

A REVIEW OF THREE COMPREHENSIVE PREMARITAL ASSESSMENT QUESTIONNAIRES

Jeffry H. Larson
Brigham Young University

Kenneth Newell
Second Nature Wilderness Therapy Program, Duchesne, Utah

Glade Topham
Texas Tech University

Sheldon Nichols
Private Practice, Lynnwood, Washington

Three comprehensive premarital assessment questionnaires (PAQs) are described, evaluated on their psychometric characteristics, and compared. They include the PREmarital Preparation and Relationship Enhancement (PREPARE) questionnaire, the Facilitating Open Couple Communication, Understanding and Study (FOCCUS) questionnaire, and the RELATIONSHIP Evaluation (RELATE). Recommendations for using each PAQ are discussed.

The importance of marriage preparation and premarital counseling has increased in the United States recently as the divorce rate continues to remain high and legislatures like those in Florida, Louisiana, Minnesota, and Arizona pass marriage covenant laws and marriage preparation legislation in an effort to stem the tide of divorce. An important component of premarital counseling is assessment, and a growing number of states encourage couples to participate in premarital assessment by offering them incentives, such as reduced fees for marriage licenses. Therapists and educators conducting premarital assessment, education, and counseling may choose from three comprehensive premarital assessment questionnaires (PAQs): PREmarital Preparation And Relationship Enhancement (PREPARE; Olson, 1996a), Facilitating Open Couple Communication, Understanding and Study (FOCCUS; Markey, Micheletto, & Becker, 1997), and the RELATIONSHIP Evaluation (RELATE; Holman, Busby, Doxey, Klein, & Loyer-Carlson, 1997). The purpose of this article is to review these three instruments by first describing the theoretical and psychometric criteria on which PAQs should be evaluated; second, describing how well these three PAQs meet these criteria; third, briefly describing and comparing the three PAQs; and fourth, making suggestions for using these PAQs in the premarital assessment process.

It should be noted that we chose not to evaluate two other PAQs that we reviewed several years ago (see Larson et al., 1995) because of their relative lack of easy availability to test administrators, age (both were published more than 12 years ago), and no published evidence of predictive validity, a factor considered crucial for a PAQ. These two instruments were the Cleveland Diocese Evaluation for Marriage (Bechtold & Rebol, 1988) and the Premarital Inventory Profile (1984). Is it also noted that each of the three instruments reviewed here have been revised since our earlier review of them (e.g., several subscales were added to the

Jeffry H. Larson, Marriage and Family Therapy Program, Brigham Young University; Kenneth Newell, Second Nature Wilderness Therapy Program, Duchesne, Utah; Glade Topham, Marriage and Family Therapy Program, Texas Tech University; Sheldon Nichols, private practice, Lynnwood, Washington.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Jeffry Larson, Marriage and Family Therapy Program, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah, 84602. E-mail: jeffry_larson@byu.edu

RELATE, and its name was changed (formerly called the PREParation for Marriage (PREP-M questionnaire).

Theoretical and Psychometric Criteria for Evaluating PAQs

Premarital assessment questionnaires should be evaluated based on their ability to meet certain basic theoretical and psychometric criteria pertaining to their usefulness in premarital education and counseling (Larson et al., 1995). The following criteria are suggested by authorities in the fields of assessment and premarital relationships (c.f., Fischer & Corcoran, 1994; Larson et al., 1995; Stahmann & Hiebert, 1997):

(1) *Be designed primarily or exclusively for assessing premarital relationships and (2) Collect comprehensive data that are relevant to the premarital counseling or education process.* Larson and Holman (1994) viewed 50 years of published longitudinal and cross-sectional research on premarital factors that predict marital satisfaction and stability. Based on an ecosystemic theory, they concluded that premarital predictors could be organized into three major categories. First, background and contextual factors, including family-of-origin dynamics, sociocultural factors, such as education and race, and support for the relationship from friends and parents; second, individual traits and behaviors, including self-esteem, interpersonal skills, physical health, and emotional health; and third, couple interactional processes including homogamy (i.e., similarity in race, religion, and socioeconomic status), similarity of values and attitudes, and couple communication and conflict resolution skills (see Larson & Holman [1994] for a more detailed list of these factors).

