

## **Predicting Marital Satisfaction Using PREPARE: A Replication Study**

**Andrea S. Larsen & David H. Olson**

**This study clearly replicated the previous findings which demonstrated the predictive validity of PREPARE. Like the previous study, this longitudinal study was a 3-year follow-up of 179 couples who took PREPARE during their engagement. As in the initial longitudinal study, PREPARE predicted, with about 80% accuracy, couples who got divorced from those that were happily married. Also, the same linear trend in PREPARE scores was found (highest to lowest scores): happily married, unhappily married, cancelled/delayed marriage, and separated/divorced. This study further indicates the importance of the premarital period as the foundation for marriage and the ability of PREPARE to identify high-risk premarital couples who could benefit from premarital counseling. Premarital counseling could potentially help these high risk couples develop a more satisfying marriage.**

The possibility of predicting marital satisfaction and success prior to marriage has long fascinated researchers and clinicians. This interest was pioneered by Burgess and Wallin (1953) and Terman (1938). More recent efforts have used improved methods and multivariate designs (Fowers & Olson, 1986; Markman, 1979, 1981).

The purpose of this study is to replicate the longitudinal study conducted by Fowers and Olson (1986) with the premarital inventory PREPARE. In discussing marriage and family research we agree with Lyman Wynne (1986), who strongly emphasized the need for replication studies. He stated:

One of the major points on which there is agreement is the need for replication studies. The field of somatic psychiatric treatment has been burned again and again by reposts of results that are highly touted but turn out not to be replicable. In the family therapy field, we must acknowledge that there have been few attempts at replication. With many opportunities for innovation in family

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Agriculture Experiment Station, University of Minnesota, St. Paul, MN.*

*Andrea S. Larsen, PhD, is a Marriage and Family Therapist, Private  
Practice, Loring Park Office Building, Suite 230, 430 Oak Grove, Minneapolis,  
MN 55403.*

*David H. Olson, PhD, is Professor, Family Social Science, 290 McNeal  
Hall, University of Minnesota, St. Paul, MN 55108.*

therapy, we have been more interested in trying something different than in replicating any approach used by someone else. Unfortunately this craving has reduced our credibility. (p. 7)

The ability to predict marital success has become increasingly important given the high divorce rates of the last 2 decades. Current estimates of this divorce rate are that 50% of all first marriages will end in divorce. Two thirds of these divorces occur in the first 10 years of marriage, with the median duration of marriages being 7 years (National Center for Health Statistics, 1988).

Several recent longitudinal studies have attempted to pinpoint the factors that are predictive of marital success. These studies have shown great promise in identifying which aspects of premarital relationships are associated with marital discord and dissolution. The information is vital for two reasons. First, longitudinal studies are necessary to aid in understanding and explaining the developmental changes that occur in couples and families. Second, effective divorce prevention is entirely dependent upon knowing where to intervene (Baggarozzi & Rauen, 1981; Fowers & Olson, 1986; Markman, 1984).

Markman (1979, 1981, 1984) conducted a 5 ½-year study, following 26 couples from engagement through the first years of marriage. Prior to marriage, the participants in the study completed five problem solving tasks, ranging from low to high conflict areas for each couple. Markman used three independent variables to predict relationship satisfaction over the course of the study: (a) self-report rating of the positive or negative impact of the communication during the problem solving exercises; (b) self-report ratings of relationship problem intensity; and (c) the Marital Relationship Inventory (MRI), a variant of the Locke-Wallace Marital Adjustment Test (Locke & Wallace, 1959).

The problem intensity and MRI data were highly predictive of marital satisfaction 1 year after initial data collection (Markman, 1979). At 2 ½ and 5 ½ years later, the only predictor was the communication impact ratings (Markman, 1979, 1981). There were 18 couples who were married 5 ½ years after initial data collection. Four couples had never married, 3 had divorced, and 1 couple was separated. Markman (1984) reports that the best predictors of future breakup were the couple's confidence that they would get married and the degree of give and take in discussions.

