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### Measuring Marital Satisfaction: A Comparison of the Revised Dyadic Adjustment Scale and the Satisfaction with Married Life Scale

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## **Measuring Marital Satisfaction: A Comparison of the Revised Dyadic Adjustment Scale and the Satisfaction with Married Life Scale**

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*Marital satisfaction has been psychometrically measured using many different instruments not soundly based on theory. The Revised Dyadic Adjustment Scale (RDAS), consisting of 14 items, is commonly accepted by researchers and practitioners to measure marital satisfaction but was not specifically designed to measure marital satisfaction. The Satisfaction with Married Life Scale (SWML), consisting of five items, is a short scale specifically targeted toward measuring marital satisfaction. An online sample collected from 1,187 couples throughout the United States was used to compare these instruments' correlation ( $r = .782$ ), factor structures, reliability (SWML,  $\alpha = .958$ ; RDAS,  $\alpha = .943$ ), theoretical foundation, and validity. These instruments are on parity with each other when measuring marital satisfaction; however, each instrument yields implications for practitioners and researchers desiring to measure marital satisfaction.*

**KEYWORDS** *marital satisfaction, satisfaction with married life, scale development*

### INTRODUCTION

Marital satisfaction is one of the most studied phenomena in marriage and family research. Although many instruments are used to measure marital satisfaction, few are specifically designed to do so. Instead, researchers typically measure other constructs and falsely reify them to represent marital

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satisfaction (Eddy, Heyman, & Weiss, 1991; Fincham & Bradbury, 1992). For example, the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS: Spanier, 1976) and Revised Dyadic Adjustment Scale (RDAS: Busby, Christensen, Crane, & Larson, 1995) measure dyadic adjustment. These instruments were not originally intended to measure marital satisfaction but have been used in hundreds of studies to suggest marital satisfaction (Eddy et al., 1991). Although dyadic adjustment and marital satisfaction may be related, they are indeed different constructs and should be independently measured (Bradbury, Fincham, & Beach, 2000; Eddy et al., 1991).

Historically, researchers tried to measure marital satisfaction by implying the construct is a compilation of several other variables. Schumm and colleagues (1985) suggested marital satisfaction can be represented by adjustment to spouse, marriage, and marital relationships; however, they later recognized these distinct components do not adequately indicate marital satisfaction. They believed marital satisfaction to be more than a sum of discrete variables but rather a general global evaluation of marriage. Other researchers choose to measure marital satisfaction by asking one global question (e.g., Hill, 1988; Stack, 1998). These researchers ask the following questions: taking all things together, how would you describe your marriage—would you say your marriage is very happy, a little happier than average, just about average, or not too happy? Single-item satisfaction scales face their own difficulties; they leave room for socially biased responses, they have not gained wide use by fellow researchers, and they are generally not accepted as a valid global measure of satisfaction (Collard, 2006). On the other end of the spectrum, very lengthy and expensive to administer instruments have also been used to measure marital satisfaction. An example is the RELATionship Evaluation questionnaire (Holman, Busby, Doxey, Klein, & Loyer-Carlson, 1997). This questionnaire consists of 271 items and has been reported to take nearly 30 minutes for participants to complete. It appears that an instrument that can be quickly and inexpensively administered within the context of other research and is specifically designed to measure marital satisfaction is needed.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Satisfaction

Satisfaction can be defined as a state of happiness over pain (Collard, 2006). This view of satisfaction considers all possible aspects of a person's environment and state of being to determine if happiness outweighs pain. To measure satisfaction and specifically marital satisfaction, a person is required to cognitively balance all environmental influences, personal feelings, aspirations, disappointments, and achievement of personal goals and then determine if the positive exceeds the potential negatives. One could view satisfaction as being in a continual state of well-being.

Individuals determine their own level of satisfaction. The process of determining satisfaction is subjective; it is not the same for all individuals (Deiner, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985; Warr, 1990). Satisfaction is a global assessment of the quality of an individual's situation according to one's internally chosen criteria. Although the criteria for deciding satisfaction is susceptible to external influences, it is important to remember satisfaction is internally dictated. A situation that may be satisfying for one person may not be satisfying to another, because each person independently chooses his or her own criteria for comparison. Therefore judgments of satisfaction depend on "comparisons of one's circumstances with what is thought to be an appropriate standard" (Diener et al., 1985, p. 71).

