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Author(s): Marilyn L. Bowman

Source: *Journal of Marriage and Family*, Vol. 52, No. 2 (May, 1990), pp. 463-474

Published by: National Council on Family Relations

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/353040>

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Coping Efforts and Marital Satisfaction: Measuring Marital Coping and Its Correlates

In the course of a long-term, intimate relationship such as marriage, recurring strains require people to cope in a way that seems to be different from the way they respond to sudden traumatic events. An inventory was developed to identify the major kinds of coping used in dealing with recurring marital problems. A substantial normative population (n = 368) provided a data base for discovering five robust subscales. Cronbach's alpha reliabilities were satisfactory (Conflict, .88; Introspective Self-blame, .88; Positive Approach, .82; Self-interest, .82; and Avoidance, .77). The correlations between final scale scores and original factor scores were also satisfactory (.94, .95, .94, .86, and .89, respectively). The final scale of 64 items was studied to determine the scale-score attributes of subjects sorted for age, sex, education, and years married, and for aspects of validity relating to overall marital happiness and problem severity.

Major and unpleasant life experiences can lead to severe personal distress. When Holmes and Rahe (1967) developed a way to calibrate significant life events to study health, their new technique stimulated a flood of life stress research, including scale refinement (e.g., Holmes and Masuda, 1974), studies of the minutiae of daily life (Kanner, Coyne, Schaefer, and Lazarus, 1981), and studies of chronic life strains (Pearlin and Schooler, 1978). These further led to studies of buffering variables such as social support (e.g., Thoits,

1982), personality variables such as defensiveness (Haan, 1977), locus of control (Lefcourt, 1976), and coping behavior (Pearlin and Schooler, 1978).

While some studies construed coping as a stable personality attribute (Kobasa, 1979), reviews (Menaghan, 1983a; Wortman, 1983) of the evidence (e.g., Folkman and Lazarus, 1980) suggested that the choice of coping technique was likely to be problem-specific.

Because marriage is such a central and important life status, one repeatedly calling upon coping efforts, it is an important source of information concerning the structure and effects of coping efforts. Marital status per se has long been associated with better general well-being (particularly in men), although the quality of the marital relationship further modifies this general finding (Gove, Hughes, and Style, 1983). Marital satisfaction has been repeatedly shown to have higher correlations with overall life happiness than other factors do, in large population surveys spanning more than a decade in the United States (Glenn and Weaver, 1981). The important study by Pearlin and Schooler (1978) showed that coping responses were more powerful in relieving marital and childrearing strains than they were in relieving problems in other central roles, where factors including personality characteristics and social support resources played a greater role. Further, particular coping responses (e.g., controlled reflectiveness) were differentially helpful within marriage.

Marriage thus appears to be a potential source of valuable information about coping. Despite this, there have been few attempts to construct specific measures to study coping efforts in mar-

Department of Psychology, Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, B.C., V5A 1S6, Canada.

riage. Many scales have been developed to assess marital quality, variously named as marital satisfaction, adjustment, agreement, attitude favorableness, or happiness (e.g., Snyder's Marital Satisfaction Inventory, 1979; Spanier's Dyadic Adjustment Scale, 1976), or marital complaints (e.g., Weiss and Birchler, cited in Margolin, Talovic, and Weinstein, 1983), but few measures have focused specifically on the coping efforts that spouses use when dealing with recurrent marital strains. Although the Pearlin and Schooler (1978) and Menaghan (1982) analyses of their large data set yielded coping factors important in marriage, these were not developed as specific independent measurement scales with established psychometric properties suitable for use elsewhere.

Attempts to measure coping as a more general construct have been more vigorous, but despite two decades of research on the construct of coping (initiated largely by Lazarus's 1966 work), consensus on the central features of the construct and the best ways to study these has been slow to develop. This has been reflected in a similarly halting development of measurement methods. Out of the work of a number of researchers (Andrews, Tennant, Hewson, and Vaillant, 1978; Billings and Moos, 1981; Folkman and Lazarus, 1980; Pearlin and Schooler, 1978; Sidle, Moos, Adams, and Cady, 1969) it is possible to discern desirable features of a measurement instrument that would correspond usefully to some of the developments in definitions of the construct. The instrument should be directed to a particular life domain rather than to coping with life in general, because coping is apparently domain-specific. The respondent should specify the particular stress being considered, rather than the test-maker providing a generalized, hypothetical situation that may be irrelevant to a given respondent. Subjects should have the opportunity to provide frequency ratings rather than being given dichotomous choices, and item content should include material elicited from the subject population.

