MMPI-2-RF Predictors of Interpersonal Relationship Characteristics in Committed Couples

Tayla T. C. Lee and April M. Taylor
Ball State University

Ashley M. Holbert
Akron, Ohio

John R. Graham
Kent State University

There has been no systematic examination of whether scale scores on the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory-2-Restructured Form (MMPI-2-RF; Ben-Porath & Tellegen, 2011; Tellegen & Ben-Porath, 2011) are related to self- or partner-rated characteristics of romantic relationships. As such, the current study examined relations between select MMPI-2-RF scale scores and markers of relationship quality. Participants included 739 committed couples who completed the MMPI-2 and the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (Spanier, 1976; Spanier & Filsinger, 1983). Correlational analyses identified clinically meaningful negative associations between self-rated relationship satisfaction and scores on Emotional/Internalizing Dysfunction (EID) and Demoralization (RCd) for both men and women. For men and women self- and partner-rated relationship satisfaction and consensus were both meaningfully and negatively related to scores on Antisocial Behavior (RC4) and Family Problems (FML). These results are the first to provide support for the convergent validity of FML as a measure of difficulties experienced in romantic relationships. Results for EID, RCd, and RC4 converge with previous research examining relations between personality and intimate relationship qualities. Overall, these results suggest scores from the MMPI-2-RF are useful in screening for problems experienced by the individual or their partner in the context of their committed relationship.

Public Significance Statement
Given that satisfying romantic relationships play a key role in fostering emotional well-being in adults, it is important to assess perceptions individuals and their partners have of their relationship in psychological evaluations. Results of this study indicate scores on Emotional Internalizing Dysfunction, Demoralization, Antisocial Behaviors, and Family Problems from the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory-2-Restructured Form, a widely used instrument in clinical practice, are useful for this purpose.

Keywords: MMPI-2-RF, relationship characteristics, committed couples

Attaining and maintaining satisfying romantic relationships has been demonstrated to play a key role in fostering emotional and physical well-being in adults (Berscheid, 1999). Previous research has demonstrated several important associations between personality characteristics and relationship satisfaction in heterosexual romantic couples. Specifically, predispositions to experience negative affectivity, neuroticism, and trait anxiety have been linked to greater marital dissatisfaction and negative interactions within committed relationships (Donnellan, Larsen-Rife, & Conger, 2005; Watson, Hubbard, & Wiese, 2000). Conversely, individuals reporting higher levels of positive affectivity, as well as higher levels of agreeableness and constraint, are more likely to be satisfied and have positive interactions with their romantic partner (Donnellan et al., 2005; Karney & Bradbury, 1995; McCrae, Stone, Fagan, & Costa, 1998). These personality characteristics are not only predictive of the individual’s characterization of their committed relationship, but also characterizations of the relationship provided by their partners (Barelds & Barelds-Dijkstra, 2006; Donnellan, Conger, & Bryant, 2004; Gattis, Berns, Simpson, & Christensen, 2004).

