what that satisfaction (or

dissatisfaction) means in the context of a their moral framework and whether it indicates the goodness of their marriage. In this way, the self that is reporting is a contextual self – one that is perhaps satisfied, perhaps unsatisfied, but sees that satisfaction in relation to the goodness or badness of his marriage and in the context of the relational whole. If administering the above measures as they stand, one must do so with this kind of openness if they are to assume strong relationality.

A final point ought to be made concerning what "self-report" means as implied by the process of these measures. The instructions of all five self-report measures require that couples take the measures separate from one another and without collaboration. As Snyder (2004) says concerning the MSI, responses must be "independent…in order to ensure clinically useful results" (p. 6). In other words, the self that is reporting the marriage is (or ought to be) autonomous, an atomized individual, one whose report is not influenced in any way by the other spouse. The independent manner in which these measures are administered suggests that the individuals are not bound relationally, but that their relationship can be appropriately represented by each individual separately. Separating married individuals from one another separates the individuals from an important part of the context of their marriage – their spouse – and thus is a practice that tends to de-contextualize the couple, a sign of weak relationality.

From a strong relational perspective, even part of the whole is said to be reflective of the whole, so administering the measures individually is not *necessarily* weakly relational. The strong relationist could justify the separation of married persons given certain contexts. For example, if a couple is involved in a domestic dispute wherein the pair has been court-ordered to avoid each other, the strong relationist might argue that one individual by herself will still be

able to reflect the whole. However, the strong relationist would also hold that seeing a person in his or her context is better than seeing him or her abstracted from the context, which would include seeing the couple together. Thus it would not be standard practice from this perspective to separate the couple. Instead, if both spouses were available, it would make more sense from a strong relational perspective to assess the couple together – as a whole – as that would be a better way of seeing the couple in context than separating the two. Indeed, the strong relationist would argue against the idea that the couple could avoid collaborating, as persons apart from their spouses are still in relation to their spouses, and thus somewhat influenced by them. Because the strong relationist argues for a fundamental relationality, it would be impossible for two people in relation to *not* collaborate (that is, in some way influence the others' responses on the measure, separated or not).

In conclusion, the process of self-report measures implies a definition of self and "self-report" that makes weakly relational assumptions. The self is autonomous and atomized – also a characteristic of individualism – and thus is not fundamentally in relation to the spouse. Thus we see that that the assumptions made about the self in the process of administrating these measures do not avoid individualism.

Assumptions about the Couple

Once a couple has completed the self-report measure, then their score is totaled and these scores are then compared to a normative sample, which then indicates whether the couple falls within a certain category. The categories include well-adjusted/poorly adjusted (e.g., Deleonardo, 1999), distressed/non-distressed (e.g., Whiting & Crane, 2003, which also distinguishes between moderately and severely distressed), or satisfied/unsatisfied (e.g., McLeland & Sutton, 2005).

Cut-off scores are the rule for determining which couple to place in which category, and in all cases the scores have been standardized to create the normative sample and provide a comparison of scores for couples.

The first issue to address is the scoring itself. All these measures use a numerical score to summarize the couple's marriage. Defining a couple by using a number is a decidedly thin way of representing the couple. By that, I mean to say that the score is contextually bare. For example, consider one couple who scores a 50 on the MSI (Global Distress Scale) compared to another who scores 60. One might wonder what the difference between a 50 and a 60 on the MSI might be. The numbers themselves are fairly barren in helping to make any sort of meaningful distinction between couples. This barrenness is an indication of weak relationality.

This barrenness is made more evident with the contrasting relations method. From a strong relationality, understanding a couple requires a contextual understanding. Descriptions of the couple from this perspective will thus be contextual and "thick." We might say, for example, that the couple who scored 50 in the above example are both involved in local politics and lead rather busy lives, whereas the couple who scored 60 is a retired couple that spend much of their time vacationing. These differences would change significantly our understanding of each of the marriages – a difference that is at *best* poorly reflected by a 10 point *numerical* difference. Similarly, numerical scores cannot distinguish between two couples who score the *same*, though the differences between *these* two couples would be essential to how a strong relationist understands each marriage.

The strong relationist would certainly favor a thicker description of couples, one that perhaps uses spoken language rather than numerical language. By nature, couples do not speak in

numbers nor understand their marriage in numbers. Asking the couple to translate their marriage into numbers does not guarantee that the meanings couples wish to convey are retained (Williams, 2005). The spoken language of the married couple, however, is inherently rooted in the couple's context, and thus is the natural language of understanding. Thus using the spoken language to understand and evaluate marriage allows for greater contextual complexity, believed to be fundamental from a strongly relational perspective.