Studies of marital quality have shown variation as a function of demographic variables: Argyle and Furnham (1983) found that older couples experienced less marital conflict; Gove et al. (1983) found women's happiness more related to the emotional quality of the relationship, while men's was more related to the status per se.

Education is usually positively associated with marital quality, while the presence of children is negatively correlated and results are mixed on child density (Spanier and Lewis, 1980). In contrast, the evidence concerning coping efforts in marriage and demographic variables is scanty and mixed. Folkman and Lazarus (1980) did not find age effects in general coping and did not find sex effects in coping with family problems, but Sidle et al. (1969) found that college women used external distraction more than men did in general coping, and Pearlin and Schooler (1978) found that women used selective ignoring more in dealing with marital problems. A recent review of 200 studies concluded that there was, at best, "equivocal support" for sex differences in coping (Miller and Kirsch, 1987: 296). While Vitaliano, Russo, Carr, Maiuro, and Becker (1975) failed to find education effects on general coping in distressed and small samples, Pearlin and Schooler found that education was positively related to the use of more effective coping efforts in their large sample. Generally, then there is mixed evidence concerning the contribution of demographic variables to coping with marriage problems. In the present study, as we could not accurately predict the nature of the coping factors that would be identified in our marital data, specific predictions about relations between marital coping variables and demographics were not ventured, although they were expected to be of interest.

The present study had three aims: (a) the development of an instrument for assessing the use of coping efforts in dealing with marital strains, a Marital Coping Inventory, (b) the determination of the relationship between the use of particular coping efforts and marital happiness, and (c) the identification of the major demographic correlates of the use of particular coping efforts, including sex, age, years married, number of children, and education.

Coping efforts were defined as "specific actions taken in specific situations which are intended to reduce a given problem or stress" (following Menaghan, 1983b) and were thus distinguished from coping resources (generalized attitudes and personal skill) and coping styles (preferred habitual ways of dealing with problems).

THE SAMPLING PROCEDURE

In developing the coping efforts scale, three consecutive versions (A, B and C) were constructed. Subjects for Scales A and B, and those in an initial round of data collection for Scale C, were married persons with a connection to the university as students, faculty, or staff. Because this "college" sample ($N = 180$) was skewed in terms of education and years married, an additional "random" sample was recruited to make the data base more representative. A random-numbers procedure was used with the city directory to identify households in Greater Vancouver in which there was apparently a married couple in residence, and letters were sent out to 503 such households. The nature of the study was described and spouses were invited to participate, either through a follow-up telephone call or through the use of an enclosed reply card. Of the 503 approaches to the random sample, 201 were not interested, 75 could not be reached, and 14 were unable to respond because they were non-English-speaking immigrants. Of the 213 who agreed to participate, 191 returned completed questionnaires, of which 188 were usable, including 65 couples. Thus, of the 414 that were reached and could read English, 46% responded.

Demographic characteristics of the college and random samples showed significant differences between the two subsamples, as expected, and the combined sample ($N = 368$) was used in all subsequent analyses. These persons had a mean age of 39.8 years (range 18–94), had been married a mean of 15.8 years (range .4–77 years), had a mean of 1.6 children (range 0–7), and were 61% female. Twelve percent had not completed high school, 13% had, 44% had incomplete postsecondary education, and 31% had completed university.

When the combined sample was compared with Canadian census data for the district on the central variable of age, chi-square testing showed that the two distributions were not significantly different. Ages in the combined sample were distributed as follows: to 19 = 1%, 20–29 = 28%, 30–39 = 31%, 40–49 = 15%, 50–59 = 14%, 60–69 = 8%, 70–94 = 8%. Chi-squares comparing our random sample with the census on income showed the random sample to have slightly more lower-income subjects ($\chi^2 [2] = 6.69, p < .05$) than the general population; since these data

had not been collected from one part of the earlier college sample, they are not reported for the combined group. The combined sample probably had slightly more subjects with higher levels of education, although direct comparisons with census data were not possible.