### Marital Satisfaction

Marital satisfaction is one type of satisfaction that has received widespread attention. It has often been indirectly addressed in the marriage and family literature by implying that marital satisfaction is the state of a nondistressed relationship (Bradbury et al., 2000; Busby et al., 1995; Kinnunen & Feldt, 2004; Spanier, 1976). Researchers need to recognize that the factors leading to a nondistressed marriage may not be the same factors that result in marital satisfaction: "A satisfying marriage is not merely a relationship characterized by the absence of dissatisfaction, as is implied by the routine use of the term *nondistressed* to describe a couple who are maritally satisfied" (Bradbury et al., 2000, p. 973). Factors that lead to a satisfying marriage may not simply be the inverse of those that result in an unsatisfying relationship. Thus different instruments should be used in research and by practitioners to determine if a marital relationship is nondistressed or if the couple experiences marital satisfaction.

To effectively measure marital satisfaction it must first be clearly defined. Marital satisfaction is not often theoretically defined in the research. Instead, researchers allow its definition to vary according to how they interpret satisfaction (Baldwin, Ellis, & Baldwin, 1999; Hill, 1988; Holman & Jacquart, 1988; Julien & Markman, 1991; Orthner & Mancini, 1990, 1991) and struggle to operationalize the variable without a distinct direction. By ambiguously defining the construct being measured, it is difficult "to draw valid inferences from one's data, there must be consistency among purpose, definition of constructs, and measurement" (Ruddell, 2002, p. 6). Kerlinger and Lee (2000) further emphasize the value of a good definition by stating "all constructs, in order to be useful scientifically, must possess constitutive meaning" (p. 42). Considering these points, a clear and precise definition of marital satisfaction needs to be developed to truly measure this construct and make it scientifically useful. This definition should not be derived *via negativa*, dependent on something else not being present. For example, marital satisfaction should not be defined as a marriage that is not distressed,

as is the practice of many of today's marital satisfaction researchers (Bradbury et al., 2000; Eddy et al., 1991; Fincham & Bradbury, 1992). Instead, marital satisfaction must be defined for what it is. If researchers and practitioners used the *via negativa* approach, they may falsely identify a nondistressed marriage as a satisfied marriage, when in reality the parties in the marriage do not have marital satisfaction.

This study defines marital satisfaction as an individual's emotional state of being content with the interactions, experiences, and expectations of his or her married life. The first part of the definition focuses on the emotional state of satisfaction. Emotional states are self-contained within the individual and require people to consider all the different elements of marriage based on internal criteria (Collard, 2006). The emotional state of marital satisfaction is being content with the interactions between themselves and spouse. This refers back to the original characterization of satisfaction, experiencing overall happiness over pain (Collard, 2006). Thus when individuals experience happiness over pain in their marital relationships, they are in the emotional state of having marital satisfaction. The second part of the definition delimits the emotional state to focus on interactions between the couple. Interactions include all experiences, influences, relationships, and emotions shared between a partner and oneself. Researchers and practitioners who measure marital satisfaction are not considering all aspects of satisfaction within the participants' life; instead, they desire to only focus on interactions within the participants' marriage.

## Measurement of Marital Satisfaction

### DAS AND RDAS

The task of measuring marital satisfaction has been the focus of much effort and energy (Filsinger, 1983). Over the last several decades defining and effectively measuring marital satisfaction has been a challenge researchers have faced. One of these challenges has been reaching a general consensus about what marital satisfaction consists of and how to best psychometrically capture this construct (Bradbury et al., 2000; Hamilton, 1948; Jones, Adams, Monroe, & Berry, 1995; Patrick, Sells, Giordano, & Tollerud, 2007). Spanier's (1976) Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS) was one attempt to establish a framework from which marital satisfaction researchers and practitioners could work within. The DAS was used in hundreds of studies over the proceeding decades to measure dyadic adjustment that some researchers used to represent marital satisfaction (Eddy et al., 1991). Busby and coworkers (1995) later noticed some inherent problems with the DAS instrument and revised the DAS to be shorter with improved psychometrics properties. The new instrument was called the Revised Dyadic Adjustment Scale (RDAS).