Given that satisfying romantic relationships play a key role in fostering emotional well-being in adults, it is important to assess perceptions individuals and their partners have of their relationship
during psychological evaluations. The Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI) family of instruments has a long-standing history of assessing these types of relationship characteristics (e.g., Han, Weed, & Butcher, 2003; Hjemboe, Almagor, & Butcher, 1992; Swan, 1957; Yom et al., 1975). To date, however, there has been no systematic examination of whether scores from scales on the most recent addition to the MMPI family of instruments, the MMPI-2-Restructured Form (MMPI-2-RF; Ben-Porath & Tellegen, 2011; Tellegen & Ben-Porath, 2011), are related to characteristics of romantic relationships, either as rated by the individual or their romantic partner. Nonetheless, there are several reasons to believe that scales scored on the MMPI-2-RF will be particularly suited for this type of investigation. First, given that MMPI-2-RF consists of substantially fewer items than many other broadband instruments and is widely used in practice (Wright et al., 2017), the MMPI-2-RF may offer a time-saving (and hence more cost-effective) method of screening individuals for impairment in their committed relationships in situations in which it is not feasible to conduct a more comprehensive assessment of this domain of functioning. Second, the scales of the MMPI-2-RF are more strongly connected to current models of personality when compared with its predecessors (Sellbom, 2019). This suggests MMPI-2-RF scale scores that have strong associations with specific traits may be also able to provide information about the individual’s relationship satisfaction and functioning. Specifically, in university and clinical samples, scores on Emotional Internalizing Dysfunction (EID), Demoralization (RCd), Dysfunctional Negative Emotions (RC7), Anxiety (AXY), Anger Proneness (ANP), and Negative Emotionality/Neuroticism-Revised (NEGE-r) have been associated with measures of negative affectivity and neuroticism, while scores on EID, Low Positive Emotions (RC2), and Introversion/Low Positive Emotionality-Revised (INTR-r) have been related to positive affectivity (Harkness et al., 2014; Sellbom, Ben-Porath, & Bagby, 2008; Tellegen & Ben-Porath, 2011). Scores on Behavioral/Externalizing Dysfunction (BXD), Cynicism (RC3), Antisocial Behavior (RC4), and Hypomanic Activation (RC9) have been associated with agreeableness in these same samples. In university and clinical samples, scores on Disconstraint-Revised (DISC-r) have been associated with impulsivity and disinhibition (Harkness et al., 2014; Tellegen & Ben-Porath, 2011). Third, the MMPI-2-RF is one of the only measures available that separates the measurement of nonspecific distress, or the report of feeling unhappy and experiencing life as unpleasant that is common to many forms of psychopathology, from the measurement of other constructs (Sellbom, 2019). This nonspecific distress is captured in the MMPI-2-RF RCd scale and previous research suggests removing this ubiquitous shared variance from the measurement of other constructs has allowed other scale scores to have improved discriminant abilities when compared with their predecessors (Tellegen, Ben-Porath, & Sellbom, 2009). Thus, examining these constructs separately may allow for more specific measurement of relationship satisfaction. Lastly, the Family Problems (FML) Specific Problems scale of the MMPI-2-RF was purposefully developed to assess family related interpersonal problems and difficulties (Ben-Porath & Tellegen, 2011). However, to date, no studies have examined whether markers of relationship quality in committed couples are related to scores on this scale.

Given that scale scores from the MMPI-2-RF could be useful in assessing relationship qualities, we conducted the current study to explore the association between self- and partner-rated relationship qualities and scores on selected MMPI-2-RF scales. Specifically, we examined associations in a large sample of committed, heterosexual couples between aspects of relationship satisfaction and functioning with MMPI-2-RF measures of negative and positive affectivity (i.e., EID, RCd, RC2, RC7, AXY, ANP, INTR-r, NEGE-r), agreeableness (i.e., BXD, RC3, RC4, and RC9), and constraint (i.e., DISC-r), as well as general family problems (i.e., FML). We operationalized relationship satisfaction and functioning using the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS; Spanier, 1976; Spanier & Filsinger, 1983), a measure widely used in research and clinical settings to assess four aspects of self-reported relationship quality. Based on the previous research described above, we expected scores on the examined MMPI-2-RF scales would be negatively associated with positive self- and partner-rated relationship characteristics, as higher scores on the selected MMPI-2-RF scales reflect extreme standing on the assessed personality dimensions. We also expected scores on FML would be negatively associated with positive self- and partner-rated relationship characteristics, as higher scores on FML should reflect high levels of dissatisfaction and conflict with important others. Though we had no gender-specific hypotheses, we did conduct our analyses for men and women separately because previous research has demonstrated differences between men and women in their perceptions of marital satisfaction, as well as in the factors associated with these perceptions (Actielli, 1992; Fowers, 1991; Jackson, Miller, Oka, & Henry, 2014).