Development of a Scale to Measure Marital Coping

Seventy-one items for a pilot scale (A) were developed on the basis of information from open-ended interviews and questionnaires with married people, the literature, and existing coping scales. These represented specific coping efforts (actions, thoughts, or feelings), including items of an antagonistic or retributive nature—items that contrasted with the generally more benign and socially desirable items seen on lists of researcher-generated coping efforts. Scale A subjects were first asked to identify the particular recurring problem within their marriage that "troubles you the most," then to respond to items by describing their own behavior, using a 5-point scale. Pilot data from 50 subjects suggested that meaningful dimensions were identifiable, and further development was undertaken.

Scale B expanded to 131 items, the Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale was added to check for response bias (Crowne and Marlowe, 1964), and data from 101 new subjects were collected. Item-response analysis suggested coherent patterns and a larger sample was sought. Scale C refined item wording, deleted a useless item, and inserted "unlikely" dummy items as validity checks. It was administered to additional subjects (the "college" sample) to bring the subject total to 180 for the item pool. Item and factor analyses suggested that Scale C was measuring meaningful patterns of marital coping behavior, and data were then collected on the additional "random" sample as described above to form one large combined data set for Scale C.

Measuring Marital and Life Happiness and Problem-Severity

We used four simple global ratings for measures of overall marital happiness, marital problem-severity, life satisfaction, and life problem-severity, noting that Spanier and Lewis (1980)

found high correlations between global indices of marital satisfaction with multifactorial measures, and that Johnson, White, Edwards, and Booth (1986) had shown that two broad dimensions (of happiness and problems) underlie marital quality indices. Subjects used 7-point scales (from "terrible" to "delightful," after Andrews and Withey, 1976) on the two happiness measures and 5-point ratings on the two problem scales. They described their most serious current marital and life problem and used these as the basis for their responses.

Demographic Measures

Demographic variables were chosen to reflect the dimensions of married life relevant to marital quality noted earlier, including age, number of years married, and number of children. Education was used as a rough index of socioeconomic status. Race was not considered a significant factor in our sample; the only racial variation of any size in our community is Chinese-Canadian, approximately 5% in the local population, according to census data.

RESULTS

Missing data cells were examined and missing values generated with both rational and psychometric procedures. Subjects' written comments were used as guides for assigning some missing ratings, while in other cases we estimated missing values through a procedure based on a two-step multiple regression if no rationale existed for otherwise assigning a meaningful rating. Insertion of regression-estimated values was chosen in order to retain a substantial sample size and to reduce the risk of biasing the data set, and was done conservatively. Three subjects were deleted from the sample because of excessive missing data and before estimation procedures were used. Of the remaining 368 included cases, 96% provided all (69%) or all but one (27%) item, no subject was missing more than 5 items, and no item was missing in more than 2% of the subjects. Although this procedure will inflate internal consistency values to some extent, we do not believe that significant inflation occurred, because of the very constrained scale of the missing data.

Marital problems were identified by subjects in an open-ended format and later categorized as follows: communication (18%), money (18%),

children (12%), health (10%), and other. To see if there were significant types of marital problems associated with the use of particular coping efforts, we did one-way ANOVAs for the types of marital problems for each of the five coping scales, using Tukey-B tests to deal with the problem of multiple comparisons; no significant relations were found, and problem type was not further pursued as a variable.

The Marital Coping Inventory

Anticipating that the factors would be correlated, we did a principal-factor analysis (iterated communalities) with direct quartimin rotation, using BMDP4M on the Scale C data from the combined sample. We found a five-factor solution to be the best fit, using judgment to obtain the best combination of the drop-off in eigenvalues, and considering interpretability. The factors were identified as Conflict, Introspective Self-blame, Positive Approach, Self-interest, and Avoidance. No item-weighting was done prior to the factor analysis despite some possible influences linked with sex, age, and education, because there were no compelling reasons to consider any particular demographic variable more confounding than any other.

Social desirability (SD) scores correlated significantly only with one factor, (Conflict), ($r = -.44, p < .001$); because this was a rational correlation and all the other scales were independent of SD, the Conflict scale was retained intact and SD was not pursued as a confounding issue.

An item analysis was done to identify those items that met certain conditions for subsequent use in scales. Items were retained if they had factor loadings greater than .4, mean values between 1.5 and 4.5, standard deviations greater than .8, and a rational connection with the other items in the factor. For each factor a series of calculations was done to determine the best items for the eventual scale, in terms of maximal factor-scale correlations and alphas. These items then comprised the final scales. A further factor analysis was done with only the 64 items retained in the final scales. The final Marital Coping Inventory may be seen in the Appendix. Final item loadings on all factors in this second factor analysis are shown in Table 1.