Spanier (1976) originally defined dyadic adjustment as “a process, the outcome of which is determined by the degree of: (1) troublesome dyadic differences; (2) interpersonal tensions and personal anxiety; (3) dyadic satisfaction; (4) dyadic cohesion; and (5) consensus on matters of importance to dyadic functioning” (p. 17). Upon empirically testing this definition, Spanier suggested dyadic adjustment consists of four factors: dyadic consensus, dyadic satisfaction, dyadic cohesion, and an affectional expression factor, which used the composite of dyadic differences, interpersonal tensions, and personal anxiety. Many researchers have used the DAS and combined the four factors to represent marital satisfaction. Although dyadic adjustment and marital satisfaction may be correlated, these two constructs are not the same (Eddy et al., 1991; Fincham & Bradbury, 1992).

The DAS consisted of 32 items that loaded on four factors. The dyadic consensus factor had 13 items with moderate factor loadings and a mean factor loading of .55. Dyadic satisfaction had 10 items with moderate factor loadings and a mean factor loading of .59. Dyadic cohesion had five items with moderately strong loadings with a mean factor loading of .64. Finally, the affectional expression factor had four factors with moderate factor loadings and a mean factor loading of .53 (Spanier, 1976). Of these subscales within the DAS, Dyadic Satisfaction and Affectional Expression have been problematic (Crane, Busby, & Larson, 1991; Sharpley & Cross, 1982; Spanier & Thompson, 1982). In addition, the DAS instrument was lengthy, had potential psychometric problems, and was designed and intended to measure dyadic adjustment, not marital satisfaction as researchers were starting to do (Eddy et al., 1991). Furthermore, Spanier (1988) claimed the DAS worked best as a global assessment of marital quality and the individual subscales of the instrument did not adequately capture their reflected constructs. Spanier elaborated by stating he had not used any of the subscales in his personal research. Thus the need for an instrument purely designed to measure marital satisfaction still existed.

Busby et al. (1995) recognized some of the DAS's limitations and revised it to the RDAS. The revisions were designed to reduce and balance the number of items used to measure each construct that contributed to dyadic adjustment. Thompson and Spanier (1983) suggested the DAS needed further work to reduce items that did not reliably mark factors across multiple samples. Busby et al. (1995) wanted to revise the DAS so an improved “instrument would be more appropriate for clinical and research use” (p. 289).

The RDAS continued with the same hierarchical structure of the DAS. Busby et al. (1995) attempted to improve the psychometric characteristics of the DAS and continued with the intent of the instrument to measure dyadic adjustment and not necessarily marital satisfaction. The instrument intended to measure dyadic adjustment in regard to consensus, satisfaction, and cohesion (Busby et al., 1995). Most researchers, however, do not use the RDAS to measure the instrument's individual constructs. Instead, the common practice

**TABLE 1** Satisfaction with Married Life Scale

Below are five statements with which you may agree or disagree. Using the 1–7 scale below, indicate your agreement with each item by circling the appropriate number on the line following that item. Please be open and honest in responding.

Item	Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Slightly disagree (3)	Neither agree nor disagree (4)	Slightly agree (5)	Agree (6)	Strongly agree (7)
1. In most ways my married life is close to ideal	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2. The conditions of my married life are excellent	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3. I am satisfied with my married life	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4. So far I have gotten the important things I want in my married life	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
5. If I could live my married life over, I would change almost nothing	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

is still to combine the constructs to measure marital satisfaction and/or happiness. This use of the instrument circumvents a couples' subjective evaluation of marital satisfaction by asking them to report the amount of distressed-related behaviors in their marriages (Knobloch, Miller, Bond, & Mannone, 2007). Over 20 studies have used the RDAS for the sole purpose of measuring marital satisfaction or happiness over the last decade (e.g., Hollist & Miller, 2005; Kinnunen, Feldt, Geurts, & Pulkkinen, 2006; Kinnunen, Geurts, & Mauno, 2004; Schaeffer, Alexander, Bethke, & Kretz, 2005; Steffen & Masters, 2005). One must ask if the instrument is really a valid measure of what most researchers are using it to measure, and by using the RDAS or DAS to indicate marital satisfaction, how much measurement error is being introduced?