As I mention above, the scores are also standardized. By standardizing the scores, the creators of the measures have assumed that all good marriages will be the same. That is, they have generalized their idea of the good marriage, given it a number, and included that number as part of the scoring for the measures. This is another way to assume a weak relationality. This general view of marriage – the "norm" – is essentially abstracted from the various contexts of the particular marriages that make up the normative sample. This practice essentially places the abstract ideal as a benchmark by which to judge other couples. Thus comparing each couple to a general, abstracted idea of the good marriage, is to assume that the good marriage depends not on the couple's relationship to their particular context, but instead on an abstract ideal. In other words, scoring and comparing scores as instructed effectively ignores the relational moral framework of the couple, assuming instead a general, abstracted moral framework determined by the measure that applies to couples across contexts, and thus assumes weak relationality.

Putting couples into the distressed/non-distressed or well-adjusted/maladjusted categories is similarly assuming a weak relationality. The categories are themselves abstractions (based on the normative samples) where the couple is made to fit, depending on how they score on the measure. The labels are incapable of capturing the contextual complexity of the particular

couples. Take, for example, a couple that is labeled “distressed.” The label “distressed” potentially ignores a host of contextual realities, such as moments (even fleeting) when the couple is actually *not* distressed, or even the context of the distress (which again, may not be due to a poor marriage, but to other contextual circumstances). Comparing couples to a normative sample and then labeling them with an abstraction is assuming a weak relationality.

As I have mentioned several times already, the strong relationist understands the couple to be deeply contextual, and to thus live in a moral framework that is likewise contextual, particular to the couple. Any particular couple will have a moral framework that will differ in some ways from the moral framework of other couples. Thus any “norm” will change from couple to couple. Indeed, for the strong relationist, norms are themselves inevitably de-contextual, as they are defined by abstract characteristics of the relationship that occur regularly – hence “normal” behaviors – and ignore the irregular behaviors. Norms are essentially a type of abstraction. Thus normative sampling for the strong relationist can only ever provide an impoverished view of the couple’s moral context. Indeed, it may even provide the wrong view of a couple’s moral framework, as “norms” change with the context.

For example, the strong relationist might anticipate “normal” satisfaction to change for a newlywed couple if they decide to have children. Even if the couple’s so-called level of satisfaction did not change, it is quite likely the nature of that satisfaction will change. In this way, the relational context of the couple changes and understanding their marriage requires that we adjust what we initially considered the “norm” for that couple. Thus using normative sampling is itself called into question from this perspective, as the strong relationist is particularly interested in understanding the couple in context. Understanding a couple

contextually would require noting the changes in the couple's contexts, effectively altering most "norms," which by definition remain static.

Likewise, the couple would need to be understood according to its personal context. Labels would be rejected and the strong relationist would seek a deep understanding of the couple in context. For example, a couple who might be categorized as distressed using the MAT (or another of the measures) might be observed in particular, non-distressed moments. Those moments might be significant to the researcher and she might then want to explore the context of those moments and understand why or how the couple changes from one context to the other. In this manner, the researcher is attentive to the context of the couple and how the couple changes across differing contexts, and is more likely assuming a strong relationality.

One final point ought to be considered with regard to the self-report measures. The measures themselves have been formulated to apply universally across all contexts. That is, in administering the measures, the context rarely, if ever, influences any sort of change, whether in content or process. One example of where this is most obvious is in cross-cultural research. All self-report measures are at some point used to measure marriages in other cultures, such as the Japanese (e.g., Chen, Tanaka, Uji, Hiramura, Shikai, Fujihara, Kitamura, 2007), Czech (Vaculik & Jedrziejczykova, 2009), Bedouin (Al-Krenawi & Slonim-Nevo, 2008), Haitian (Felix, 2007), and Korean (Chung, 2004). For the most part, the measures themselves remained essentially unchanged in both content and process, apart from the necessary translation that must occur in some cases. Even with differences through translation, however, the underlying meaning of the measures remain the same (e.g., the KMS still measures marital satisfaction, even in its use in other cultures). This particular practice assumes that successful marriages are the same across

cultures. But even more, it suggests that the measure itself is perceived as unchanging, an indication of weakly relational assumptions.