The five scales were composed of 64 items that met the above criteria in the first factor analysis;

they are described below. For the final scales, Cronbach's alpha values for internal consistency ranged from .77 to .88. Factor-scale correlations were computed across all subjects for factor scores (the sum of all the weighted items on each factor) with the related scale scores (the unweighted sum of the selected items). These values ranged from .86 to .95.

The Scales

The Conflict scale (factor-scale $r = .94$, $\alpha = .88$) included 15 items reflecting conflict,

criticism, sarcasm, and revenge. The Introspective Self-blame scale (factor-scale $r = .95$, $\alpha = .88$) included 15 items of troubled feelings, self-blame, worry, and disturbances of sleeping and health. Positive Approach (factor-scale $r = .94$, $\alpha = .82$) included 14 items reflecting gestures of physical affection, fun, and initiating shared activities and good memories. The Self-interested scale (factor-scale $r = .86$, $\alpha = .82$) consisted of 9 items reflecting deliberate increased activity outside marriage. Avoidance (factor-scale $r = .89$, $\alpha = .77$) had 11 items including denial, repression, and suppression of feelings. Interest-

TABLE 1. SECOND FACTOR ANALYSIS: LOADING OF FINAL 64 ITEMS ON FIVE FACTORS

Item	Factor 1 Loading	Factor 2 Loading	Factor 3 Loading	Factor 4 Loading	Factor 5 Loading
19	.655	.004	-.048	.016	.007
56	.648	.068	.021	.083	-.000
29	.645	.019	.048	-.026	-.082
12	.644	.149	.055	-.019	.059
46	.642	.077	.065	.138	.085
4	.639	-.043	.001	-.104	-.100
9	.629	-.002	.031	-.098	.020
52	.604	-.042	-.122	-.111	.092
16	.564	.084	-.023	-.045	-.094
61	.553	-.020	.011	.181	-.125
64	.530	.009	-.049	.109	.101
43	.515	-.112	-.007	.107	.130
39	.387	.281	-.172	.140	-.013
34	.310	.085	-.007	.080	-.038
27	.283	.184	.130	.096	.005
49	-.004	.689	-.023	-.043	.153
31	.110	.673	-.098	.023	.012
35	.017	.646	-.055	-.017	-.062
62	.092	.609	.035	.057	-.057
20	.017	.593	-.028	.116	-.135
25	-.048	.578	.032	.266	-.020
55	.078	.577	-.111	.112	.162
65	.094	.555	.060	-.198	.106
8	.241	.535	-.023	-.162	.111
11	-.002	.465	.021	.039	-.215
42	.143	.459	-.144	.156	.203
6	-.088	.432	.172	-.208	.076
18	.055	.421	-.039	.205	-.047
38	.111	.416	-.048	.163	-.191
59	.018	.372	.166	.161	.029
13	-.034	-.143	.603	.081	-.047
41	.135	.010	.588	.154	-.001
15	-.119	.001	.583	.130	.064
48	-.070	.069	.574	.052	.010
51	-.044	.104	.532	-.129	-.225
54	-.006	-.159	.530	.017	-.027
28	-.038	.001	.526	-.045	.061
45	-.136	.116	.500	.245	.152
66	.182	.110	.490	-.163	-.071
58	-.106	-.188	.447	.059	.043
37	.010	.121	.428	.122	.054
5	.041	.036	.422	.090	.149
21	-.261	-.291	.368	-.263	-.067
24	-.320	-.187	.301	-.186	.013

(continued on next page)

TABLE 1. SECOND FACTOR ANALYSIS: LOADING OF FINAL 64 ITEMS ON FIVE FACTORS—Continued

Item	Factor 1 Loading	Factor 2 Loading	Factor 3 Loading	Factor 4 Loading	Factor 5 Loading
22	.156	-.036	.017	.661	-.027
36	.001	.020	.034	.645	-.013
30	.114	-.070	.150	.605	-.027
32	.071	-.028	.031	.584	.035
60	.308	-.039	-.034	.544	.048
53	-.050	.014	.191	.538	-.038
14	-.059	.033	-.031	.500	.061
7	-.047	.128	.086	.431	.048
44	.045	.222	.010	.359	.193
26	-.043	.017	.151	.014	.554
10	.009	-.062	.130	.015	.540
63	-.004	.105	.007	.037	.530
3	-.061	-.007	-.371	.242	.499
40	.123	.194	.037	.032	.484
33	.108	.063	.063	-.002	.481
23	-.054	-.188	.134	-.128	.471
47	-.243	.191	-.124	.109	.450
17	-.063	-.035	-.337	.147	.442
50	.177	-.219	-.192	-.072	.392
57	-.050	-.069	-.324	.019	.376
Sum of squares	5.456	5.125	4.231	3.598	3.001

ingly, it was the only scale to include items of an active problem-solving approach; these were negatively loaded and weak.