#### SATISFACTION WITH MARRIED LIFE SCALE

The Satisfaction with Married Life Scale (SWML) is a newly developed scale that directly measures marital satisfaction (Table 1). Johnson, Zabriskie, and Hill (2006) developed the SWML by creating a modified version of the Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener et al., 1985). The word "life" was replaced by "married life." For example, one item in the Satisfaction with Life Scale reads "In most ways my life is close to my ideal" (Diener et al., 1985, p. 72). The same item in the SWML reads "In most ways my married life is close to ideal."

The SWML intends to measure marital satisfaction directly instead of depending on the correlational relationship between dyadic adjustment and marital satisfaction. This research has defined marital satisfaction as an emotional state of being content with the interactions between yourself and spouse. The SWML embodies this definition and focuses directly on measures of marital satisfaction. The psychometric characteristics of the SWML, however, have not been adequately demonstrated. Furthermore, the compatibility of the RDAS and SWML is unknown. Therefore the purpose of this study was to explore the reliability and validity of the SWML, empirically compare the SWML and RDAS instruments, and explore the benefits and limitations of measuring marital satisfaction with these two instruments.

## METHODS

### Sample

Data were collected through an online survey that was completed by a nationally representative (by census region) sample of couples ( $n = 1,187$ ) residing in U.S. households. A couple was defined as a relationship between two individuals that were considered domestic partners. As consistent with the definition of couple per Sabourin, Valois, and Lussier (2005), cohabitation or sexual preference was not a delimiting factor for couples to be included in the sample. Participants were asked to have one spouse



complete the entire questionnaire and then have the other complete the same questionnaire independently in an effort to foster open honest responses. Instructions to which partner should complete the questionnaire first were not given.

Data were analyzed using 1,187 couples from 48 states within the United States. The collected sample represented the population distribution of the United States by geographical region. Most couples (93%) were currently married. The mean age was 50.67 (standard deviation [SD]=13.75) with a mode of 60 representing 95 participants. Thirty-seven percent of the sample had been previously divorced, and 53.2% reported living in locations with a population over 500,000. The mean annual household income was \$40,000 to \$49,999, with a mode income of \$30,000 to \$39,999 representing 15% of the sample. Many different ethnic groups participated in the study; however, 90.7% of the participants classified themselves as White, non-Hispanic. Of the 7% of nonmarried cohabitating couples, 16 reported being in a same-sex relationship, and nine of those were female.

### Instrumentation

Marital satisfaction was measured using two different instruments. The first instrument used was the RDAS (Busby et al., 1995). The RDAS consists of 14 items. A sample item was "religious matters." Participants marked their responses on a Likert-type scale ranging from 0 (always disagree) to 5 (always agree). It has been a common practice to sum all items to determine an individual's level of marital satisfaction and to use the partner's combined score to represent the couple's marital satisfaction (e.g., Kinnunen & Feldt, 2004; Schaeffer et al., 2005). Therefore the couples score has a possible range of 0 to 140. Busby et al. (1995) demonstrated the RDAS to have acceptable model fit and an instrument's internal consistency with a Cronbach's alpha of .90. Furthermore, the RDAS provided evidence to discriminate between distressed and nondistressed couples, resulting in some evidence of construct validity.

The second instrument used to measure marital satisfaction was the SWML. The SWML requires participants to agree or disagree with five statements about married life on a seven-point Likert-type scale (from 1=strongly disagree to 7=strongly agree). A sample item is "In most ways my married life is close to ideal." The scale is scored by summing all five items, resulting in a marital satisfaction score that ranged from 5 to 35. For purposes of this study a couple's combined marital satisfaction score was calculated by summing both partners' scores, resulting in a possible score range of 10 to 70, with higher scores indicating greater marital satisfaction for the couple. The internal consistency of the SWML has been reported with a Cronbach's alpha of .92 along with some evidence of construct validity (Johnson et al., 2006).