Once again, turning to a strong relational perspective, the contrasting relations method makes this point clearer. Measuring marriage must differ across contexts, as marriages themselves differ across contexts. Thus for the strong relationist, measures must have the flexibility to change as contexts change. For example, cross-cultural understandings of marriage would require an understanding of the specific cultural meaning of marriage. Our instrument would need to be sensitive to this cultural understanding and factor that into a moral framework of marriage that could be culture specific. Different contexts will call for different emphases of good and bad; different cultures will call for differing moral frameworks. Without this sort of flexibility, the strong relationist would argue, one will fail to properly understand any particular marriage.

Conclusion

So we see that in the process of scoring the self-report measures, couples are de-contextualized by the self-report measures, because they are both categorized and compared to a normative sample. As we see above, the self also is de-contextualized in the implied definition of self-report. Both themes which arose from the self-report process then seem to manifest weakly relational assumptions.

Behavioral Observation Process

Like the self-report measures, the process of both the MICS and the SPAFF is similar. Consequently, the following analysis will cover both the MICS and the SPAFF collectively, except where notable exceptions arise. In my analysis of behavioral observation process, a single

theme emerged, which I call “Couple and Context.” As the title suggests, this theme deals with the degree to which the couples are understood contextually, given the process of the measures. It appears the whole of process fits under this single theme. For organizational purposes, I have divided this theme into two parts, the first dealing with “Couple and Context” in the administration of the measure; the second with “Couple and Context” in the coding and scoring.

Couple in Context

Administration. The first step in coding interaction behavior of couples is to get the couple to interact. This is generally performed by having the couple generate a list of conflictual areas and then choose one to discuss for 10-15 minutes (see for example Heyman, Weiss, & Eddy, 1995 and Shapiro, 2004). The purpose of doing this type of interaction is to try to reproduce as close as possible a natural interaction between the couple. The couple is then allowed to interact with no intervention for 10-15 minutes. Their interaction is videotaped for later analysis by coders, explained below.

At first blush it seems that in employing this measure, one is more attuned to the context of the couple. Rather than contriving an abstract scenario wherein couples can interact, researchers help the couple contrive their own scenario based on their own particular context. One specific way researchers have employed the SPAFF has been used by Gottman and his students (e.g., Driver, 2006), where the couple actually spends 24 hours in an apartment-laboratory, equipped with all the amenities you might find at home, such as a kitchen, a living area, and a bedroom. The apartment is meant to represent a home-like environment and theoretically enable the couple to behave as naturally as possible. The couple is generally

observed (by video camera) for 12 hours out of the day and then the analysis is performed on a 10 minute segment of that day.

Using a contrasting relations approach, we can better understand the strong relationality implied here. As I have mentioned, the weak relationist tends to feel a little more ambivalent about the context of the couple. The sort of attentiveness being paid to the couple's context here seems more characteristic of a strong relationist. Indeed, if we are to learn anything about the analysis to this point, it is that the weak relationist consistently attempts to fit couples with a universal context. Thus we might expect that a weak relationist would encourage couples to have the *same* or similar discussion as other couples, rather than letting them choose a scenario more typical of their relationship. But that is not what happens here, implying strongly relational assumptions.

It seems, however, that strong relationality is partnered with weak relationality in this particular form of administration. The analyzed interaction is fairly short – 10-15 minutes – and is abstracted from the greater context of the relationship and said to represent the relationship. The goal of these measures is to understand the marriage, however understanding such a short period will potentially ignore rather important parts of the greater context of the marriage. Indeed, by limiting the time of the discussion, couples are only allowed to introduce a small part of their context to the researchers, and thus the observations miss a host of other contexts that might be important for understanding the couple's marriage. For example, though a couple's discussion of their children might mirror a discussion of religion, both conversations will certainly have differences to which this particular process is unable to attend.

The strong relationist will concede that any 10-15 minute *part* of a marriage will in many respects reflect the *whole* of the marriage (Yanchar, 2005). The more "natural" that the 10-15 minute discussion, the better for the strong relationist. But understanding marriage for the strong relationist requires attention to a greater context wherein that part is situated, when and where it can be made available. Indeed, the strong relationist might argue that a discussion of 10-15 minutes would likely not include important parts of the marriage that might be necessary for a full understanding of the marriage. Thus from this perspective, observations would likely take place over longer periods of time, and even across several differing contexts.