There were interesting patterns of correlations between the five coping scales. Overall, Positive Approach stood in isolation as a factor, while the other coping efforts were positively linked to each other to varying degrees. Table 2 shows these by sex.

Coping efforts and marital quality. There were significant and meaningful relations between the coping scale scores and the ratings of marital happiness and problem severity. Marital happiness was positively correlated with Positive Approach ($r = .23, p < .001$) and negatively with the other coping efforts as follows: Conflict ($r = -.27, p < .001$); Introspective Self-blame ($r = -.40, p < .001$); Self-interest ($r = -.42, p < .001$);

Avoidance ($r = -.23, p < .001$). Marital problem-severity ratings correlated significantly with four of the coping efforts: Conflict ($r = .33, p < .001$), Introspective Self-blame ($r = .52, p < .001$); Positive Approach ($r = -.17, p < .01$); and Self-interest ($r = .36, p < .001$).

Coping efforts and life quality: Correlations showed a pattern similar to those for marriage, although fewer were significant and all were of a much lower order of magnitude.

Marital Coping Efforts and Demographic Characteristics

Sex. The scores of the sample on the final set of scales may be seen in Table 3, with scores for the sexes shown separately and in combination. A MANOVA studying the sexes on the five coping

TABLE 2. CORRELATIONS BETWEEN COPING EFFORTS: MALES AND FEMALES

Factor	Conflict	Introspective Self-blame	Positive Approach	Self-interest	Avoidance
Conflict	—	.45***	-.28***	.30***	.01
Introspective Self-blame	.40***	—	-.11*	.35***	.18**
Positive Approach	-.12	.07	—	.07	-.15**
Self-interest	.28***	.29***	.06	—	.20**
Avoidance	.14*	-.04	-.20**	.27***	—

Note: Females are above the diagonal ($n = 225$), males below ($n = 139$).
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

TABLE 3. MARITAL COPING EFFORTS: MEAN SCALE SCORES BY SEX, WITH SIGNIFICANCE TESTS OF THE SEX DIFFERENCES

Factor	Range	Men (<i>n</i> = 139)	Women (<i>n</i> = 225)	Total (<i>n</i> = 364)	Univariate <i>F</i> (1, 362)
Conflict	15–75	30.3	32.5	31.6	5.05*
<i>SD</i>		7.5	9.6	8.9	
Introspective Self-blame	15–75	36.3	40.7	39.0	18.5***
<i>SD</i>		8.3	10.1	9.7	
Positive Approach	14–70	42.4	42.3	42.3	.01
<i>SD</i>		8.1	8.8	8.5	
Self-interest	9–45	19.9	21.6	21.0	6.7**
<i>SD</i>		5.6	6.4	6.1	
Avoidance	11–55	29.1	27.1	27.9	7.7**
<i>SD</i>		6.9	6.7	6.8	

p* < .05. *p* < .01. ****p* < .001.

scales simultaneously, showed a significant overall effect (Rao's $F[5, 358] = 6.58, p < .001$). The univariate ANOVAs showed that the sexes were significantly different on four of the five coping scales, with women showing greater use of Conflict, Introspective Self-blame, and Self-interest, and men showing greater use of Avoidance. There were no sex differences in the use of Positive Approach.

Education. A MANOVA studying the overall relations between four levels of education and the five coping scales simultaneously indicated that there was no overall education effect in the use of different coping efforts, and education was not pursued as a significant variable in most subsequent analyses.

Number of years together. Multivariate analysis of variance with years together (in five groups of 10-year intervals) and the five coping efforts tested simultaneously showed that there were significant differences in the use of coping efforts related to years together (Rao's $F[20, 1181] = 4.71, p < .0001$). Univariate ANOVAs and inspection of means showed this effect on four of the five coping scales, with Conflict ($F[4, 360] = 8.09, p < .001$) and Introspective Self-blame ($F[4, 360] = 3.51, p < .01$) significantly greater in shorter marriages, in contrast to the rise in the use of Avoidance ($F[4, 360] = 4.32, p < .02$) and Positive Approach ($F[4, 360] = 8.87, p < .001$) with years married.

