

Marital and Family Therapies

Some Useful Distinctions

I. Study of Marriage: Psychology vs. Sociology

Psychology:

- Marital interactions --behavioral coding
- Personality <--> behavior relations
- Self-report <-- > behavior relations
- Focuses on transactions, what couples do
- Marriage and psychopathology (e.g., depression)

Sociology:

- Variables-- happiness, adjustment, stability
- How societal institutions affect marriage
- Social norms and marriage
- Living conditions/status effects on marriage (e.g., children, economic factors, etc.)
- Often rely on surveys

II. Areas of Overlap

- Content: Abuse, violence
- Psychology --> person factors, interventions, prevention
- Sociology --> demographics and abuse, group membership, etc.
- Definitions (theories) of marital satisfaction
- Measures of satisfaction

III. Kinds of literature you will encounter

A. Major reviews (e.g., theme reviews, e.g., *Psych Bulletin*, *Clinical Psych. Review*)
Summarizes a broad range of studies to illustrate some points and/or support some conclusions (e.g., the relation between marriage and depression; marriage and health; effects of marital distress on children, etc.)

B. Theoretical papers -- develop a theory about a topic; uses past empirical studies to lead into something new, yet highly relevant to field (e.g., Gottman's theory about why marriages fail); present an integrative theory. not just one study

C. Empirical studies

Hypothesis testing;

- experimental manipulation; concerns with internal and external validity
- quasi-experimental designs (starting with existing groups) sampling of known groups (e.g., alcoholic vs. non-alcoholic couples on some measures)
- report statistical comparisons

(over)

D. Case studies

Good for illustrating procedures; suggest new techniques

Do not provide a basis for generalizing beyond the case itself

"Proves" nothing (no experimental control)

E. Essays and "think pieces"

Opinions, essays, "should be" articles, based on what someone "believes" -- not based on evidence; suggestions for intervention or procedures (generally of limited value for this class)

IV. Practice:

For each of the following, decide whether it is more likely to be a psychological or a sociological study; try to imagine how the *independent* and *dependent* variables might be measured:

1. Rates of spouse abuse as a function of lowered family income
2. Divorce rates in one- and two-spouse working families
3. Communication behaviors predictive of divorce
4. Sexual satisfaction and marital conflict: is there a causal relation?
5. Effects of children on marital satisfaction
6. Positive and negative communication in alcoholic marriages
7. Self-report and behavioral measures of marital quality: a new assessment procedure
8. Comparison of three marital therapies: which is most effective?
9. Religion as a factor in marital stability
10. Reciprocity of negative affect arousal and likelihood of divorce

V. Levels of Abstraction, Levels of Analysis

Our goal is to describe and understand marital interactions, marital stability, satisfaction, and marital quality by using variables from different levels of abstraction. This course draws on three main levels of analysis, the person, the interaction, and the system. Knowing how they are similar and different is essential for understanding the studies you will be reading. Variables are defined at these different levels. This is what exercise IV, above was designed to help you with.

A. Person

Name as many person variables as you can think of that would be relevant to understanding marriage relationships.

B. Interaction

What words (terms) do we use for describing interactions? How do interactions describe marriage? Are there as many interaction words as there seem to be person words? What accounts for the difference, if any?

C. System

How does being a member of a group (e.g., family) help you understand what people do in a marriage? How does an inter-dependent set of related persons affect our behavior? From a systems perspective we look at behavior that is constrained by "context" (based on system principles).

MARITAL AND FAMILY THERAPY RELATED JOURNALS

This is a **partial** listing of marriage related journals. Journals vary in scientific quality, focus on marriage/family, and readability. The rating system is fairly gross, but it will help guide you in your quest for sources for your papers. Please let us know of other journals you found useful and worthwhile.

Ratings:

- 1 = Excellent selections for this subject matter
- 2 = Good; may not contain many marital/family articles
- 3 = Overall, not a quality journal, but may be useful
- 4 = Among the weaker journals; don't rely heavily on these

- 1 *American Journal of Family Therapy*
- 2 *Annual Review of Psychology*¹
- 2 *Behavioral Assessment*
- 2 *Behavioral Science Research*
- 1 *Behavior Therapy*
- 2 *Clinical Psychology Review*
- 3 *Family Coordinator*
- 2 *Family Process,*
- 1 *Family Psychology*
- 3 *Family Relations,*
- 2 *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*
- 1 *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*
- 1 *Journal of Family Violence*
- 2 *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*
- 1 *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*
- 3 *Journal of Marriage and Family Counseling*
- 1 *Journal of Marriage and the Family*
- 2 *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*
- 3 *Journal of Sex and Marital Therapy*
- 2 *Journal of Studies on Alcohol*
- 2 *Psychological Bulletin*
- 2 *Violence and Victims,*

¹ Only relevant article: O'Leary, K. & Smith, D. A. (1991). Marital interactions.

A sampling of some standard useful (but specialized) books:

- Beach, S. R. H., et al. (1990). *Depression in marriage*. New York: Guilford Press
- Filsinger, E. E. (Ed.). (1983). *A source book of marriage and family assessment*. Beverly Hills: Sage.
- Fincham, F.D., & Bradbury T. N. (Eds.) (1990). *The psychology of marriage: basic issues and applications*. New York: Guilford.
- Jacobson, N. S., & Gurman, A. S. (Eds.), (1995) *Clinical handbook of couple therapy*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Goldenberg, I., & Goldenberg, H. (1991). *Family therapy: an overview*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.
- Gurman, A. S., & Kniskern, D. P. (Eds.). (1991). *Handbook of family therapy. Vol. 2*. New York: Brunner/Mazel.
- Van Hasselt, V. B., et al. (1988). *Handbook of family violence*. New York: Plenum Press.
- Van Hasselt, V. B., & Hersen, M. (1996). *Sourcebook of psychological treatment manuals for adult disorders*. New York: Plenum. (Chpt. 13: Weiss & Halford. Managing Marital Therapy)