## Analysis

In an effort to follow protocol established by previous research when considering couples' marital satisfaction using the RDAS (e.g., Kinnunen & Feldt, 2004; Schaeffer et al., 2005), all data were analyzed at the couple level. Before summing partner scores, individual responses were examined to ensure that each partner responded similarly. Responses by each partner were positively correlated as measured by both the SWML ( $r = .713$ ) and the RDAS ( $r = .796$ ). Furthermore, the mean absolute difference between partner responses was only 3.67 for the SWML and 4.11 for the RDAS. Therefore it was determined partners rated their marital satisfaction similarly and scores were summed for each couple, resulting in a total couple marital satisfaction score for each scale. All comparative analyses were completed at the couple level.

SWML was compared with the RDAS in four different ways. First, a Pearson correlation indicated the strength and direction of a linear relationship between scores from the two scales (Kerlinger & Lee, 2000). Second, reliability of the two scales was examined to determine their consistency in comparison with each other. Third, the instruments were considered from a validity point of view. And fourth, a factor analysis for each instrument considered how many latent variables underlie a set of items.

## RESULTS

Total couple satisfaction scores of the RDAS ranged from 3 to 137 with a mean of 97.23 ( $SD = 19.67$ ). The range for the first person within each couple to complete the questionnaire was 2 to 69 with a mean of 48.30 ( $SD = 10.41$ ) (Table 2). Their partner's score ranged from 0 to 69 with a mean of 48.93 ( $SD = 10.03$ ). If the total couple satisfaction score suggests marital satisfaction, then couples in the study were moderately satisfied with their married life.

Total couple satisfaction scores of the SWML ranged from 10 to 70 with a mean of 55.38 ( $SD = 13.82$ ). The range for the first person within each couple to complete the questionnaire was 5 to 35 with a mean of 26.80 ( $SD = 8.17$ ). Their partner's score also ranged from 5 to 35 with a mean of 28.58 ( $SD = 6.75$ ). Similar to the RDAS, if one uses the total couple satisfaction

**TABLE 2** Marital Satisfaction Scores

	RDAS			SWML		
	Range	Mean	SD	Range	Mean	SD
Couple	3–137	97.23	19.67	10–70	55.38	13.82
Participant 1	2–69	48.30	10.41	5–35	26.80	8.17
Participant 2	0–69	48.93	10.03	5–35	28.58	6.75

scores from the SWML to suggest marital satisfaction, respondents were moderately satisfied with their married life.

Comparisons of the data distributions between the RDAS and SWML indicated that scores from both instruments were negatively skewed. Scores from both instruments were skewed greater than one unit, with the total couple marital satisfaction score for RDAS skewness equaling  $-1.03$  and the SWML equaling  $-1.09$ . The instruments' negative skewness mean more couples report being satisfied with married life than a normal distribution would suggest.

One noticeable difference in the data distribution between the RDAS and SWML was their kurtosis. Scores from the RDAS had a kurtosis statistic of 1.148, and those from the SWML had a kurtosis statistic of .464. Visual inspection of each instrument's histograms indicates the RDAS distribution appears to be within acceptable range. The SWML histogram has a spike from normality toward the end of being extremely satisfied with married life, suggesting a group of participants were extremely satisfied with married life.

To determine how the two instruments behave in comparison with each other a Pearson correlation was used. Correlating the RDAS total couple satisfaction scores with SWML total couple satisfaction scores yielded a .782 correlation ( $p < .01$ ). Comparing the first participant scores of both instruments yielded a .756 correlation ( $p < .01$ ), and the second participant scores when correlated with each other equaled .697 ( $p < .01$ ). This indicates participant and couple responses to marital satisfaction are strongly and positively correlated between the two instruments. Furthermore, criterion validity is supported because the RDAS and SWML instruments measure the same construct. This is evident from the strong couple and individual correlation between the instruments.

