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MARRIAGE AND FAMILY ATTITUDE SURVEY

*Donald V. Martin and Margaret Martin. St. Louis, Missouri:
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Introduction

The contemporary family faces great changes. Generally speaking, the bond between husbands and wives seems to have weakened; further, the divorce rate has risen, the fertility and marriage rates have declined, and people are marrying at a later age (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1983/1985a). The traditional family life-style is fading.

The family institution is important because it plays a vital role in the socialization and organization of the American society. The family serves to socialize its members; it attempts to make order out of what might otherwise be a more confusing and chaotic existence (Christensen & Johnsen, 1971/1985). If people can better understand their attitudes toward familial relationships, perhaps they can better ensure a marriage of similar attitudes and values, thus decreasing the risk for later separations and further decline of the family institution. However, helping people clarify their attitudes toward marital and family relationships is difficult. Creighton, Killian, and Katell (1990) note that many of the inventories and questionnaires used for assessing marital relationships and attitudes were developed in the 1960s and 1970s. The instruments available to evaluate family relationships and attitudes also are antiquated. One newly developed instrument, however, is the Marriage and Family Attitude Survey (Martin & Martin, 1987).

The Marriage and Family Attitude Survey was developed by Donald V. Martin, Ph.D. and Margaret Martin, Ph.D. The impetus for the development of the test was Donald Martin's 1981 doctoral dissertation at North Texas State University. According to these authors, there was a paucity of self-administered instruments that could be used to survey a couple's expectations for family relationships. The Martins sought to create an instrument that could be used by educators and professionals in human services to understand better the general attitudes of people involved in marital and familial relationships. The current version of the questionnaire was published in 1987.

The eight-page test manual includes a listing of directions for administration, scoring, and interpretation. The rationale, purpose, and general overview of the development of the instrument are included, as are the answers and interpretive information. The four-page test booklet contains five demographic questions and 58 test items. The demographic questions cover age, sex, ethnicity, parental status, and dating habits within the past year. The test questions encompass 10 topical areas deemed important for marriage and family life:

cohabitation and premarital sexual relations; marriage and divorce; childhood and child rearing; division of household labor and professional employment; marital and extramarital sexual relations; privacy rights and social needs; religious needs; communication expectations; parental relationships; and professional mental health services. (Martin & Martin, 1987, p. 4)

The test items are presented in a forced-choice format and respondents are asked to rate their attitude on each item. The available responses range from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree" and only require the examinee to circle the response that is most representative of his or her attitude.

In terms of scoring, the examiner adds 1 point for each response that matches the rating most representative of the authors' normative sample. The total score equals the sum of the individual item scores, ranging from 0 to 58. The final score is compared to the four ranges provided by Martin and Martin (1987) in the examiner's manual. The high agreement range is noted as traditional and inflexible in relationships, whereas the normal range is delineated as maintaining similar societal attitudes and flexible relationships. The low agreement range is described as unaccepting of societal attitudes, and the conflictual range is denoted as lacking sufficient desire for maintaining and developing relationships.

Martin and Martin (1987) do not establish any specific requirements for the setting in which the test can be used. The only materials that appear to be necessary when using the test are a pen or pencil and the test booklet.

Practical Applications/Uses

The primary purpose of the Marriage and Family Attitude Survey is to aid a person in understanding his or her attitudes toward marital and familial relationships. The instrument is seen by its authors as particularly useful with couples involved in premarital or marital counseling. The survey reportedly has been administered in educational settings, group workshops, counseling centers, private offices, mental health centers, and churches.

Martin and Martin (1987) indicate that the Marriage and Family Attitude Survey might have some therapeutic utility and educational value. For example, a couple who presents for counseling might complete the survey jointly and be encouraged to agree upon a mutual answer before proceeding to the next item. As the couple progresses through each item during a joint administration, the areas of discrepancy in choosing a response can be discussed and/or explored with the help of a counselor. The scoring for a joint administration could be optional and secondary to the process involved in the actual test administration. Counselors could note not only the areas of disagreement on the survey but also the process of negotia-

tion and conflict resolution. Jacobson and Margolin (1979) suggest that an agreed upon structure of rules is important for the functioning of a relationship. Therefore, helping couples recognize their patterns of conflict resolution and aiding them in the establishment of rules for negotiating differences seems vital to a marital relationship; the Marriage and Family Attitude Survey might serve as a useful tool in the process.

The survey can be administered to individual members of a dyad as well. Having a couple complete the survey separately without the assistance of the other person might prove beneficial. Couples can compare their answers after completing the test and discrepancies can be discussed and/or explored with the assistance of a counselor. However, the discussion of answers and its therapeutic utility has little to do with the actual test itself. Most counselors are trained to listen for discrepancies between couples and illuminate the areas of disagreement between them. The best that the Marriage and Family Attitude Survey can do in a counseling situation is to serve as an impetus for illuminating some discrepant attitudes maintained by two or more people; otherwise, it has no other apparent therapeutic utility. The *raison d'être* of the survey does not lie in diagnostic interpretations gleaned from scorable results, obtained after the administration of the instrument, but rather as vehicle for discussing individual and group differences about heterosexual marital and familial relationships.

