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Twenty-one and Single!?: Marriage Desperation Among Single BYU Students



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Getting married at an early age is a social norm for members of the Latter-day Saint (LDS) faith. To our knowledge there are no published studies of marriage desperation in that culture. The goal of our study was to develop an instrument for reliably and validly measuring marriage desperation, which we operationally defined as the frequency of contemplating marriage as well as other actions likely to result in getting married. The Marriage Desperation Scale (MDS) consists of 10 items rated on a 4-point Likert scale. The MDS was administered to a convenience sample of 166 single LDS participants via an online-survey site. The MDS had moderate internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.67$). Two items had validity coefficients of 0.76 and 0.68 and two others 0.52. A factor analysis revealed three factors, but it was difficult to discriminate between them. We offer suggestions for improving the MDS for future use in research including more domain specific questions and a more experienced panel of experts. The MDS is neither a reliable nor a valid way of measuring marriage desperation.

Twenty-one and Single!?: Marriage Desperation Among Single BYU Students

In the Latter-day Saint (LDS) faith and especially at Brigham Young University (BYU) there is social pressure to marry early and consequently anxiety about remaining single (a condition that we identify here as *marriage desperation*). According to Uecker and Stokes (2008) conservative Mormons and Protestants are the most likely to marry before the age of 23. The mean age of first marriage in the United States has been increasing since the 1970s and currently is 28 for men and 26 for women (Lee & Payne, 2010). These young marriages may result from the strong encouragement of parents and other family members, friends and other persons of influence for individuals to be married by a certain age (Blakemore, Lawton, & Vartanian, 2005; Heinrichs et al., 2006).

According to Bebbington et al. (2010) the frequency of one's thoughts provides a strong predictor of one's subsequent actions. Marriage desperation may be overzealousness about getting married as quickly as possible or constant efforts that are intended to result in increased chance of marriage. Attitudes leaning towards getting married at a young age may be part of the larger LDS belief that it is one's duty to have children and without being married it is taboo to do so. Having sex outside the bounds of marriage is strictly preached against and considered a very grave sin. Marriage desperation may be a factor in people marrying sooner than they would if they did not feel anxiety about being unmarried (Blakemore et al., 2005). Any number of other factors may result in early marriage as well, including financial circumstances improving through marriage, unwanted pregnancies resulting in marriage, etc.

For this study, we operationally defined marriage desperation as the frequency of contemplating marriage as well as frequency of actions that increase one's likelihood of getting married. After our initial pilot study, content-validity ratios (CVR) indicated that questions of these two categories more accurately represented marriage desperation. Contemplating marriage was defined as thinking about becoming married or about the impact of remaining unmarried. Actions that increase one's likelihood of getting married were defined as (a) conflict-avoidant verbal communication or (b) being one-on-one with potential partners in the interest of becoming romantically involved.

On the campus of Brigham Young University (BYU) it is not uncommon to receive daily reminders of the importance of marriage. These include being told that marriage should be the student's highest priority

and receiving frequent invitations to attend marriage-preparation classes. Amidst these reminders of the importance of marriage one's frequency of contemplating marriage may increase. For those who are unmarried, the reminders can lead to self-accusations such as, "I should be married already."

The purpose of our study was to create a measure of marital desperation and to determine its factor structure, internal consistency, and validity, and thereby its potential use in future studies of individuals who are overzealous to become married. We hypothesized that the Marriage Desperation Scale (MDS) will be both reliable and valid.

Method

Participants

There were 178 participants, all of whom were never-married and LDS individuals. Ten of them did not complete the entire survey. Of the remaining 168 participants, 97 were females 71 were males. Participants were arranged into four age groups: 56 participants were between the ages of 18 and 19; 62 were between 20 and 21; 30 were between 22 and 23; and 20 were 24 and older. The only demographic questions collected included: marital status, age, gender and religion.

Item Construction

To create the MDS, we first constructed 30 items for a pilot study. We administered them to 46 students in an undergraduate psychological research-methods course. Items with a CVR greater or equal to 0.12 were included in the final 10-item survey. Half of the items addressed one domain of our construct—namely, frequency of contemplation—and the remainder of the second domain of other actions. Participants responded to the items on a 4-point Likert scale: 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree). Five of the items were negatively worded and reverse scored to control for agreement bias.

Survey Administration

We administered our survey via an online-survey site (<http://www.qualtrics.com>). We recruited using a convenience sample of e-mail contacts and Facebook (<http://www.facebook.com>) friends. These two methods of distributing and recruiting for the survey were the most efficient way to reach a large number of people in a small amount of time. Although this method of sampling was convenient, the environment in which the

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surveys were taken was not controlled for as a result. This lack of control is a potential confounding factor.