Conflict means for each 10-year interval were 33.9, 31.6, 30.9, 27.7, and 25.2; Introspective Self-blame means were 40.2, 39.0, 40.5, 35.5, and

35.0; Positive Approach means were 42.0, 39.7, 41.4, 47.8, and 45.6, and Avoidance means were 26.5, 28.4, 29.4, 27.8, and 32.1. Self-interest mean scores did not shift significantly as a function of years together (20.7, 21.0, 22.2, 19.9, and 22.9).

Age of subjects. On a MANOVA that simultaneously tested subject age (in seven groups of 10-year intervals) in relation to coping efforts, a significant overall effect was found (Rao's $F[30, 1410] = 3.43, p < .001$). Inspection of the univariate ANOVAs and group means showed this to be an effect on three coping scales. Both Conflict ($F[6, 356] = 7.31, p < .001$) and Introspective Self-blame ($F[6, 356] = 2.60, p < .02$) rose to a peak (34.6 and 41.3) in the 20–29-year-old group, and then fell to lowest levels with increasing age (23.1 and 36.3). In an inverse pattern, Positive Approach ($F[6, 356] = 4.66, p < .0001$) fell to its lowest level (40.0) in the 40-year-old group, then rose to its highest level (48.2) with increasing age.

Numbers and ages of children bore no significant relationship with coping efforts, and these variables were omitted from most further analyses.

Predicting Marital Happiness and Problem Severity

For all 255 subsets, we did multiple regressions to identify the important predictors of marital happiness and marital problem-severity, using as predictors five demographic variables (age, gender, years married, education, and children), and the

five coping scores. When predictor subsets were evaluated in terms of the R^2 values, visual inspection showed that Self-interest (-), Introspective Self-blame (-), and Positive Approach (+) were importantly present in all the strongest equations for marital happiness. There were minor shifts when the sexes were analyzed separately in that Avoidance (-) rose in importance for men. The strongest equation achieved an adjusted R^2 of .322 for the combined sexes, .213 for the males, .374 for females. For marital problem-severity, Introspective Self-blame (+) was by far the strongest predictor, followed by Self-interest (+) and Positive Approach (-), then weakly followed by the temporal construct represented by age/years married. The highest adjusted R^2 values were .342, with the males' best .357, the females' .343.

The relative importance of marital coping efforts as contrasted with demographic variables may be seen in the adjusted R^2 values in Table 4. It is important not to be misled by the sizes of individual beta weights, for it is clear from the R^2 values that all demographic variables could be eliminated with only negligible losses in predictive accuracy.

For marital happiness the adjusted R^2 was .312 when all coping efforts and all demographic

variables were entered. This dropped slightly to .298 when all coping efforts were retained and the demographics dropped out; in contrast, if the demographic variables were retained and all coping efforts dropped out, the value fell to .035. A similar pattern was found concerning marital problem-severity. The coping scores as a block were consistently more crucial to the prediction of marital happiness and marital problem-severity than were the demographic variables. In terms of individual variables, the temporal demographic variables (age/years married) were significant as predictors in the all-variables equation, along with four of the five coping efforts.

DISCUSSION

Coping Factors

We found five robust factors that described the coping efforts married people reported using when dealing with recurring marital problems. The factor positively associated with marital happiness, Positive Approach, consisted primarily of items reflecting efforts to improve the emotional quality of the marriage, rather than items reflecting more earnest, cognitive problem-solving behavior. This was found even though there was a

TABLE 4. REGRESSION WEIGHTS AND ADJUSTED R^2 FOR PREDICTING MARITAL HAPPINESS AND PROBLEM-SEVERITY FROM DEMOGRAPHIC AND COPING VARIABLES ($N = 368$)

Category	Marital Happiness		Marital Problem-Severity	
	R^2	Beta	R^2	Beta
Demographic variables	.035		.097	
Age		-.238		-.106
Gender		-.058		.030
Years together		.410**		-.217
Children		-.194**		.082
Education		-.067		.100
Coping variables	.298		.300	
Conflict		-.011		.077
Introspective self-blame		-.263***		.392***
Positive approach		.214***		-.133*
Self-interest		-.304***		.205***
Avoidance		-.111*		-.001
All variables	.312		.337	
Age		-.368**		-.030
Gender		.034		-.084
Years married		.413***		-.188
Education		.003		.035
Children		-.098		.008
Conflict		-.028		.035
Introspective self-blame		-.267***		.382***
Positive approach		.209***		-.098
Self-interest		-.292***		.220***
Avoidance		-.102*		-.004