As it stands, then, the administration of the SPAFF or the MICS seems to imply both strong relationality – in its call for more "natural" (contextual) interactions – and weak relationality – in its temporal and spatial limitation of the context of interaction. It might even be that the strong relational move has been an attempt to correct for the generally acontextual nature of self-report measures. Whether it is or not, it appears it has not entirely avoided a weak relationality.

Scoring. After the interaction has been videotaped, it is then observed and analyzed by coders. Before coders analyze the videos, they are trained to recognize certain verbal, facial or physical cues that would indicate the various types of behavioral or affective expression. Coders then look at the behavioral expression of each person in the couple at various intervals (e.g., every time the speaker or the topic changes, or every 30 seconds, etc; e.g., Fyffe, 2000), keeping frequency counts of the different coded behaviors. The frequency counts are then added to make a summary score, which is then compared to a normative sample, much like self-report scores.

The codes for both the MICS and the SPAFF are universal and almost any behavior manifested by any individual in any interaction should fit one of the codes. I discussed in a previous section the universal morality (and therefore weak relationality) implied by the codes themselves. That coders are required to fit couples to the codes, rather than to fit codes to the couples, also implies a weak relationality. In other words, only when couples fit the abstracted moral good implied by the so-called "positive" behaviors can it be concluded that their marriage is good. This assumes a weak relationality because the tendency is to focus not on the couple's relationship and a relational moral framework, but to assume that a pre-determined, abstract moral framework ought to legislate whether the couple's marriage is good.

One major exception to this universal rule of coded behavior can be seen in the process of the SPAFF. Gottman (the author of the SPAFF) believes that most affective expressions are universal across cultures, referencing researcher Paul Ekman, famous for his work studying facial expressions across cultures (Yoshimoto, Shapiro, O'Brien, & Gottman, 2005). This belief itself implies weak relationality. However, in the scoring instructions for the SPAFF, Gottman and his colleagues allow for cultural anomalies – culture-specific behaviors that may not fit the universal codes identified in the SPAFF. All coders are therefore supposed to be "cultural informants," able to identify affects that are specific to the culture in which the SPAFF is being administered and coded (Shapiro, 2004).

The idea of a "cultural informant" is more strongly than weakly relational. The weak relationist is more interested in the universal good marriage, often arguing (as Ekman might) that the good marriage is the same across cultures. But here, we see that instead of forcing individual behavior into the abstracted, universal mold of the SPAFF codes, having a cultural informant at

least permits for culturally specific – that is, context specific – behaviors to be noted and play a role in assessment. This notion at least allows for a strongly relational perspective on marriage, as it permits the cultural context of the couple speak louder than if it were just otherwise ignored.

Thus two meanings appear to emerge from the scoring of the SPAFF and the MICS. The first meaning is that coding couple behavior requires that the coder attend primarily to universal definitions of good and bad and fit each couple to one or the other mold, which meaning is weakly relational. The second meaning derives from the idea of a "cultural informant," which allows for culture-specific behaviors to speak somewhat to coders' assessment of the couple's good or bad marriage. While it appears that the idea of culture-specific, context-dependent behavioral codes is not emphasized nearly as much as the emphasis coders place on the universal codes (e.g., Fyffe, 2000; Gottman, 1999), it still stands that both a weak and strong relationality seem to be potentially present in the scoring.

One final point ought to be made concerning the scoring. Once the coding is complete, couples are assigned summary scores based the frequency counts of positive and negative behaviors (e.g., Felbau-Kohn, 2001). Communication sequence scores are also tallied, which measure how often, for example, a negative behavior is followed by a negative response (Driver & Gottman, 2004). Ultimately, these scores are used to classify the couples, much like the self-report scores are used: those with more negative behaviors or negative behavior sequences are those whose marriages are worse off, and those with more positive behaviors have better marriages. I have already argued that this process of categorization based on a weak relationality, but it bears repeating here. Categorizing a couple as "distressed" or "non-distressed" abstracts the couple from their particular context, ignoring moments or events wherein the couple might

be rather different. Once a couple is categorized using the scores, the researcher tends to attend to that label (the abstraction) and ignore the couple, whose context is bound to change. Ignoring the couple is ignoring the rich context wherein the couple exists, the context to which the strong relationist must attend if she is to be strongly relational.