The content of each PAQ was evaluated using these factors to determine its level of comprehensiveness. We also evaluated each PAQ for the inclusion of remarriage items because 49% of all European-American and 40% of all African-American marriages are remarriages for one or both partners (Wilson & Clarke, 1992). Examples of such items are: "I worry that a previous spouse or memories of a previous spouse will cause trouble for our new marriage" and "We agree on what furnishings and possessions each of us will bring to our new home" (Markey et al., 1997, p. 6). All three questionnaires measure at least 85% or more of these 27 separate premarital factors that predict marital satisfaction. Neither FOCCUS nor PREPARE assesses a history of parental mental illness (e.g., depression) or similarity of intelligence, whereas none of the three questionnaires assesses the similarity of absolute status (i.e., the overall similarity of the partners based on age, socioeconomic status, intelligence, religion, and race).

(3) *Be easy to administer and widely applicable.* The questionnaire should be easy to administer for the therapist, easy to complete for the client, relatively simple to score, and should require a short amount of time to complete such as in a typical therapy hour of 50 min (Stahmann & Hiebert, 1997). Each of the PAQs meets these criteria except for completion time. For some individuals it takes 75–90 min to complete each PAQ. These instruments are easy to procure and are inexpensive (see Appendix for addresses). The most expensive one, PREPARE, costs less than one-half of an average therapy session. All of them offer computer scoring. Advanced training in test administration is not required for the test administrator. (See Table 1 for more details).

(4) *Be easy to interpret.* The results of the scored questionnaire should be relatively easy for test administrators and partners to interpret and use as part of a comprehensive marriage education process (Stahmann & Hiebert, 1997). The strength of these three PAQs is in their ease of interpretation. All of them include a comparison or norm group to which the respondents' scores are compared; or, the criteria for preferred responses to test items is described for the therapist to use in interpretation. Each provides a rich amount of data that can be used in premarital discussions of strengths, weaknesses, and issues.

(5) *Be reliable and valid.* All three PAQs have evidence of internal consistency reliability, content validity, and predictive validity (see Table 1 for details). For PAQs, we were especially interested in their ability to predict later marital satisfaction and stability. Each of these instruments has published evidence to support their predictive validity.

DESCRIPTIONS OF THE THREE PAQS

In this section, we describe each instrument in more detail and evaluate each one's strengths and weaknesses. The authors of each PAQ were given the opportunity to comment on our accuracy. That

improved the quality of our reviews. However, the following comments represent our evaluations of the instruments, not the authors' opinions.

PREPARE

PREPARE (Olson, 1996a) is a 195-item inventory designed to identify and measure premarital "relationship strengths" and "work areas." PREPARE contains 15 relationship categories, plus four personality scales and an Idealistic Distortion scale, making 20 total scales. In addition to the standard form, the PREPARE-MC (Marriage with Children) version is available for use when one or both of the premarital partners have children. PREPARE is also available in six foreign languages: Chinese, German, Japanese, Korean, Spanish, and Swedish.

The relationship areas assessed by PREPARE include: Marriage expectations, personality issues, communication, conflict resolution, financial management, leisure activities, sexual relationship, children and parenting, family and friends, role relationship, and spiritual beliefs. A separate Idealistic Distortion scale serves as a correction score for idealism or the tendency to answer items in socially acceptable way. Individual scores in the other areas are corrected based on the person's Idealistic Distortion scale score. Four of the 15 scales on PREPARE assess information about the current couple relationship and each individual's

TABLE 1
Descriptive and Psychometric Characteristics of PAQs

Instrument	Number of items	Time to administer	Cost per couple	Scoring	Supporting materials	Validity	Reliability	Instructor training
FOCCUS	156	45-60 min	\$10.00	Computer, hand, PC program ^a	Facilitator's notebook, Couple Profile, Goal-setting form	Content, Construct, Predictive	Internal consistency .86-.98	Optional one day seminar or video
RELATE	271	55-70 min	\$10.00	Computer	Couple report, Instructor's/counselor's manual	Content, Construct, Concurrent, Predictive	Internal consistency .70-higher, Test-retest .63-.95	Self study with counselor manual
PREPARE	195	55-70 min	\$30.00	Computer	Counselor's manual, Counselor feedback guide, Computer report, couple workbook	Content, Construct, Concurrent, Predictive	Internal consistency .73-.85, Test-retest .74-.93	One-day workshop or video required

Note. Each questionnaire consists of multiple subscales, each of which has a reliability coefficient.

^aThe hand scoring packet sells for \$15.00 and contains materials for 10 couples. The PC program sells for \$175.00 plus \$6.50/SH and is available for Windows 95, 98, 2000, and NT.

family of origin (i.e., adaptability and cohesion).

PREPARE (Olson, 1996a) also assesses four personality traits: Assertiveness, self-confidence, avoidance, and partner dominance. The personality assessment is designed to help the premarital counselor understand the individual traits that are related to couple dynamics.