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

good supply of items originally available for a "problem-solving" factor; inspection showed that most subjects answered these in a tightly affirmative manner whose lack of variance precluded their emergence as a factor or any meaningful relation with variations in marital happiness. (A small number of these items survived only as weak items negatively loaded on Avoidance.) In contrast, the emotion-directed items emerged as a factor and were significantly and positively associated with marital happiness. These findings suggest that responsiveness to the emotional qualities of the relationship is more typical in happy marriages than is the use of cool, rational problem-management. This finding is consonant with results reported by Jacobson (1984), who found that training in increased attentiveness to the emotional response of the spouse was the component of his behavioral marital therapy program that had the best short-term impact on marital satisfaction. This attentiveness increased the frequency of positive affective spouse interactions, although long-term effects required additional treatment components.

Open conflict, as found in the Conflict factor, was found to be a feature of an unhappy marriage, echoing similar findings in the literature (e.g., Ting-Toomey, 1983). Avoidance was significantly and negatively associated with marital happiness, supporting similar findings by Menaghan (1983b) and others. Emotion-focused coping is not always positively oriented, and its negatively toned aspects were seen in Introspective Self-blame, which included thinking unhappy thoughts. Self-interest was significantly associated with marital unhappiness; this correlation may represent a deliberate self-development ideology that has led to marital unhappiness or may reflect persistent marital unhappiness that has prompted one spouse to create distance from the partner.

Coping Types

Our scales did not sort cleanly into the two-construct coping schema focusing on problem-solving and emotions that was originally suggested by Folkman and Lazarus (1980). This reflects differences between the studies in terms of constructs (means versus ends) and in scale-construction methods (empirical versus rational); a later empirical analysis by Folkman and Lazarus (1985) showed six factors. It is not yet clear

whether coping efforts are best typed in terms of means, goals, functions (e.g., Pearlin and Schooler, 1978), or effects. If coping efforts are categorized in terms of effectiveness, they may vary in ways independent of traditional conceptual categories. In our study, for example, both Conflict and Positive Approach may be construed as "direct action" efforts, but only Positive Approach was positively associated with marital happiness.

The Effectiveness of Marital Coping Efforts

Our multiple regression equations looking at the prediction of marital happiness and problems repeatedly found that coping efforts as a block were more powerful predictors than were the demographic variables as a block. This finding is congruent with the sparse literature (e.g., White, 1983).

The insignificance of "active problem-solving" as an effective marital coping effort is interesting but not unique to this study. Menaghan (1983a) noted that coping efforts representing direct action (e.g., Pearlin and Schooler's "advice-seeking") had no particular effects on later marital problems. In a similar vein, a two-year follow-up study of a marital therapy program oriented toward problem-solving skills, (Jacobsen et al., 1985: 555) concluded that perhaps "skills-oriented marital therapy has benefits which are only temporary," and Johnson and Greenberg (1985) found that while both behavioral and emotion-focused marital therapy were effective, couples treated with the emotion-focused approach showed a greater magnitude of effect. Perhaps we have been too engulfed in the cognitive revolution in creating coping models, and need to look more carefully at the data to see if the general enthusiasm for a cognitive, skill-oriented, problem-solving approach is empirically as effective as we would conceive it to be.

Demographic Variables and Coping

Coping efforts varied significantly as a function of age, sex, and years married but not as a function of education or children. Sex differences, with women reporting more worry, conflict, and seeking out of distracting activities as a response to marital problems, suggest a relatively strong

emotional involvement in marriage that is congruent with studies finding that women count on their relationships with men to provide emotional support more than vice versa (Argyle and Furnham, 1983). In contrast, men have been found to derive substantial marital benefits from marital status per se (Gove et al., 1983), and problems may not provoke as much emotional response in men unless they are severe enough to threaten this status; that explanation would account for the men's greater penchant for Avoidance. Notably, there were no sex differences on the one efficacious coping effort, Positive Approach.