Conclusion

The analysis of the behavioral observation process yielded some mixed results. Recall that the overall theme was entitled "Couple and Context." We see first with the administration of the measures, couples are seen more contextually that we have seen up to this point, as they are asked to engage in a conversation common to their particular marriage. On the other hand, the conversation itself is somewhat abstracted from the whole context of the marriage, evidencing more weak relational assumptions. We might draw similar conclusions from the scoring of behavioral observation methods, as we saw strong relational assumptions in "cultural informant," but more weakly relational assumptions as scorers tend to emphasize universal codes of behavior over culturally specific codes.

Process Analysis Summary

To summarize the process analysis, self-report measures are still overwhelmingly weakly relational. As I just mentioned, behavioral observation measures seem to be more a mixture of strong and weak relationality, though the latter is clearly dominant. Let us run briefly through the various themes of each section one more time to review.

I first analyzed the self-report process, from which arose two themes: "Assumptions about the Self" and "Assumptions about the Couple." Under the first theme, I noted that the process of self-report measures defines self autonomous and atomized, particularly in its implied

definition of “self-report.” For the second theme, I argued that in the categorization of couples, and subsequent comparison to normative samples, de-contextualizes the couple and is based on weakly relational assumptions. Thus the process of self-report is imbued with a weak relationality.

But while the process of self-report is primarily based on weakly relational assumptions, the analysis of behavioral observation measures proved to be a little different. The theme that rose from these measures was entitled “Couple and Context.” Under this theme, I noted that, while there are still several underlying weak relational assumptions in the process of behavioral observation, such as is implied by the brief interactions and the scoring summaries, two practices revealed more strongly relational leanings. First was the quasi-natural settings in which behavioral observation occurs, where the couple is asked to discuss naturally a topic which comes up in normal, day-to-day interaction. Second was the cultural informant, who is charged with noting culture-specific behaviors that might otherwise be missed by the universal behavioral categories.

DISCUSSION

I began this dissertation discussing individualism, its pervasiveness in American culture, and the potential threat that individualism poses for marriage. It has long been contended that individualism is a big part of our culture, beginning in the nineteenth century with French philosopher de Tocqueville (2000; see also Bellah et al., 1996). Relatively recent observations have shown that individualism has become part of the marital culture (e.g., Amato, Booth, Johnson, & Rogers, 2007; Doherty, 2002). Indeed, some fear that individualism has been somewhat devastating for marriage in America, leading, for example, to a higher divorce rate (e.g., Cherlin, 2009; Fowers, 2000).

A few scholars have even contended that individualism has infiltrated the marital sciences (Fowers, 2000; Richardson, Fowers, & Guignon, 1999). And this particular observation has some potentially troubling implications, with some scholars fearing that the same problems individualism causes for marriage have carried over to the discipline charged with caring for marriage. Among the most troubling implications is the worry that individualistic assumptions in the marital sciences "may very well heighten the already excessive popular expectations of marriage, thereby inadvertently helping to maintain or accelerate the rate of divorce" (Richardson, Fowers, and Guignon,1999, p. 166).

The problem is that there has as yet been no systematic study of the marital sciences to test this contention. Thus it was this observation that gave birth to this project, as I hoped to determine if and to what extent individualism was a part of the marital outcome literature, in particular the methods used to measure marriage. But uncovering individualistic assumptions seemed a little difficult, given that the measures deal primarily with relationships. Thus, I argued

that identifying individualistic assumptions would require a deeper analysis of the types of relationships being assumed by the instruments. By tracing individualism to its ontological roots, and arguing that even the individualist can talk about relationships, the question, "Do outcome measures assume individualism?" evolved into, "What types of *relationships* are being assumed by the measures: individualistic or relational?" The latter question, I argued, was an ontological question, as it required understanding the ontological assumptions being made by the instruments. By now, the reader should be familiar with the two ontological perspectives used to perform this analysis. Abstractionism, or weak relationality, is the ontology under which individualism is subsumed; strong relationality is the ontology I used to contrast with abstractionism and individualism. Each ontology offers a different perspective on relationships and these differing perspectives became the framework for my analysis of marital outcome measures.

After an exhaustive review of the marital outcome literature, I selected five of the most prominent and widely used self-report measures and two of the most popular behavioral observation measures for ontological analysis. I used a contrasting relations approach to analysis, in which I basically identified the assumptions made in the content and the process of the measures as either weakly or strongly relational. I then further demonstrated the assumptions being made by the content or the process by contrasting them with alternative content or processes based on the alternate ontological assumptions. Through this analysis, I argued that weak relationality – the relational manifestation of individualism – utterly dominates the underlying assumptions of all seven measures. Some hints of strong relationality were found, but its influence was almost trivial in comparison to the weak relationality of all the instruments, including their content and process. In analyzing the content and process of the measures, all

three assumptions identified in Chapter 2 as characteristic of a weak relationality – self-interest, instrumentalism, and atomism – were evident.