Method

Participants

The MMPI-2 normative couples sample was composed of 823 male participants and 832 female participants drawn from diverse regions of the United States (Butcher et al., 1989). Data from these couples has been used in previous work examining the validity of the MMPI-2 Content scales (Butcher, Graham, Williams, & Ben-Porath, 1990). For the current study, we extracted data from 810 couples from this larger sample who indicated they were legally married or in a committed, monogamous relationship and had been in a relationship with their partner for at least 1 year. In order to reduce error variance in analyses, couples were excluded if either partner in the dyad was suspected of responding invalidly to the MMPI-2-RF, which we defined using standard criteria outlined in the MMPI-2-RF manual (Ben-Porath & Tellegen, 2011), including a Cannot Say (CNS) score greater than or equal to 15, a True Response Inconsistency-r (TRIN-r), Variable Response Inconsistency (VRIN-r), or Uncommon Virtues (L-r) T score greater than or equal to 80, an Adjustment Validity (K-r) T score greater than or equal to 70, an Infrequent Psychopathology Responses (Fp-r), Infrequent Somatic Responses (Fs), Response Bias scale (RBS), or Symptom Validity (FBS-r) scale T score greater than or equal to 100, or an Infrequent Responses (F-r) score equal to 120. Using these criteria, 55 (7%) of the couples in the sample were excluded. Chi-square results suggested a slightly larger proportion of men had valid profiles when compared with women, $\chi^2(N=1,607) = 7.29$, $p = .007$, $\varphi = -.07$, though this difference was of a small effect size (Cohen, 1988). Additional chi-square and t tests were conducted by gender and suggested...
there were other demographic differences between those included and excluded from analyses. Specifically, for both men and women, a slightly larger proportion of participants who identified as White produced valid profiles when compared with individuals who identified as Black or of another or unidentified ethnicity, $\chi^2(N = 794) = 5.90, p = .05, \varphi = .09$ and $\chi^2(N = 787) = 28.45, p \leq .001, \varphi = .19$ (respectively), though these were small effect sizes. There were no significant differences between excluded and included participants demonstrated for reported age for men or women, in addition to no differences demonstrated for level of education for men. However, women who produced valid protocols ($M = 14.50, SD = 1.90$) reported having more years of education than women who were excluded ($M = 13.37, SD = 1.57), $t(789) = 2.57, p = .001, d = .65$.

The final sample consisted of 739 married or committed couples in heterosexual relationships lasting between one and 77 years ($M = 18.31, SD = 14.99$, $Mdn = 14.00$). Relationship length in the sample was positively skewed (skew = 1.02), with approximately 50% of the sample being in a relationship lasting between 1 and 14 years and approximately 75% of the sample being in a relationship lasting between 1 and 27 years. Men in the sample ranged in age from 18 to 79 years old ($M = 42.56, SD = 14.55$) and had an average of 14.33 years of education ($SD = 1.82$). Of these men, 650 identified as White, 46 identified as Black, and 43 individuals identified as another or unidentified ethnicity. Women in the sample ranged in age from 19 to 83 years old ($M = 39.91, SD = 13.76$) and had an average of 14.52 years of education ($SD = 1.89$). Of these women, 636 identified as White, 56 identified as Black, and 47 individuals identified as another or unidentified ethnicity.

**Measures**

**MMPI-2-RF.** The MMPI-2-RF (Ben-Porath & Tellegen, 2011; Tellegen & Ben-Porath, 2011) is a restructured version of the MMPI-2 (Butcher et al., 1989, 2001) consisting of 338 items rated as either true or false. The instrument assesses response styles, as well as social, emotional, and behavioral functioning. In the current study, MMPI-2-RF scale scores were extracted from MMPI-2 responses, which previous research has suggested can be done with no impact on reliability or validity of MMPI-2-RF scale scores (Tellegen & Ben-Porath, 2011; Van Der Heijden, Egger, & Derksen, 2010). Evidence supporting the reliability and validity of scores on MMPI-2-RF scales in a wide variety of settings and samples was provided in the instrument’s Technical Manual (Tellegen & Ben-Porath, 2011). Reliability estimates for the selected MMPI-2-RF scale scores in the current study are presented in Table 1 for men and Table 2 for women.