In educational programs, Martin and Martin (1987) report that the survey likely could prove helpful as a mechanism for eliciting group discussions. It is not uncommon for students in sex education, home economics, psychology, sociology, and other similar courses to discuss their attitudes toward marriage and family relationships. The instrument can be used as it is in counseling sessions, or given to a class where the answers are discussed via the 10 topics that comprise the test. For example, students might review the questions that pertain to cohabitation and premarital sexual relations and engage in a more in-depth discussion of that particular topic without getting into broader discussions about marriage and family life.

Martin and Martin (1987) indicate that the Marriage and Family Attitude Survey is potentially helpful to high school guidance counselors, who occasionally are called upon to aid individuals or young couples in conflictual relationships. The instrument can be used to initiate a discussion of a dyadic and potential familial relationship.

Although the authors state that the questionnaire has been used in all the academic settings just described, no specific reference is made to evidence supporting its utility in these programs. The authors need to provide documentation to support the validity of their claim. It is feasible that independently developing a list of questions for discussing marriage and family relationships is just as helpful as using the Marriage and Family Attitude Survey. The average number of questions for each of the 10 topics is five—not an extensive presentation.

Martin and Martin (1987) suggest that their test has been helpful with a variety of individuals who are troubled by confusion over sex roles, difficulties establishing intimate relationships with someone of the opposite sex, unrealistic expectations about family life, or concerns about marriage. The authors do not state how the instrument might be helpful to these various people or provide documented evidence to substantiate their claims. They only indicate that the answers could be

scored according to the procedures outlined in the manual, and then discussed with a counselor. Although it is possible that discussing the responses could help a person gain some clarification regarding his or her attitudes toward sex-role behaviors and/or expectations toward marriage and family life-styles, it is not known whether the Marriage and Family Attitude Survey actually adds anything of value to the discussion. Talking about these issues without the instrument may be just as helpful; there are no statistical data to suggest that one procedure is better than the other.

Regarding administration of the instrument, no special training is required and the authors are not explicit about any necessary educational qualifications for the examiner. It is likely that the questionnaire can be administered by human service professionals (i.e., teachers, psychologists, guidance counselors, or marriage and family therapists), either individually or in group settings, as well as by persons who are not involved in human services (i.e., secretaries and proctors). The directions are the same for both individual and group administrations, and, as the instructions are printed on the front page of the test booklet, self-administration is possible. Overall, the survey requires approximately 4 to 10 minutes to complete and can be comprehended on an eighth-grade reading level.

Scoring for the Marriage and Family Attitude Survey is clear, simple, and objective. No computer scoring is available. Although the manual provides no time frame, it is doubtful that scoring would take more than 10 to 15 minutes, and mastery of the procedure is quick and easy. Separate answers are provided for male, female, and combined (male and female) groups. The authors suggest that the respondent's answers can be compared to the same-sex profile as well as to both the opposite-sex and combined profiles. Although the combined scores are somewhat unclear, it appears that they reflect a composite score for a group containing males and females. However, the utility of the combined score is not established. The assumption for making the same-sex and opposite-sex comparisons is that by reviewing the other categories, different points of view can be discussed, thereby facilitating an incorporation of alternate attitudes.

The authors provide no means for assessing the reliability or validity of a given administration and provide no directions for interpreting the test with unanswered items. The four interpretive ranges provided in the manual (i.e., high agreement, normal, low agreement, normal) offer little to persons interested in comparing a respondent's attitude toward marriage and family relationships with those of the general population, despite the claim to make comparisons to "societal norms" (p. 3). Selected students from six academic programs (i.e., colleges, universities, and secondary schools) comprised the "normative population" (p. 3). The demographic results noted in Donald Martin's 1981 doctoral dissertation indicate that ages ranged from 14 to 35 years, with the total number of subjects exceeding 5,000. Females represented more than half the population, and more than 80% of the sample was Caucasian. The "normative population" seems biased toward younger, white, educated females, making the Marriage and Family Attitude Survey questionable with regard to generalization to the larger population (p. 3).

The authors suggest that the instrument could likely serve to illuminate areas of possible conflict and help to avoid later difficulties in a heterosexual relationship. However, there are no overt data to suggest that the questionnaire adds anything

specific information about a particular population. In that sense, it does not appear that the Marriage and Family Attitude Survey is in fact a survey. Furthermore, the authors make frequent reference in the manual to the instrument being a "test." The *Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing* (American Educational Research Association, American Psychological Association, & National Council on Measurement in Education, 1985), however, recommend avoiding use of the term *test* in describing instruments that identify interests and personality characteristics through self-report.