First, in the content analysis, self-interest was manifested through the emphasis of the measures' items on so-called positive affect over negative affect. The positive affect of the self trumped all other interests in these items, including, conspicuously, interest in the marriage. That is, it was more important that the individual feel good about the relationship than that the interests of the relationship – the *actual* goodness of the relationship – were served. In fact, individual positive affect seemed so highly valued that entire measures were primarily composed with that single meaning in mind. Thus, in measuring whether a marriage was good, items often inquired first into whether the interests of the self or individual had been served. As I mentioned in both Chapter 1 and Chapter 2, self-interest is a potential threat to marriage because it serves primarily the interests of individuals involved in the marriage, even to the detriment of the relationship.

In tandem with self-interest, the content analysis revealed instrumentalism as another prominent assumption. Some of the content which emphasized individual positive affect also implied that the *purpose* of marriage was to obtain self-interest, and marriage should thus be viewed as an instrument or means for achieving positive affect. Instrumentalism was also viewed as a potential threat to marriage. Both Fowers (2000) and Bellah et al. (1996) discussed this particular feature of individualism, as I mentioned in Chapter 1, arguing that viewing marriage as an instrument or means, where individual self-interest is the end goal, can result in divorce, especially when the self's interests are not being met.

Atomism also manifested itself prominently in the analysis of both the content and the process of the measures. The content analysis showed that the measures atomized the individual. In discussing affect and cognition, for example, the emotions and thoughts of individuals were assumed to be personal and private, rather than relational and shared, thus presupposing individuals to be fundamentally independent of other individuals and the external context. In that sense, then, the individual's affect and cognition are contained within the self, fundamentally uninfluenced by the context outside of the individual, including other individuals (such as a spouse). In the sections on behaviors, as measured by both self-report and behavioral observation measures, behaviors were also investigated as though they were independent of other behaviors, abstracted from the context wherein the behaviors occurred. In this way, behaviors were also fundamentally atomized from other contextual factors, such as others' behaviors (including those of the spouse).

Strong relationality was manifested at only one particular place in the measures, the process of the behavioral observation measures. Only here was there evidence that perhaps the context of the couple was being taken seriously in understanding the couple's marriage. However, even this small manifestation of strong relationality was de-contextualized in many ways, and mixed with weakly relational assumptions. For instance, the couple was still removed from their natural context (such as from their home to the laboratory) and the measure used to analyze behavior was still imbued with weakly relational assumptions, in particular because it failed to consider the couple's community and culture. Thus even this tiny hint of strong relationality is minimal compared to the otherwise dominate weakly relational assumptions in the discourse of marital therapy outcome measures.

Limitations

There were several major limitations associated with the design of this study: (1) only the more widely used measures were analyzed; (2) two ontological perspectives were drawn on in the analysis; and (3) the project itself was not empirical in the traditional sense.

First, there are a myriad of measures used by marital researchers and therapists, only seven of which were analyzed. In this sense, it is fair to say that the results of my analysis may not apply to all measures currently in use. As I argued in Chapter 3, my purpose was not to do an exhaustive analysis, but instead to analyze only the most popular of the measures and fairly assess the hidden relational assumptions of a large portion of the marital research. Of all the measures I identified in Table 3, those I analyzed received 80% of all hits in the last decade, representing a large majority of the research reviewed, thus it seems my purpose was accomplished. But there are many other measures available, including some being newly developed, so it is important to note that this project has pioneered a new framework of analysis that can be useful to any researcher wishing to test a measure for its ontological character.

One might also question how exhaustive the two ontologies were in understanding marital assessment; that is, whether there is not another ontological alternative that ought to have been considered in such an analysis. As I argued in Chapter 2, however, the two ontologies described are thought to be comprehensive (Slife, 2005; Macmurray, 1999). The abstractionist ontology has roots in Greek philosophy, and has influenced most of the modern approaches to knowledge in the past few centuries in Western culture (Robinson, 1995). Even materialism, a popular ontology in the natural sciences, as well as some branches of psychology (e.g., neuroscience; see Slife & Hopkins, 2005), is a subcategory of abstractionism, with its reductive

and contextless approach to complex phenomena (Slife and Richardson, 2008). And as I argued in Chapter 2, the relational ontology is also subsuming, being used as a framework for both the natural sciences (e.g., Prigogine, 1997) and the social sciences (Reber, 2007; Nelson, 2007). That it is being used so broadly ought to suggest its exhaustive nature in explaining complex phenomena, particularly a relational phenomenon such as marriage.