Statistical Analysis

We measured the internal consistency of our survey using Cronbach's Alpha and used a Pearson bivariate correlation to measure reliability. We used eigenvalues ≥ 1 (Kaiser's Rule) during factor analysis to reduce the data. The final item of the survey was included as a measure of face validity (see Appendix A). The CVR was used to measure content validity. SPSS 18 was used to analyze the data.

Results

Factor Structure

A factor analysis revealed three factors with eigenvalues greater than 1.0 (2.63, 1.41, and 1.24) that accounted for 52.74% of the variance (see Appendix E). The factor analysis also indicated that 26.25% of the variance was accounted for by one factor. Several items loaded onto multiple factors: Items 1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 8, and 10 onto Component 1, Items 2, 3, 4, 5, and 9 onto Component 2, and Items 4, 6, and 8 onto Component 3 (see Appendix F).

Reliability

Twenty-five of the 45 Pearson bivariate correlations were statistically significant ($p < 0.05$), with 22 $p < 0.01$. A Cronbach's alpha of $\alpha = 0.67$ (see Appendix D) revealed that the internal consistency of the survey was moderate.

Validity

As mentioned previously, items with a CVR $\geq .12$ composed the survey. Two items had superior validity (0.76, 0.68), two had high validity (0.52), three moderate validity (0.44, 0.36, 0.36), and one with adequate validity (0.28). The other two components had low validity (0.12) (see Appendix B). The measure of face validity was low (27.98%). In order to measure face validity, participants answered the open-ended question, "What do you think this survey was measuring?" Following that, we objectively analyzed their responses to see if correctly recognized the construct as measuring marriage desperation. Only 47 participants correctly recognized the construct as marriage desperation. The remaining participants viewed the survey as about opinions on marriage.

Discussion

The MDS was neither a reliable nor a valid measure of marriage desperation. Revisions to this test, such as administering our pilot study to a panel of professionals and properly evaluating the data to obtain an authentic display of information, are necessary in order for this measure to be accurate and of use to both the LDS community and the general population. The outcome indicated that the survey items measured more than one construct.

An examination of our principal component analysis and our scree plot showed that there were three principal components that described our data. We reason that they did not load onto our two originally projected domains—(1) thoughts about marriage and (2) actions that increase the likelihood of marriage—because the questions measure three different factors: the desire to attain the social norm of being married, the ability to make good decisions despite social norm expectancy, and jealousy due to non-attainment of social norms.

One strength of our results was that 25 out of the 45 correlations were statistically significant ($p < 0.05$), with 22 of these correlations significant at $p < 0.01$. To be applied outside of the LDS faith, the MDS would need to be revised. In doing so, a reliable and valid measure of marriage desperation may be constructed.

The scale would be stronger psychometrically if the items were tested on a group of experts who would be asked to rate the items rather than students who provided ratings merely for a grade. Although experts on the specific topic of marriage desperation may not exist, experts on the subject of marriage may suffice. Greater caution while analyzing the data would also be advised. As data was analyzed, many of the questions that received superior or high CVR were overlooked because we were interpreting our data too quickly due to time constraints and deadlines. Ultimately after revisions are made, the survey may be useful in distinguishing between those who want to marry for more than desperation and out of mere desperation. In this way it may help to reduce divorce and the societal toll that accompanies it if participants of the survey take their results seriously. Participants who have results indicating high marriage desperation will be cautioned that marriage should be taken seriously and not rushed in to and if entered in for the wrong reasons may result in decreased overall satisfaction of life and increased rates of divorce.

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Appendix A

Question	Answer Options
What is your marital status?	Single, In a relationship, Married, Divorced
What is your age?	18-19, 20-21, 22-23, 24 and older
What is your gender	Male, Female
What is your religion?	LDS, Other
I try hard to be the person that others want to marry	Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Agree, Strongly Agree
I do not think about marriage daily.	Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Agree, Strongly Agree
Meeting my future spouse is not my main motivation behind dating.	Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Agree, Strongly Agree
Getting married is not a higher priority than finishing school.	Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Agree, Strongly Agree
I would not date someone unless I could see myself getting married to them.	Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Agree, Strongly Agree
I feel like everyone but me is getting married.	Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Agree, Strongly Agree
I will not suppress opinions in order to please a potential spouse.	Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Agree, Strongly Agree
I do not feel jealous when I hear acquaintances or friends are getting married.	Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Agree, Strongly Agree
If I was dating someone seriously, and decided I could not marry them, I would break up with them immediately.	Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Agree, Strongly Agree
I feel that my life is worthless without a spouse.	Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Agree, Strongly Agree
What do you think this survey was measuring?	Open-ended Answer