The value of this study is in its longitudinal design which can show the development of marital discord. It also suggests that the quality of communication and degree of commitment are potential predictors of eventual dissolution. The findings must be interpreted with caution due to the small sample size (21 couples at the final follow-up).

Markman and his colleagues recently attempted to replicate this study (Markman, 1984), in a 1-year study with 18 couples. One year after the initial data collection, the only significant predictor of marital satisfaction was initial relationship satisfaction. The initial predictive capability of the premarital form of the Locke-Wallace inventory is

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parallel to the finding discussed above with the MRI. Neither the problem intensity rating nor the communication impact rating predicted satisfaction. The impact of the problem solving communication did not emerge as a predictor of satisfaction until the 2 ½-year follow-up in the original study (Markman, 1981) so it is impossible to know if this finding would be replicated with the available data.

A recent longitudinal study conducted by Fowers and Olson (1986) attempted to predict marital dissolution based on premarital inventory scores. The authors conducted a 3-year follow-up of 164 couples who had taken the premarital inventory PREPARE during their engagement. The couples were divided into three groups based on their marital status at the follow-up: (a) happily married; (b) separated or divorced; and (c) never married.

The PREPARE scores were highly predictive of subsequent marital status. Nine of PREPARE's 11 scales consistently predicted marital status. Discriminant analyses of the data predicted the couples' marital status with 74-84% accuracy. The most prominent predictors of subsequent marital success were the Conflict Resolution, Communication, Realistic Expectations, Personality Issues, Leisure Activities, Financial Management, Family and Friends, Equalitarian Roles, and Religious Orientation scales.

This study confirms the importance of premarital relationship factors in the prediction of marital success. The longitudinal design, again, indicates that premarital difficulties may well lead to marital discord and dissolution. The larger sample size provides more confidence in the results.

Although the Markman (1979, 1981) and Fowers and Olson (1986) studies generally corroborate one another, neither has been fully replicated. This paper will provide a replication of the findings of the Fowers and Olson (1986) study. Replications are essential for several reasons. First, the generalizability of results which are based on a single sample is always open to question. Second, many statistical techniques increase the degree of predictability in an inflated way. Third, it is not at all uncommon for replication studies to fail to corroborate the original findings. In order to have full confidence in any scientific finding, we must rely on a body of research rather than any single study.

## **METHODS**

### ***Sample***

A sample of 179 married couples who had taken PREPARE as premarital couples in 1982 were involved in this longitudinal study over 2 years after their marriage (Larsen, 1986). These premarital couples visited their clergy or counselor for premarital counseling, took the PREPARE inventory about 4 months before they planned to marry, and knew their partner-to-be for 32 months. The sample was primarily Caucasian (98%), and affiliated with a Christian church (95%). The mean ages were 24 years for males and

22 years for females. All of the married couples reported having at least one child, with an average of 1.71 children.

The educational levels for males and females were roughly similar, with 85% completing graduate degrees, 28% completing undergraduate degrees, 42% completing a technical or 2-year college program, 18% completing high school, and 3% who did not complete high school.

The occupations of the males and females in the above sample showed some differences. Approximately 5% of the males reported working in the professional field, compared to 2% of the females. Other professional work, such as teaching, was identified by 30% of the females and 21% of the males. Skilled trade was noted by 14% of the males and 6% of the females. Sales/clerical work was reported by 11% of the males and 28% of the females. Labor and service categories were identified by 18% of the males and 7% of the females. A high percentage of the sample reported student status (14% of the males and 20% of the females). The majority of the sample earned a monthly take-home pay ranging from \$400-1000.

A comparison of the sample in the current study with the sample studied by Fowers and Olson (1986) can be seen in Table 1. In general, the two samples were very similar in terms of all the demographic characteristics.