The *Standards* state that "if a test is likely to be used incorrectly for certain kinds of decisions, specific warnings against such use should be given" (AERA, APA, & NCME, 1985, p. 13). The Marriage and Family Attitude Survey manual offers no cautions for the possible misuse of the interpretive data. The authors imply that they have obtained a normative group that is representative of "societal norms." Therefore, it is conceivable that an examinee might use the results as a mechanism for evaluating the agreement of his or her attitude with present societal norms, but the instrument does not demonstrate validity in this regard. The manual also fails to provide evidence to substantiate its claim that the Marriage and Family Attitude Survey is a valuable tool for promoting group discussions in academic courses, nor that it is helpful to individuals who are confused about intimacy, sex-role behavior, and marriages in general.

The *Standards* also encourage test developers to include the relevant training, qualifications, and level of experience of experts used during the construction of the instrument. Although Martin and Martin (1987) provide some necessary information about the experts they used, they do not describe the level of experience or training qualifications in detail. In order to ensure full compliance, more specific, relevant information about the experts used during the questionnaire's development should be provided.

Scores on a psychological/educational measure need to include estimates of reliability and general information about the nature of the sample population (AERA, APA, & NCME, 1985). Martin and Martin (1987) do not list the procedures that were used for obtaining the sample population. The manual does not include measures of reliability between administrations and does not provide analyses for the possible variation of a score from one setting to another. Factors like marital status, age, and situational crises can potentially affect scores.

The rationale and constructs measured in the survey are not defined clearly. The *Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing* recommend that "tests . . . be developed on a sound scientific basis" (AERA, APA, & NCME, 1985, p. 25); the Marriage and Family Attitude Survey is not in compliance. Martin and Martin (1987) state that "the fifty-eight attitude items were derived by the researcher from prominent literature in the field of marriage and family therapy, including Sager's pioneering work entitled *Marital and Couple Therapy* (1976)" (p. 6). However, Sager's text appeared 11 years before the publication of this survey, and the manual's reference section lists texts dating from 1966 to 1979, with one reference noted in 1980. Current literature (i.e., Blumstein & Schwartz, 1985a, 1985b; Caplow, Bahr, Chadwick, Hill, & Williamson, 1985; Davis, 1985a, 1985b) suggests that many changes have occurred in marital relationships and attitudes since the 1970s. Consequently, the references are dated and antique the items and inter-

pretations. (For a more detailed review of the instrument and its compliance with the established standards, see Creighton, 1989.)

Because several of the questionnaire items ask about the number of children desired in a marital relationship and attitudes toward child-rearing practices, the instrument seems more applicable to couples who have never been married and are interested in raising a family than to couples who have been married previously and have children from an earlier marriage; it seems less applicable to couples who are not interested in having children at anytime. In that sense, it is probably best entitled Family Attitude Questionnaire. However, it does not compare favorably with the inventories that currently exist in the field of family assessment. For example, the Family Environment Scale (Moos & Moos, 1981) and Family Adaptability and Cohesion Evaluation Scales-III (Olson, Portner, & Lavee, 1985) are two prominent instruments that have been evaluated as clinically useful, theoretically based, and well-researched self-report family instruments (Caldwell, 1985; Camara, 1988). The test user should refer to those instruments and reviews.

The Marriage and Family Attitude Survey lacks precision, clarity, thoroughness, and evidence of careful statistical analysis and research. Martin and Martin (1987) provide no definitive age range for which the questionnaire can be used. Instead, they report that "the age range of subjects given the test can vary from early adolescence through adulthood" (1987, p. 2). The instrument lacks a sensitivity to ethnic, racial, and cultural differences. The authors need to provide separate norms for African-Americans, Caucasians, Asians, and Hispanics in order to improve the utility of the instrument. Other problems exist in the writing and/or typing in the examiner's manual; occasionally words are misspelled and punctuation incorrect. Statements are repeated throughout, reflecting a less organized, concise manual than is desirable for a psychological instrument. In addition, Martin (1981) notes in his doctoral dissertation that the demographic question related to "parental status" created some confusion "for some individuals who believed the item related to their own marital status. Rewording this item to 'are you parents?' instead of the words 'parental status' may help clear this confusion" (p. 205). Martin and Martin (1987), however, failed to modify the item before publication of the questionnaire.

In summary, the Marriage and Family Survey can be used as a device for promoting discussion about marriage and family life. However, it has not been established statistically that it offers anything unique to such a process, and it is possible that providing an open forum encouraging people to talk about marriage and family relationships would be just as valuable. Furthermore, the instrument does not provide evidence to support its claim in making comparisons to present societal norms, its interpretive value is dubious at best, and it fails to comply with many of the standards outlined in *Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing*.

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