A final objection that might be raised is the project's seemingly non-experimental nature. In many respects, this dissertation is somewhat non-traditional, particularly in the field of psychology. My subject matter was instruments used to measure marriages, not the married couples themselves; my analysis was dialectical, not mathematical. As a consequence, my approach and subsequent analysis may be unfamiliar in some senses. But one should keep in mind that my subject was assumptions, so I needed to perform a conceptual analysis. As such, the analysis was necessarily theoretical. However, it was also empirical, at least in the broad sense of that term. My "data" were the marital literature, specifically the instruments used to help form this literature. These instruments and their practices were observable and themselves analyzable. And though I did not quantify my observations, I presented the methods and evidence in such a way that anyone could replicate my study and check my results. The results I have presented are therefore as open to scrutiny as any empirical research. And it may be that, after all, conceptual analysis of philosophical assumptions embedded in the instruments used to gather empirical data is a "pre-empirical chore" that, when attended to, would expand the meaningfulness of empirical work. Indeed, given the results of this analysis, the "pre-empirical chore" accomplished by this project is quite revealing of the current instruments and these instruments can now be better understood for what they are: instruments for measuring

individuals and their feelings about marriages, not necessarily for measuring the quality of the marriage relationship itself.

Implications

Frequently, measuring instruments are used in the psychological literature as though they make no assumptions about the subjects being rated (Richardson, 2005; Williams, 2005), as though they are "mapping the reality" of whatever they are purported to "measure." Having demonstrated the weakly relational assumptions inherent in the instruments herein analyzed, it is important to point out that these instruments are not "objective" instruments of measurement, at least in the conventional sense. Instead, they make clear – though implicit – assumptions about what constitutes a quality marriage and what couples are like, and thus are biased accordingly. These instruments have a specific interpretive framework that is inescapable in any meaning-making of the results obtained through the use of these measures.

This interpretive framework places limitations on how marriages are understood and evaluated. The instruments are only capable of measuring relationships from a weakly relational perspective, and are therefore unable to measure relationships from alternative viewpoints, such as a strongly relational perspective. In other words, even if researchers themselves assume that persons are fundamentally and strongly relational, using these measures will not allow researchers to measure the properties associated with this type of relationality. Instead, they will be restricted to understanding relationships as individualistic endeavors. Evaluations of marriage will focus almost exclusively on measuring the individuals and their perceptions of marriage, not on measuring the marriage itself in a strongly relational sense. More importantly, married individuals are restricted in how *they* can represent themselves. Even if married individuals

wished to represent themselves as other-interested or interested in a shared good, they cannot do so, limited as they are to measurement items that only permit an atomistic, self-interested representation.

Perhaps the most important implication of using these measures as they stand is that the interpretive framework is an individualistic one. Though many are critical of the pervasiveness of individualism in marriage, outcome measures could be compounding the problems without researchers even knowing it. Again, this is true even if a researcher or a therapist is personally opposed to individualism in marriage. No matter the researcher's or couple's personal interpretive framework, the weakly relational interpretive framework of these measures will insinuate themselves into the research results if the instruments are used. When the measures deem a marriage good, it is only good by the standards of a weak relationality. That is, it is good as an atomistic marriage of potentially self-interested individuals.

The same sort of problem could occur when using these measures in therapy. For instance, if a couple coming out of therapy is tested by any of these measures, their results will be by the standards of weak relationality. A "good" marriage, in this sense, would be a marriage imbued with individualism, perhaps even considering the marriage as a means to individual ends. If this kind of individualism is problematic, as many scholars have surmised, then this "good" is not really good. In this way, therapists and researchers may be misled by the measures' interpretive framework, compounding the very problems that individualism poses for marital sciences. Even the popular marriage literature will be subject to this individualistic framework if it is informed by research results obtained using these measures.