### ***Instrument***

PREPARE is a 125-item inventory designed to identify relationship strengths and weaknesses in 11 relationship areas: (a) Realistic Expectations, (b) Personality Issues, (c) Communication, (d) Conflict Resolution, (e) Financial Management, (f) Leisure Activities, (g) Sexual Relationship, (h) Children and Marriage, (i) Family and Friends, (j) Equalitarian Roles, and (k) Religious Orientation (Olson, Fournier, & Druckman, 1987). Additionally, the inventory contains an Idealistic Distortion scale which is used to correct the individual scores for social desirability, thereby resulting in a total of 12 scales (see Table 2).

An individual score for each spouse is generated for each scale. These raw scores are revised based on the individual's score on the Idealistic Distortion scale and the correlation of that scale with idealistic distortion.

A Positive Couple Agreement (PCA) score is also computed for each scale. The PCA is a measure of the couple's consensus for each relationship area. The PCA is computed for each PREPARE category which contains 10 items. Husband and wife responses are combined and the items that they agree on (within 1 point on a 1-5 scale) are summed and converted to a percentage score, which could range from 0-100%. Positive Couple Agreement (PCA) includes only those items where they both see the issues as positive, i.e., "I like the personality of my partner." If they agree with a

negative issue, the item is scored instead as a special focus time, i.e., “My partner is often jealous.”

**Table 1**  
**Comparison of Samples in the Fowers and Larsen Studies**

Status of Couples	Fowers' (1983)		Larsen (1986)	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Happily Married	59	36	49	27
Unhappily Married	22	13	57	32
Cancelled Marriage	52	32	37	21
Separated/Divorced	31	19	36	20
Total	164	100%	179	100%
Age (Years)				
Male	25.2		25.1	
Female	23.2		23.2	
Knew Partner Before Marriage (Months)	26.7		31.0	
Took PREPARE Before Marriage (Months)	4.2		4.3	
Follow-up After Marriage (Months)	23		28	
Education Completed (%)				
Professional	8		4	
Completed College	28		18	
Completed 2 Years	42		47	
Completed High School	18		25	
Less Than High School	4		6	
	100%		100%	

The reliability of PREPARE has been assessed using both internal consistency and test-retest methods. The scales have internal consistency (*alpha*) coefficients ranging from .63 to .81, with .73 as the mean. Test-retest reliability ranges from .64 to .93 over a 2-week period, with a mean of .78 (Olson, Fournier & Druckman, 1987). For complete reliability results see Table 2.

Extensive analyses conducted by Fournier (1979) affirmed PREPARE's concurrent validity vis-à-vis the Inventory of Premarital Conflict (Olson, Druckman & Fournier, 1978) and the Family Environment Scale (Moos & Moos, 1983). PREPARE also appears to have very good predictive validity (Fowers & Olson, 1986).

### ***Procedure***

In January, 1985, 539 counselors and clergy who used PREPARE with premarital couples were contacted to request their assistance in the study. A total of 131 (24%) of these counselors agreed to participate. Of the 131 who agreed to participate, 107 (82%) returned the materials as requested. These counselors were asked to supply information regarding the marital status of all of the premarital couples to whom they administered PREPARE in 1982. The 107 counselors had administered PREPARE to a total of 1204 couples.

**Table 2**  
**Reliability of Prepare Scales**

Scale	Internal Consistency ( <i>Alpha</i> ) ( <i>n</i> = 1.786)	Test-Retest Reliability ( <i>n</i> = 314)
Idealistic Distortion	.74	.79
Realistic Expectations	.70	.82
Personality Issues	.77	.78
Communication	.78	.69
Conflict Resolution	.72	.76
Financial Management	.75	.81
Leisure Activities	.63	.79
Sexual Relationship	.67	.64
Children and Parenting	.60	.74
Family and Friends	.70	.73
Equalitarian Roles	.78	.83
Religious Orientation	.85	.93
<i>Average</i>	.73	.78

The couples' PREPARE scores were retrieved from the PREPARE/ENRICH computer records. The original scores of 816 currently married couples could be retrieved from these records. Of these, 410 couples were asked to participate in the study. These couples were asked to complete the marital satisfaction inventory ENRICH. There were usable responses from 156 couples.