A typology of couples is integrated into the PREPARE Computer Report, which identifies four types of premarital couples: Vitalized, harmonious, traditional, and conflicted. In the Computer Report, each couple is classified into one of these four types. Research shows that vitalized couples have the greatest marital satisfaction, whereas conflicted couples have the highest divorce rate (Fowers, Montel, & Olson, 1996). As a result, more intensive intervention is recommended for the conflicted couples.

The counselor receives a 15-page Computer Report, which summarizes and analyzes the couples' responses to the PREPARE items. The Counselor's Manual contains detailed information on organizing feedback to the couple. During feedback sessions the couple also uses a 25-page workbook called *Building a Strong Marriage* (Olson, 1996b) which contains communication exercises (e.g., assertiveness and active listening) that the counselor uses with them to help them discuss their PREPARE results.

A unique feature of PREPARE is the day-long training workshops for users that are conducted nationally. Attendance at one of these workshops is encouraged to obtain and use PREPARE and PREPARE-MC or the test administrator may complete a self-study program including a videotape.

Strengths. PREPARE's strengths include its relatively shorter length, comprehensiveness, and ease of administration and interpretation. PREPARE has multiple measures of reliability and validity. Excellent supplemental counseling materials are available. There are multiple language versions and a version for couples that are remarrying.

Concerns. PREPARE does not measure three factors that predict marital satisfaction: Parental mental illness, similarity of intelligence, and similarity of absolute status (i.e., an overall similarity measure based on a combination of similarity of age, education, income, parents' social economic status, and parents' social economic status.). It is the most expensive of the three instruments reviewed.

FOCCUS

FOCCUS is a 156-item instrument (with an additional 33 optional items for interfaith couples, cohabiting couples, and couples in which one or both partners are remarrying) that is widely used by Catholic and Protestant churches as well as nondenominational counseling services. Four editions are available: (1) A General Edition with no Christian language or references; (2) a Christian Nondenomination Edition; (3) a Catholic Edition; and (4) an Alternate Edition from the General Edition but for those with limited ability to read or who have English as a second language. It is available in several languages including Spanish, Vietnamese, Italian, Polish, and Braille. It is also available on audiotape for nonreaders. It was designed to reflect the values and ideals of marriage as sacred, including issues of permanency, fidelity, openness to children, forgiveness, shared faith in God, and unconditional love (Williams & Jurich, 1995).

The four major content areas in FOCCUS contain 19 separate scales grouped as follows: Matches of personality, life styles and friends, communication and problem-solving skills, bonders and integrators, such as religion, values, and readiness for marriage, and summary categories, such as key problem indicators and family-of-origin issues.

FOCCUS can be administered to individual couples or to groups of couples. The computer printout of results lists all the statements for each of the 19 scales and shows on which items the partners agree both with each other and with the preferred responses. Preferred responses are the ideal or optimum responses the authors believe to be most advantageous to the couple (e.g., the preferred response to this item is "disagree": "There are qualities about my future spouse that I do not respect." [Markey, Micheletto, and Becker, 1997, p. 63]). The printout also lists each partner's responses and the preferred response when there is a disagreement between them, or when an uncertain response is given to an item. Responses to items that are key problem indicators are also listed for each scale. For example, if an individual answers "disagree" to the item, "I feel my future spouse shows affection adequately or appropriately" that item is interpreted as

a key indicator of future problems (FOCCUS, 1997, p. 63). A useful way to examine the couple's scores is to use the Patterns for Couple Study. Patterns are determined from examining the couple's scores on several related items on the test. An example of such a pattern is uncertainty, conflict, or fear over role expectations. Counselor Aids on Individual Items also help the counselor and the couple look more in-depth at statements that may seem to be especially significant, sensitive, or troublesome; for example, "I am uncomfortable with the amount my future spouse drinks" (Markey et al., 1997, p. 2).

On completion of the questionnaire, the couple may purchase and complete an additional 14-item form called *FOCCUS for the Future* (1997), which helps them consolidate what they learned about their relationship as a result of completing FOCCUS and helps them plan how to use this information in improving their future relationship. Topics for discussion on this form include planning how to improve communication, resolve problems, and manage money.

Strengths. FOCCUS strengths include the availability of several versions for couples that do not speak English or have reading problems. Three scoring options are available. Key problem areas are conveniently listed on one scale. Patterns for couple study and counselor aids on especially important individual items are very helpful in interpreting the results. Remarriage, cohabitation, and interfaith items are included. Supplemental materials are available.