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Appendix B Content Validity Ratio

Item	CVR
I feel that my life is worthless without a spouse.	.76
I feel like everyone but me is getting married.	.68
Meeting my future spouse is not my main motivation behind dating.	.52
I will not suppress opinions in order to please a potential spouse.	.52
If I was dating someone seriously, and decided I could not marry them, I would break up with them immediately.	.44
I do not think about marriage daily.	.36
Getting married is not a higher priority than finishing school.	.36
I try hard to be the person that others want to marry.	.28
I do not feel jealous when I hear acquaintances or friends are getting married.	.12
I would not date someone unless I could see myself getting married to them.	.12

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Appendix C

Percentage of Variance Explained

Item	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	Percentage of Variance	Cumulative Percentage	Total	Percentage of Variance	Cumulative Percentage
1	2.625	26.254	26.254	2.625	26.254	26.254
2	1.410	14.102	40.357	1.410	14.102	40.357
3	1.238	12.380	52.736	1.238	12.380	52.736
4	.953	9.531	62.268			
5	.794	7.939	70.207			
6	.786	7.865	78.072			
7	.656	6.556	84.628			
8	.575	5.746	90.374			
9	.534	5.343	95.717			
10	.428	4.283	100.000			

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Appendix D
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis

Cronbach's Alpha

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Standardized	N
.67	.67	10

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Appendix E
Component Matrix

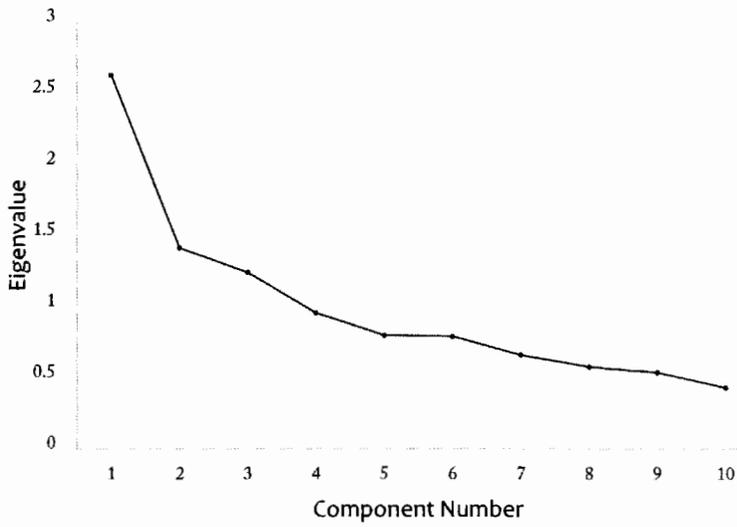
	Component 1	Component 2	Component 3
I try hard to be the person that others want to marry.	.55		
I do not think about marriage daily.	.45	.43	
Meeting my future spouse is not my main motivation behind dating.	.38	.56	
Getting married is not a higher priority than finishing school.	.62	.31	-.5
I would not date someone unless I could see myself getting married to them.		.66	
I feel like everyone but me is getting married.			.83
I will not suppress opinions in order to please a potential spouse.	.65		
I do not feel jealous when I hear acquaintances or friends are getting married.	.31		.80
If I was dating someone seriously, and decided I could not marry them, I would break up with them immediately.		.79	
I feel that my life is worthless without a spouse.	.60		

Appendix F
Pearson Correlation Coefficients

	Item 01	Item 02	Item 03	Item 04	Item 05	Item 06	Item 07	Item 08	Item 09	Item 10
Item 01	1.00	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Item 02	.23†	1.00	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Item 03	.23†	.35†	1.00	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Item 04	.25†	.31†	.34†	1.00	-	-	-	-	-	-
Item 05	.25†	.31†	.31†	.20*	1.00	-	-	-	-	-
Item 06	.09	.04	.10	-.06	.02	1.00	-	-	-	-
Item 07	.16*	.24†	.16*	.23†	.13	.04	1.00	-	-	-
Item 08	.13	.28†	.22†	-.03	.23†	.43†	.15	1.00	-	-
Item 09	.03	.06	.23†	.12	.29†	-.12	-.09	.11	1.00	-
Item 10	.26†	.09	.21†	.24†	.22†	.14	.21†	.09	.00	1.00

* Significant at 0.05 level (2-tailed).
† Significant at 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Appendix G Scree Plot



Scree plot indicating components of the *Marriage Desperation Scale*.