The couples were divided into thirds, based on their ENRICH scores. The upper third of these couples constitutes the married/satisfied group (*n*=49), and the lower third were assigned to the married/dissatisfied group (*n*=57). The marital status information provided by the PREPARE counselors was used to identify 36 couples who had divorced

or separated and 37 couples who had cancelled their marriages after taking PREPARE. Thus, the entire sample consists of 179 couples.

## RESULTS

Univariate and multivariate analyses were conducted to examine the predictive validity of PREPARE and to replicate the findings of the Fowers and Olson (1986) study. The univariate analyses included one-way analysis of variance with all four of the groups and *t*-tests for the married/satisfied and separated/divorced groups to determine if PREPARE scores could predict subsequent marital status. Discriminant analyses were conducted to examine the predictive capability of PREPARE as a whole and to assess which scales were the best predictors of marital status at the time of the follow-up.

One-way analyses of variance of the PCA scores of each of the PREPARE scales were conducted. The scores were compared across the four groups of couples: (a) married/satisfied, (b) married/dissatisfied, (c) cancelled/delayed marriage, and (d) separated/divorced couples. Between-groups and linear trend ANOVAs were carried out to test for differences between groups across scales. It was expected that the groups would have scores ranging from highest to lowest, in the following order: (a) married/satisfied, (b) married/dissatisfied, (c) cancelled/delayed, and (d) separated/divorced couples.

There were significant differences between the groups on 9 of the 11 scales: (a) Realistic Expectations, (b) Personality Issues, (c) Communication, (d) Conflict Resolution, (e) Financial Management, (f) Leisure Activity, (g) Sexual, (h) Family and Friends, and (i) Equalitarian Roles. No difference across the groups were found in the Children and Marriage and Religious Orientation scales. The descending pattern of scores across the groups was found hypothesized in all of the PCA scores except the Children and Marriage scale. These results can be seen on Table 3.

A series of *t*-tests with the PCA scores were conducted to examine the differences between the two groups of primary interest: (a) married/satisfied, and (b) separated/divorced couples. The married/satisfied group was expected to have higher scores on all of the scales. Differences between these two groups were found on 8 of the 11 scales; all differences were significant at  $p < .01$  level. Differences were found on the following 8 scales: (a) Realistic Expectations, (b) Personality Issues, (c) Communication, (d) Conflict Resolution, (e) Leisure Activity, (f) Family and Friends, (g) Equalitarian Roles and (h) Religion. The 3 scales that did not show significant differences were: (a) Financial Management, (b) Sexuality, and (c) Children and Marriage (see Table 4).

Table 4 also includes the results of *t*-tests conducted with the Fowers and Olson (1986) data. The findings in the two studies were similar on 8 of the 11 scales. Both Financial Management and Sexual Relationship were significant in the Fowers study but not in the replication.

Stepwise discriminant analyses utilizing Rao's  $V$  to maximize the distance between the groups of optimal classification were carried out. The individual and PCA scores of all scales defined two sets of independent variables used to predict subsequent marital status. Table 5 presents the results of analyses discriminating between: (a) married/satisfied and separated/divorced couples, (b) married/satisfied and married/dissatisfied couples, and (c) married/satisfied and cancelled/divorced couples. Table 5 also includes the discriminant analysis results from Fowers and Olson (1986) for comparison. The results indicate strong support for PREPARE's ability to differentiate between couples who will go on to have satisfactory marriages from couples who are likely to experience marital discord and dissolution. For example, using individual scores, married/satisfied and separated/divorced couples were classified correctly 77% of the time. Using positive couple agreement scores (PCA), these same couples were discriminated correctly in 84% of the cases.