**DAS.** The DAS (Spanier, 1976; Spanier & Filsinger, 1983) is a self-report instrument assessing the test taker’s perception of the quality of their committed, romantic relationship. The instrument contains 32 items that load onto four factors, including Satisfaction, Consensus, Cohesion, and Affectional Expression (Spanier, 1976). Higher factor scores are reflective of the individual reporting more positive relationship characteristics. The Dyadic Satisfaction factor measures an overall sense of the test-taker’s contentment in the romantic relationship, while the Dyadic Consensus factor assesses the perceived level of agreement between partners regarding important issues, such as finances and making major household decisions. The Dyadic Cohesion factor assesses the couple’s engagement in positive and bonding experiences. Lastly,

Table 1

Correlations of Selected MMPI-2-RF Scales Scores With Self- and Partner-Rated Dyadic Adjustment Scales (DAS) for Men

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MMPI-2-RF Scales</th>
<th>α</th>
<th>Self-ratings on DAS</th>
<th>Partner-ratings on DAS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Consensus</td>
<td>Cohesiveness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EID</td>
<td>.83</td>
<td>-.26*</td>
<td>-.24*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BXD</td>
<td>.78</td>
<td>-.22*</td>
<td>-.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RCd</td>
<td>.85</td>
<td>-.25*</td>
<td>-.19*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RC2</td>
<td>.66</td>
<td>-.14*</td>
<td>-.23*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RC3</td>
<td>.76</td>
<td>-.16*</td>
<td>-.16*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RC4</td>
<td>.76</td>
<td>-.26*</td>
<td>-.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RC7</td>
<td>.79</td>
<td>-.22*</td>
<td>-.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RC9</td>
<td>.78</td>
<td>-.21*</td>
<td>-.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AXY</td>
<td>.40</td>
<td>-.10</td>
<td>-.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ANP</td>
<td>.72</td>
<td>-.16*</td>
<td>-.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FML</td>
<td>.61</td>
<td>-.33*</td>
<td>-.18*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DISC-r</td>
<td>.70</td>
<td>-.18*</td>
<td>.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NEGE-r</td>
<td>.75</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>-.16*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTR-r</td>
<td>.76</td>
<td>-.27*</td>
<td>-.16*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. $N = 739$. Bolded coefficients are those that met established criteria for statistical and practical significance. EID = Emotional/Internalizing Dysfunction; BXD = Behavioral/Externalizing Dysfunction; RCd = Demoralization; RC2 = Low Positive Emotions; RC3 = Cynicism; RC4 = Antisocial Behavior; RC7 = Dysfunctional Negative Emotions; RC9 = Hypomanic Activation; AXY = Anxiety; ANP = Anger Proneness; FML = Family Problems; DISC-r = Disconstraint-Revised; NEGE-r = Negative Emotionality/Neuroticism-Revised; INTR-r = Introversian-Revised.

$p \leq .004$. 

This document is copyrighted by the American Psychological Association or one of its allied publishers. This article is intended solely for the personal use of the individual user and is not to be disseminated broadly.
the Affectional Expression factor assesses engagement in affectionate and intimate behaviors (e.g., kissing) between the romantic partners. Graham, Liu, and Jeziorski (2006) provided a review of the instrument and conducted a reliability generalizability meta-analysis. They noted the instrument is widely used in research and clinical settings and that their review and analyses generally supported the use of the instrument. Reliability estimates in the current sample for the factor scores were acceptable, with Cronbach’s alpha (α) ranging from .76 (Affectional Expression) to .88 (Consensus) for men and .76 (Affectional Expression) to .88 (Satisfaction) for women.

Procedure

As described in the original MMPI-2 Manual for Administration and Scoring (Butcher et al., 1989), the couples included in the current study were part of the normative sample collected during the restandardization of the MMPI in the late 1980s. Briefly, some individuals with committed romantic partners solicited for inclusion in the normative sample of the MMPI-2 were asked to bring their partners to the testing session, which was conducted within test takers’ communities. During the testing session, each person anonymously completed the AX version of the MMPI (an experimental form containing 704 items), a biographical information sheet, and a marginally revised version of the DAS (Spanier, 1976; Spanier & Filsinger, 1983), as well as several other measures relevant to the original project. Couples were paid $40 for participating. All participants provided consent for the collected information to be used for research purposes and data were collected in accordance with human participant regulations.