Concerns. FOCCUS does not measure three factors that predict marital quality: Parental mental illness, similarity of intelligence, and similarity of absolute status. Objective evidence for the validity of preferred responses is missing.

RELATE

RELATE (formerly known as the PREP-M; Holman et al., 1997; Busby, Holman, & Taniguchi, 2001) is a 271-item instrument with nondominational English and Spanish versions available. An internet version is also available (see Table 1). RELATE items measure factors in four broad areas: Personality characteristics, similarity of values, family background, and relationship experiences (e.g., couple communication skills). RELATE results are sent to the counselor or educator in the form of a 19-page computer printout that is self-interpretive. The printout can also be sent directly to a couple. The first section of the printout includes bar graphs that demonstrate how each partner rated the other and self in eight different personality areas, including sociability, calmness, organization, flexibility, emotional maturity, happiness, and self esteem. The second section compares partner agreement on general values or attitudes in areas, such as marriage roles, employment, sexuality, children, and religiosity. In the third section, a comparison is made of partner perceptions of family background experiences including family processes, parental marital satisfaction, relationship with father, relationship with mother, family stressors, and parental and couple conflict resolution styles. The fourth section presents information on relationship experiences including couple communication styles, conflict resolution styles based on Gottman's (1996) research, and relationship satisfaction and stability. An assessment of problem areas in the relationship (e.g., who's in charge, alcohol or drug problems, money problems) is also included.

RELATE is unique in that it requires no assistance from the counselor in interpreting the results to the couple. This may be attributable to the straightforward and simple presentation on the findings and detailed explanations of the results and guidelines of what to do when differences arise. A counselor manual is available that provides a description of the instrument, a brief description of RELATE content areas, information on the administration and scoring of the instrument, and a guide to using RELATE in counseling and teaching settings.

Strengths. Of the three premarital instruments presented, RELATE is the easiest instrument to interpret and the easiest to use in large groups and teaching settings. RELATE is also the most comprehensive and the least expensive if using computer scoring. It is the only PAQ of the three reviewed here that is available on the internet.

Concerns. RELATE does not measure one factor that predicts marital quality: Similarity of absolute status. There are currently no remarriage items, although a remarriage supplement will be available in fall 2002.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR USING PAQS

To better assist the test administrator in selecting an instrument for use in individual premarital counseling, group premarital counseling, or in the classroom, we suggest the following:

1. Decide what your priorities are in assessment (e.g., cost, length, setting, how you intend to use the results, adequacy of supporting materials, and the nature of your clientele, etc.).
2. For couples who want to know how prepared they are for marriage but prefer not to go to a therapist, use RELATE (easiest to interpret).
3. For premarital education and group use with a heterogeneous population of single individuals (e.g., nondating, dating, engaged, etc.), use RELATE.
4. For populations with limited financial resources use RELATE or FOCCUS.
5. For more intense premarital counseling when the therapist has 3 or more sessions to work with the couple, use PREPARE or FOCCUS.
6. For therapists preferring several structured exercises to use with the results, use PREPARE (best supporting materials).
7. PAQs should not be used for prediction purposes; however, the therapist has an ethical responsibility to adequately counsel couples who are a poor marriage risk (i.e., have "low marital aptitude").
8. Consider supplementing these instruments with a broader personality measure like the Taylor-Johnson Temperament Analysis (Taylor & Johnson, 1984) or the 16 Personality Factor Questionnaire (Russell, 1995).
9. Consider supplementing these instruments with good self-help literature that is based on the factors identified in the present article and focuses on helping couples prepare for marriage (e.g., Larson, 2000; Markman, Stanley, & Blumberg, 2001; Olson & Olson, 2000).

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the three major PAQs reviewed here may be confidently used in premarital assessment and counseling. We recommend that before using an instrument, professionals first clarify their values and priorities in choosing an instrument. The descriptions and comparisons provided in the present study should aid the premarital counselor and educator in making better choices and assist test developers in the revision process.

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APPENDIX

Publishers of Premarital Assessment Questionnaires

FOCCUS

Family Life Office
3214 N 60th St.
Omaha, NE 68104
(402-551-9003)

E-mail: FLO@OMAHAFLO.creighton.edu

RELATE

The RELATE Institute
Family Studies Center
366 SWKT
Brigham Young University
Provo, UT 84602-5391
(801-378-4359)
E-mail: RELATE@byu.edu
Website: www.relate.byu.edu

PREPARE/ENRICH

Life Innovations, Inc.
P.O. Box 190
Minneapolis, MN 55440-0190
(800-331-1661)
E-mail: cs@lifeinnovations.com
Website: www.lifeinnovations.com

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