The relative predictive power of the scales can be assessed by examining  $F$  ratios of the scales and the change in Rao's  $V$  when a given scale is entered into the discriminant analyses. Table 6 provides a summary of these results for the discriminant analysis of the married/satisfied and separated/divorced couples using the PCA scores. The scales that were used in the discriminant analysis, from most to least predictive power, were: (a) Equalitarian Roles, (b) Leisure Activities, (c) Realistic Expectations, (d) Conflict Resolution, (e) Family and Friends, (f) Religious Orientation, (g) Children and Marriage, and (h) Sexuality. Of these scales, Equalitarian Roles and Leisure Activities accounted for the greatest proportion of the variance.

## **DISCUSSION AND SUMMARY**

The purpose of this study was to replicate a previous study (Fowers & Olson, 1986) regarding the predictive validity of PREPARE. In general, the findings were very compatible, providing greater confidence in that predictive capacity than could be justified by a single study. Engaged couples who view various aspects of their relationship positively and tend to agree with each other are more likely to be satisfied with their marriage 3 years later. This suggests that potential discord and dissolution up to 3 years after marriage can be identified during the engagement period.

The linear trend analysis resulted in a patterning of the four groups of couples essentially the same as the one reported by Fowers and Olson (1986). Couples who developed satisfactory marriages had the highest mean scores, followed by married/dissatisfied, cancelled/delayed, and separated/divorced. The Children and Parenting scale did not produce differences in the groups in either study. While the Financial Management and Equalitarian Roles scales showed no significant differences in the original study, both scales were predictive of group membership in the replications.

While the discriminant analyses showed considerable similarity from the Fowers and Olson (1986), 2 new scales emerged as significant, i.e., (Equalitarian Roles and (b) Leisure Activities. While the earlier study indicated that Realistic Expectations, Conflict Resolution, Religious Orientation, Personality Issues, and Family and Friends scales were the most potent predictors (Fowers, 1983), this project indicates that the Equalitarian Roles, Leisure Activities, Realistic Expectations, Conflict Resolution, Family and Friends, Religious Orientation, Children and Marriage, and Sexuality scales are prominent. The importance of Realistic Expectations, Conflict Resolution, Religious Orientation and Family and Friends were common to both studies.

The overall results of the two studies are more clearly in general agreement. Both projects indicate the importance of Realistic Expectations, Personality Issues, Conflict Resolution, Communication, Leisure Activities, Family and Friends, and Religious Orientation scales in describing marital success. Both studies also failed to find any predictive validity for the Financial Management and Children and Parenting scales. It may well be that engaged couples have difficulty responding to items that pertain entirely to future events, such as finances and children.

While some earlier studies suggest that one's role relationship does not predict satisfaction (Fournier, 1979; Fowers & Olson, 1986), this more recent study demonstrates the predictive value of this scale. The Equalitarian Roles scale assesses an individual's beliefs, feelings, and attitudes about roles. High scores represent more flexibility regarding work in or out of the home and a commitment to shared responsibilities.

The importance of the Leisure Activities scale in this study deserves further comment. The items in the Leisure Activities scale measure satisfaction with spending free time alone and together as a couple. Klagsbrun (1985) writes that: "Strong marriages try to find a balance between participating in another's shared activities and going their own ways" (p. 293). The findings suggest that this scale may, in certain ways, operationalize what may be called a "friendship" variable in marriage. These findings are similar to past research which has documented the association between marital satisfaction and common interests (Blood & Wolfe, 1960; Levinger, 1965; Smith, Snyder, Trull & Monsma, in press; Snyder, 1979).

This study, in combination with Fowers and Olson's (1986) results, suggests that PREPARE has very good predictive validity. Both studies utilized longitudinal designs to predict marital status based on premarital inventory scores. This also indicates that the seeds of marital discord and dissolution are present very early in the relationship. The replication greatly increases the confidence with which these conclusions can be drawn. This information is particularly important in premarital counseling programs. Based on these two studies, such programs ought to focus on a couple's realistic expectations, personality issues, communication, conflict resolution, leisure activities, family and friends, equalitarian roles and religious orientation.

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