Busby et al. (1995) argued for the RDAS's validity by suggesting it met the criteria for face, content, criterion, and construct validity. For more than a decade the RDAS has been used in research and clinical settings to categorize satisfied and unsatisfied couples (e.g., Cook & Jones, 2002; Hollist & Miller, 2005; Schramm, Marshall, Harris, & Lee, 2005; Zimmerman, Prest, & Wetzel, 1997). The extensive use and empirical evaluation of the RDAS suggests the instrument's validity has been accepted. The SWML scale, however, is new and still in process of establishing widely accepted validity. One way to consider validity is to ask if the scale adequately measures what it reports to measure (DeVe1lis, 2003). In other words, is the scale actually measuring the construct? To answer this question, four types of validity are typically considered: face, content, criterion related, and construct.

Face validity was established by a group of family relation researchers and married couples reviewing the instrument to determine if the SWML's intent appeared to measure marital satisfaction. The overwhelming response was positive, and based on face value of the scale face validity was verified. Content validity was approached by considering what elements comprise

marital satisfaction. Much of SWML relied on the previously established content validity of the Satisfaction with Life Scale. It was presumed that the construct comprising satisfaction with life would not differ greatly when considering satisfaction with married life. The root concept remains satisfaction. Therefore content validity was largely verified by borrowing from the accepted validity of the Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener et al., 1985), which was established from research on populations such as prisoners, psychiatric patients, abused women, and students in poor and turbulent countries (Pavot & Diener, 1993).

Criterion-related validity was established by the SWML predicting with accuracy the marital satisfaction a couple experienced. To see how close marital satisfaction was predicted, the total couple marital satisfaction score of the RDAS was used to suggest marital satisfaction and then correlated with SWML's composite marital satisfaction score. The correlations were in acceptable ranges. SWML's construct validity is evident from its strong correlation with the RDAS when measuring marital satisfaction. RDAS's validity has been generally accepted as manifested from its extensive usage, and SWML's criterion-related validity can be implied from their close relationship. For validity to generally be accepted, the SWML will need to be used and tested in many different studies with varying populations.

One of the main purposes of this study was to work toward establishing construct validity. It is logical to presume if RDAS is a valid measure for marital satisfaction and if SWML and RDAS scores are significantly correlated, then SWML is measuring marital satisfaction. Based on this line of reasoning, the SWML's validity is beginning to be firmly established. The last point to consider when comparing the performance of the two instruments is their psychometric properties. The SWML scale had a Cronbach's alpha of .958, compared with the RDAS Cronbach's alpha of .943. Thus, with regard to the instruments' reliability, they again are on parity.

A factor analysis helps to empirically determine the number of constructs or factors underlying a given variable. The RDAS was designed to measure consensus, satisfaction, and cohesion. The instrument, thus, should break into three distinct factors. Using a principal components method and a varimax rotation for the first set of participants to take the questionnaire, this theoretical foundation can be confirmed. Three components with an Eigenvalue of greater than 1 are found. Consensus, satisfaction, and cohesion explain over 65% of the variance found within the instrument and have acceptable factor loadings that range from .638 to .844 (Table 3). An empirical evaluation of the instrument suggests the RDAS performs how Busby et al. (1995) theoretically suggested. The instrument performs as three distinct factors that have not been theoretically linked to measure overall marital satisfaction.

A factor analysis was used to empirically confirm if the SWML items all contribute toward measuring marital satisfaction. The SWML scale was

**TABLE 3** Rotated Component Matrix for RDAS

	Component matrix		
	Consensus	Satisfaction	Cohesion
Item 3: Making major decisions	.782		
Item 6: Career general decisions	.775		
Item 5: Conventionality	.740		
Item 2: Displaying affection	.740		
Item 4: Sex relations	.725		
Item 1: Religious matters	.638		
Item 8: How often do you and your partner quarrel?		.802	
Item 10: How often do you and your mate "get on each other's nerves"?		.758	
Item 7: How often do you discuss or consider divorce, separation, or terminating you relationship?		.746	
Item 9: Do you ever regret that you married?	.316	.700	.322
Item 13: Work together on a project			.844
Item 12: Have a stimulating exchange of ideas			.781
Item 11: Do you and your mate engage in outside interests together?			.689
Item 14: Calmly discuss something		.380	.641

Extraction method: principal component analysis. Rotation method: varimax with Kaiser normalization.

designed to only measure marital satisfaction; therefore it should only have the one factor. Using a principal components method and a varimax rotation for the first set of participants to take the questionnaire, this theoretical foundation can be confirmed. One factor with an Eigenvalue value of greater than 1 is found. This single component explains over 86% of the variance within the scale and all the items loading ranged from .887 to .957 on a single factor (Table 4). This suggests that the SWML is measuring only the construct of marital satisfaction.