One final implication of the results is that they might lend insight into the scientist-practitioner divide. Practitioners often feel frustrated at the seeming disconnect between what they feel is good practice, based on their experience, and what their scientific peers claim is good practice (e.g., Adams & Miller, 2008). On the one hand, scientists recommend the use of instruments such as I analyzed in demonstrating the efficacy of practice. But as the results show, couples are often abstracted from their every day context through the use of these marital outcome instruments. Practitioners, on the other hand, deal with couples on a very contextual level – that is, they deal with couples personally and locally, and are thus better able to see the couple in context. In short, practitioners – just by nature of what they do – can better see couples from a strongly relational perspective. The frustration that practitioners might feel in being expected to draw upon science – for example, by using scientific instruments such as those analyzed here – might stem from the incongruency that they feel between the weak relationality in the measures and the potential for strong relationality they experience with their clients.

Future Directions

As I have argued, an alternative interpretive framework is available, one which is rooted in a relational ontology. One of the most obvious directions for future research is exploring and applying this alternative in the theory, research, and practice of the marital sciences. As the measures stand currently, marital quality is defined primarily by individual satisfaction, a rather thin definition. The relational alternative would require a thicker definition of marital quality, implying evaluations of marriage and marital therapy that take into account the entirety of the relational context. This would mean that evaluation needs to consider the contextual envelope of a couple's relationship, as well as their extended family, their community, and their culture. The

measure of a good marriage would be the documentation of a shared good (not one that is self-contained).

Evaluations from this perspective would be what Taylor (1989) calls *strong evaluations*, or evaluations that take the whole of the context into account. The definition of a good marriage would be deeply contextual, and as a consequence, it could be different from couple to couple. Simple, universal definitions of the good marriage – such as those used in the measures analyzed – would only be useful for certain contexts, if that. Given that these definitions might differ from couple to couple, one might wonder if a strong relational approach to marriage has to be relativistic. Abstractionists would assume that relativism can only be avoided through universal principles, so any framework that eschews such principles is always considered suspect.

With strong relationality, however, its deep contextuality is the source of its truth and thus the reason it does not involve a harmful relativism. Evaluating the good marriage is inseparable from the context, requiring that community, culture, and history be taken into account. For example, a Christian couple from this perspective could assume that the Holy Spirit or the Light of Christ is part of the deep context of their marriage. For this reason, the couple cannot simply *decide* what the good marriage is for them (relativism). Instead, evaluating the goodness of the marriage would need to be informed by the Holy Spirit or the Light of Christ, as it manifests itself in the context of the couple's relationship.

Once the marital quality is understood in this deeply contextual way, particularly with respect to the relational moral framework, then strong evaluations of the marriage could take place. Couples would need to be evaluated according to whether they lived into their good marriage. In other words, rather than instrumentally using marriage to serve the couple's or

individual's interests, the couple would be evaluated on whether they engaged responsibly and morally with the whole of their marital context. Continuing with the example above, if the first step is to understand how the goodness of the Christian couple's marriage is informed by the Holy Spirit, then the next step would be to inquire into how well the couple honor the Holy Spirit by living according to that goodness.

Strong relationists would not rule out the use of the existing measures, though they would likely make adaptations. For example, some behaviors measured by both self-report and behavioral observation might be characteristic of some good marriages. However, the strong relationist would need to be cautious about allowing the existing measures to *define* what is good for every marriage, without allowing for *other* behaviors (not measured) to also be part of the measurements. Thus even if strong relationists were to consider using existing measures, they would always keep in mind the context and thus the limitations that the measures impose on understanding marriage, and consider whether those limitations can appropriately help to characterize the goodness of a particular couple's marriage. It is important to keep in mind that, even for a particular couple, the good marriage can change from one context to the next. Consequently, the same behaviors that may have, at one point, characterized the couple's good marriage might, in another situation, characterize a bad marriage. The focus for the strong relationist is above all on the couple and the couple's moral context, not on any tool or rubric which one might use to guide evaluation.

Conclusion

Because so many feel individualism is such a problematic assumption for marriage, it is important to understand how deeply, if at all, this assumption has penetrated the marital sciences.

The purpose of this project was to determine if and to what extent individualism, under the ontological framework of abstractionism, is assumed by the marital therapy outcome instruments. As I have shown, abstractionism, and therefore individualistic assumptions, overwhelmingly dominates the marital therapy outcome instruments. This means that, as they stand, the instruments cannot prevent individualistic assumptions from infiltrating outcome results. Indeed, it is even possible that the instruments are exacerbating the problems of individualism through their use in research and therapy, even if the researchers and therapists wish to avoid these problems. If this is true, then therapists and researchers are truly measuring individuals, rather than measuring relationships.

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