

COMMUNAL INTERESTS CRUCIAL TO MARITAL ADJUSTMENT

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About fifteen years ago, Kirkpatrick (1937) stated the following hypothesis: "Community of interests between married persons is an important factor in marital adjustment, and a measure of a community of interests may be a relatively innocuous index for measuring adjustment and for predicting the success of a relationship between two persons of the opposite sex" (p. 134). Other researchers (Taves, 1948; Frumkin, 1952) have substantiated the validity of this hypothesis, i.e., they have proven that a community of interests can be and is an index of marital adjustment.

To measure the community of interests in marriage adjustment Kirkpatrick constructed what today is called *The Kirkpatrick Scale of Family Interests*. Simply stated, this scale consists of 60 interest items duplicated on two single sheets of paper. On the first sheet the respondent is requested to check those interests which he enjoys engaging in as personal interests. On the second sheet he is requested to check all those interests which he enjoys engaging in with his spouse. The adjustment score is readily obtained by dividing the number of personal interests by the number of personal interests which are also mutual interests, i.e., the double-check items.

A question is raised concerning the interest items selected by each spouse as communal interests. Which are the most important communal interests in the light of social change? More specifically, how do social scientists, teachers, students, and other educated persons feel about the significance of these interests to marital adjustment?

METHODOLOGY

In order to get a rating of the significance of the interest items for marital adjustment, i.e., significant in the way an interest may differentiate the well-adjusted from the unadjusted spouse, in the Kirkpatrick scale, 52 judges representing the sociology and psychology departments of the Ohio State University were asked to rate each interest item on a three point scale weighted as follows: S, significant, (equal to 3); M, moderately significant, (equal to 2); and I, insignificant, (equal to 1). By having the letters S—M—I— next to the numbered interest items, the judges had only to circle the letter which represented their choice. The directions were as follows: "In relation to marital and family adjustment certain activities participated in by *husband and wife together* seem to be more significant and crucial to *success or failure* than other activities. Please circle at the left of each activity the rating which, in your opinion, represents the significance of that activity in marital and family adjustment. S—significant, M—moderately significant, I—insignificant."

After all 52 judges had rated each interest item in the scale the mean score for each interest item was recorded and each interest item arranged according to this mean score in descending order. The top ten and the bottom ten were considered as those interests most *significant* and *insignificant* to marital adjustment.

FINDINGS

It is surmised that the judges are persons of fairly good background, intelligence, and understanding, and that they are fairly well qualified to evaluate the sig-

nificance of these interests to marital adjustment. In table 1, we can examine the results of their judging of the Kirkpatrick interest items.

By using the first and last fifteen interest items of the Kirkpatrick scale and randomly dividing the judges into two equal groups it was possible to compute a Spearman rank-difference correlation to determine the reliability of the judges' ratings. The correlation between mean significance ratings of the two random groups of judges was found to be 0.93. More than just a consistency between judges, this points to a consistency in which is agreed to be the most important, most significant mutual interests affecting marital adjustment. In other words there seems to be a consensus of "experts" as to what factors are associated with a successful or unsuccessful adjustment in marriage.

More than just a selection of factors associated with a successful or unsuccessful marriage, these selections represent and reflect the whole process of social change relevant to all spheres of life. These selections of *significant* and *insignificant* interests represent a new conception of man and a new conception of marriage and the family. Bernard (1933) has said that one of the social functions of marriage in our culture is the "serving of the primary group needs of the personality" (p. 95). She also added that "a marriage which builds and stabilizes

TABLE 1
The most significant and most insignificant interests of the Kirkpatrick scale according to the 52 judges

Significant Interests	Mean	Insignificant Interests	Mean
Demonstrating affection	2.88	Reading essays aloud	1.19
Planning for the future	2.86	Smoking	1.21
Planning saving or investment	2.84	Having picture taken	1.28
Training children	2.78	Reading poetry	1.34
Planning family budgets	2.75	Listening to the radio	1.40
Making plans for children	2.71	Gardening	1.42
Discussing intimate personal experiences	2.57	Explaining moods	1.51
Confiding worries	2.57	Buying books and magazines	1.53
Playing with children	2.55	Discussing scientific topics	1.53
Discussing work done outside the home	2.48	House cleaning	1.55

and integrates the personalities of its members is successful; one that disintegrates or represses their personalities or causes conflicts in them is unsuccessful" (p. 95).

Burgess and Locke (1945) point out: "In adjustment, as compared with other methods of judging marital success, the emphasis is upon consensus, upon the mutuality of interests, and upon the joint participation in activities" (p. 444).

Harper (1949), Nimkoff (1947), Duvall and Hill (1945), Winch (1952), and others agree with Bernard, and Burgess and Locke that "the modern family has only a few major functions not adequately provided by other institutions: namely, (1) love and companionship between husband and wife; (2) reproduction; and (3) protective and affectional services for pre-school children" (Harper, 1949, p. 68).

Winch (1952, p. 447) considers the following functions as most significant to the modern family: "economic, status-conferring, reproduction, security-providing, and even, to some degree, socializing."

Thus it can be seen, that the 52 judges in our study and the family sociologists previously mentioned are in close agreement concerning the communal interests most crucial to marital adjustment. An examination of table 1 confirms this statement. Among the ten most significant interests chosen by the judges were

those of "demonstrating affection," "planning for the future," "planning for saving or investment," and "training children." It should be noted that the judges also agree that some of the traditional functions of the family are now less important to a successful marital adjustment than are the new functions of the modern family. Thus the judges mentioned among the least significant interests those of "house-cleaning," "gardening," and "reading essays aloud."

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

In this study we have tried to find out how a group of competent and educated persons would judge certain communal interests as related to success or failure in marriage. We found that these judges rated these interests in a way which was consistent with social change as it affects our conception of man, and our conception of marriage and the family. We found also, that leading family sociologists were in close agreement with our findings, i.e., our judges' ratings of communal interests crucial to marital adjustment. Thus we may conclude that there is not only a consensus of experts (of family sociologists) concerning what communal interests are crucial to marital adjustment but there is also a consensus among learned persons (not experts) concerning these interests.

What are the implications of our findings for persons who are now concerned with applying knowledge that is consistent with social change? It means clearly that professional persons working with the family must view these new functions of the family in relation to traditional functions. They must be cognizant of the inevitable conflicts which result from contradictory modern and traditional attitudes concerning the most important functions of marriage. Divorce courts will testify to the fact that the judges' selection of *the most crucial communal interest*, i.e., that of "demonstrating affection," is an interest which is crucial in modern marriage. They may also assert along with the 52 judges that the affectional function of modern marriage supersedes in importance the communal interests related to maturity. Yet we know that maturity is an extremely important factor in successful marital adjustment.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

On the basis of the findings in this study the writer makes the following suggestions for further research:

1. The significance of any particular communal interest must be assessed in relation to the social interaction taking place in a particular marriage, and in relation to the social matrix in which this marriage occurs. Thus, research that seeks to correlate actual marital adjustment in relation to particular communal interests is needed before we can say that any one communal interest is more crucial to success or failure in marriage than any other particular communal interest.

2. Perhaps we take too much for granted concerning the consensus of our 52 judges and family sociologists as to the importance of communal interests to marital adjustment. Thus, the writer suggests that further studies be done in order to determine scientifically what the actual relationship of communal interests is to other factors associated with marital adjustment.

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