The shifts in the use of coping efforts that varied with age/years married results showed that there was a temporal dimension to coping efforts. After the initial early high use of Positive Approach and constrained use of the negative coping efforts, in the "early-middle" years of the marriage there was a period of more Conflict and Introspective Self-blame, and less Positive Approach. Older marriages and subjects differed again, showing coping efforts similar to the "young" pattern more highly correlated with marital happiness.

While the present correlational study cannot show the direction of effects, the significant patterns of relations found between coping efforts and marital happiness may involve causal relations of significance, as coping has been found to exert directional effects on later marital satisfaction in longitudinal studies (Markman, 1979; Menaghan, 1983b).

NOTE

Grant support from Simon Fraser University is gratefully acknowledged, as is the valuable assistance of colleague Ray Koopman and research assistant Edward Clarke.

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APPENDIX

MARITAL COPING INVENTORY

Name _____

Most people in close relationships notice that certain problems tend to come up over and over again. For example, you and your partner may disagree over housework issues, in-laws' interference, your partner's jealousy, drinking, children, communications or sexual matters. Problems of these kinds may occur even in satisfying marriages. Think of the most serious recurring problem that you have with your partner and describe it:

1. _____

2. How serious do you consider this problem to be? Please circle—

not serious	slightly serious	moderately	quite	extremely
1	2	3	4	5

Listed below are many ways people may deal with marital problems. Keeping in mind the problem you have identified, indicate how often you tend to do each of these things when dealing with your problem, by circling the word on the scale provided after each item. Note that the answer words on the scale are sometimes in a reversed order, so read the items and answer words carefully. Please try to answer all the questions.

[Editor's note: Responses to items range from 5 to 1 (usually, often, sometimes, rarely, never), except for those marked with an asterisk, which are reverse coded.]

When I am dealing with this problem, I . . .

- 3.* sit down and talk things out with my partner
4. yell or shout at my partner
5. buy presents for my partner or do special favors for him or her
6. blame myself

(continued on next page)

APPENDIX, MARITAL COPING INVENTORY—Continued

7. put more energy into my work
8. feel sorry for myself
9. Tell my partner that s/he is childish, self-centered, domineering or moody
10. try not to think about the problem
11. have difficulty falling asleep or staying asleep
12. remind my partner of things s/he has said or done in the past that made me unhappy
13. do more things with my partner that both of us find enjoyable
14. spend more time on my hobbies
15. do more things with my partner that s/he enjoys
16. demand that my partner do things differently
- 17.* try to initiate discussion with my partner
18. sleep more than usual or have trouble getting out of bed in the morning
19. am sarcastic to my partner
20. experience more health problems than usual
- 21.* avoid initiating physical contact with my partner
22. spend more time with friends
23. tell myself the difficulties are not important
- 24.* refuse to have sex with my partner
25. feel more tired than usual
26. wait for time to remedy the problem
27. argue more than usual with people
28. am more physically affectionate than usual toward my partner
29. nag
30. try to bring new people into my life
31. feel depressed and blue
32. take on new time-consuming responsibilities at work or in the community
33. deny that anything is wrong or change the subject if my partner brings up the problem
34. hit or bash things
35. feel anxious, tense and unsettled
36. develop new time-consuming hobbies or interests (e.g., an evening course)
37. remind myself of good times my partner and I have had in the past
38. cry when I am by myself
39. am irritable around my partner
40. tell myself that I will deal with the problem in the future but that now isn't a good time
41. remind my partner of good times we have had in the past
42. feel hopeless about the situation
43. put down my partner in front of others
44. keep busy when I am at home with my partner
45. make more effort to look attractive when I am with my partner
46. criticize my partner for things other than what is really bothering me
47. keep my hurt feelings to myself
48. pay more attention to my partner
49. feel that I am a failure
- 50.* try to figure out what is causing the problems
51. tell my partner how much I love and care about him or her
52. tell my partner that the problem is all his or her fault
53. get more exercise, or put more energy into physical activities
54. try to make my partner see a funny side to the situation
55. go over and over the problem in my mind without seeming to get anywhere
56. pick fights with my partner over small issues
- 57.* set aside a time with my partner so that we can discuss the problem
58. try to see a funny side to the situation
59. worry about my health
60. socialize more than usual without my partner
61. give my partner ultimatums such as insisting that things be done my way or I will . . .
62. find I can't concentrate on my work or other interests
63. try to solve the problem myself without talking about it with my partner
64. decide to get even with my partner
65. feel guilty
66. suggest to my partner that we "make up"