**TABLE 4** Rotated Component Matrix for SWML

Component	Marital satisfaction
Item 1: In most ways my married life is close to ideal	.941
Item 2: The conditions of my married life are excellent	.957
Item 3: I am satisfied with my married life	.952
Item 4: So far I have gotten the important things I want in my married life	.917
Item 5: If I could live my married life over, I would change almost nothing	.887

Extraction method: principal component analysis: 1 component extracted.

## DISCUSSION

Current marital satisfaction research appears to be lacking both a clear definition of marital satisfaction and instruments specifically designed to measure marital satisfaction as a unique construct (Eddy et al., 1991; Fincham & Bradbury, 1992). This lack of clarity leads to limitations in understanding the construct of marital satisfaction and accurately making inference from the research data (Kerlinger & Lee, 2000). Illustrative of this point, many researchers and practitioners have used the RDAS to measure marital satisfaction by combining its three constructs into a composite score and referring to it as marital satisfaction. Although this practice has been widely used, it was not the purpose or intent of the instrument, and this approach in general has been met with some skepticism (Schumm, et al., 1985). The SWML has been designed as an alternative instrument to the RDAS to specifically measure marital satisfaction but has yet to be evaluated in comparison with an existing accepted instrument on a large scale. Considering this issue, the current study investigated the following three items: (1) the reliability and validity of the SWML, (2) empirical comparison of the SWML and the RDAS, and (3) the benefits and limitations of measuring marital satisfaction using the SWML or the RDAS.

Regarding the first area of investigation, results indicated that the reliability and validity of the SWML were acceptable. Evidence of reliability was provided with an acceptable Cronbach's alpha of  $\alpha = .958$ , and evidence of validity included acceptable face, content, criterion, and construct validity. The strong positive correlation between the two instruments implies both instruments are measuring the same construct. Based on the widespread acceptance of the RDAS as a measure of marital satisfaction, this strong correlation implies initial evidence of construct validity. Furthermore, Johnson et al. (2006) reported significant correlations between the theoretically related constructs of marital leisure satisfaction and marital satisfaction, which also provided additional evidence of construct validity. Additional research is needed, however, to continue to establish the validity of the SWML.

An additional purpose of the study was to empirically compare the SWML and RDAS instruments. Both the RDAS and the SWML are statistically comparable. Both had similar distributions with a tendency to be negatively skewed. The RDAS was more kurtotic with an index score of 1.148 and the SWML kurtosis equaled .464, implying the SWML represents a more normal distribution. The strong positive correlation between the scales ( $r = .782$ ) suggests the instruments behave in similar ways and are on parity when measuring marital satisfaction.

The last method this study used to empirically compare the two instruments was to individually consider their psychometric properties. The RDAS had a Cronbach's alpha of .943, and the SWML had a Cronbach's alpha

of .958. Both are in acceptable range and suggest the instruments' items are working well together. In addition, the instruments' factor analyses supported their theoretical conception that the SWML is truly measuring just one construct (marital satisfaction), whereas the RDAS is measuring three individual constructs (consensus, satisfaction, and cohesion), which researchers have theoretically combined to represent marital satisfaction. It can be concluded, therefore, that conceptually both of these instruments are similar, whereas differences still exist in how they measure marital satisfaction.

Based on the established validity of the SWML and the RDAS instruments, the third purpose of the study was to provide a brief discussion regarding why researchers or practitioners may choose to use either instrument to measure satisfaction with married life. Both instruments have advantages and disadvantages, which should be considered carefully.

A significant contribution of the SWML is its relationship to a clear definition of marital satisfaction. Using the SWML allows researchers to very specifically and accurately measure a single construct of marital satisfaction defined as an individual's emotional state of being content with the interactions, experiences, and expectations of his or her married life. This specific definition allows the researcher to make valid inferences from data because the definition of the construct and the measurement tool are consistent (Kerlinger & Lee, 2000; Ruddell, 2002). The SWML could also be considered for use due to its brevity: It only includes five items. It may also be used to validate other marital satisfaction instruments, as it has been used in this study with the RDAS.

Advantages of using the RDAS are that it offers a measure of constructs that contributes to marital satisfaction, it has been widely recognized, and it is used in previous literature on marital satisfaction. The RDAS also provides researchers and practitioners with three additional factors—consensus, satisfaction, and cohesion—for further analysis and clinical use, but in the end it has a composite score of marital satisfaction. Results of this study suggest that each instrument may be used to measure marital satisfaction. Careful consideration should be given to which instrument is the best fit for the given purpose.

### Limitations

This study had several limitations. One of the limitations was the sample stratification. Although the sample was intended to represent the general demographics of the United States, the sample was skewed toward White, non-Hispanics. One possible reason for this emphasis on the White, non-Hispanic group could be because of the use of the Internet in collecting data. Possibly, it is not as common for other ethnic groups to have access to a home computer and thus face a barrier to participating in this study.

Another possibility could be the questionnaire was only offered in English. Although many people in the United States speak English, they may prefer to be online in their native language.

The scores of marital satisfaction may have been skewed because of the inclusion of cohabitating couples. The study and instrument referred to married life, but a couple who participated in the study may not have been legally married in a heterosexual relationship. Previous research indicates "cohabitation unions have poorer relationships quality than their counterparts in marriage" (Brown & Booth, 1996, p. 674). Thus recognizing some of the participating couples were not legally married in a heterosexual relationship (3%) may have lowered the reported overall satisfaction score. The lower satisfaction score, however, would have been reported on a similar magnitude for both the SWML and the RDAS.

An additional limitation is that the study compares the SWML scale with only one instrument. Other instruments are used to collect marital satisfaction data. This comparison only provides initial evidence of validity. Future research may include comparing the SWML to other marital satisfaction instruments such as the RELATionship Evaluation questionnaire (Busby, Holman, & Taniguchi, 2001), Martial Adjustment Scale (MAT: Locke & Wallace, 1959), Quality of Marriage Index (Norton, 1983), and Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale (Schumm, Anderson, Benigas, et al., 1985).

Although this study clearly demonstrates the consistent internal reliability of the SWML, future investigation should focus on further establishing validity. Additional construct and criterion validity studies regarding the SWML would be useful such as verifying the SWML's ability to correctly categorize couples who are satisfied or not satisfied with their marriage. In addition, external reports of the couples' marital satisfaction completed independently by peers (i.e., those with extended interactions with the couple) could be correlated to the self-report data of the SWML, as has been done in the development of other satisfaction scales (Pavot, Deiner, Colvin, & Sandvik, 1991). Finally, other external criteria such as psychological evaluations or clinical observations could be obtained to further establish criterion and construct validity of the SWML.

## CONCLUSION

One of the main areas for future research is firmly establishing a definition for marital satisfaction. Marital satisfaction has been defined in different ways over time (Baldwin et al., 1999; Hill, 1988; Holman & Jacquart, 1988; Julien & Markman, 1991; Orthner & Mancini, 1990, 1991), but a firm definition and operationalization of marital satisfaction is still a debatable topic among researchers and practitioners alike. The use of the SWML offers a possible solution to the definition debate.



The SWML provides researchers and practitioners an equally effective tool to measure marital satisfaction as the commonly used RDAS. The SWML, however, is an improvement on the RDAS because it is theory driven in its measurement of marital satisfaction. Other commonly used instruments are not intended to measure marital satisfaction but are still used to do so. The RDAS, furthermore, is comprised of 14 items and three constructs, whereas the SWML contains only 5 items. The significance of using the SWML over alternative instruments is the brevity of the scale along with the theoretically clear measure of marital satisfaction. Practitioners can quickly use the SWML to determine marital satisfaction without the couple or practitioner investing great time and effort. The advantage for researchers using the SWML is that they can directly measure marital satisfaction, knowing precisely what the construct is measuring.

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