Results

To examine the associations between the selected MMPI-2-RF scale scores and indexes of relationship satisfaction from the DAS, a series of Pearson product moment correlation analyses were calculated. Potential Type I error was reduced when interpreting the statistical significance by applying a Bonferroni adjustment in which the standard alpha level was divided by the number of scales examined (.05/13, adjusted p ≤ .004). Interpretation of the magnitude of the correlations followed suggestions from Cohen (1988). For the associations of self-rated relationship qualities and MMPI-2-RF scales, correlations of medium effect sizes or greater (i.e., r ≥ .30) were emphasized due to shared method variance. However, because there was no shared method variance inflating the magnitude of correlations between partner-rated relationship qualities and MMPI-2-RF scale scores, we emphasized those coefficients that were greater than or equal to .20, in keeping with recommendations for research with the MMPI family of instruments (Butcher, Graham, & Ben-Porath, 1995).

Results of correlational analyses for men are presented in Table 1. As seen in the leftmost columns of Table 1, statistically significant negative associations of a moderate effect size were demonstrated between scores on self-rated Dyadic Satisfaction and EID, RCD, RC4, and FML. Scores on FML had a medium effect size correlations between women’s ratings of their relationship with their partners and men’s scores on selected MMPI-2-RF scale scores were displayed in the rightmost columns of Table 1. Results indicated statistically significant associations that met our effect size for interpretation (i.e., r ≥ .20) between scores on Dyadic Satisfaction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MMPI-2-RF Scales</th>
<th>Self-ratings on DAS</th>
<th>Partner-ratings on DAS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>α</td>
<td>Cohesiveness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EID</td>
<td>.87</td>
<td>-.26*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BXD</td>
<td>.72</td>
<td>-.21*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RCd</td>
<td>.89</td>
<td>-.27*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RCf</td>
<td>.61</td>
<td>-.21*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RC3</td>
<td>.76</td>
<td>-.14*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RC4</td>
<td>.72</td>
<td>-.31*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RC7</td>
<td>.82</td>
<td>-.21*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RC9</td>
<td>.73</td>
<td>-.17*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AXY</td>
<td>.40</td>
<td>-.14*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ANP</td>
<td>.70</td>
<td>-.17*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FML</td>
<td>.64</td>
<td>-.32*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DISC-r</td>
<td>.66</td>
<td>-.15*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NEGE-r</td>
<td>.78</td>
<td>-.12*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTR-r</td>
<td>.69</td>
<td>-.23*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. N = 739. Bolded coefficients are those that met established criteria for statistical and practical significance. EID = Emotional/Internalizing Dysfunction; BXD = Behavioral/Externalizing Dysfunction; RCd = Demoralization; RC2 = Low Positive Emotions; RC3 = Cynicism; RC4 = Antisocial Behavior; RC7 = Dysfunctional Negative Emotions; RCD = Hypomanic Activation; AXY = Anxiety; ANP = Anger Proneness; FML = Family Problems; DISC-r = Disconstraint-Revised; NEGE-r = Negative Emotionality/Neuroticism-Revised; INTR-r = Intrusion-Revised. * p ≤.004.
and BXD, RC4, and FML, as well as scores on Dyadic Satisfaction and RC4 and FML.

As seen in the results for women displayed in Table 2, the pattern of associations of DAS factor scores with the selected MMPI-2-RF scale scores was almost identical, with a few exceptions. First, as seen in the leftmost columns of Table 2, in addition to being associated with scores on FML, women’s scores on RC4 demonstrated a statistically significant medium effect size negative association with self-rated Dyadic Consensus. Second, as seen in the rightmost columns of Table 2, additional associations between men’s ratings of their relationship with their partners and women’s scores on the selected MMPI-2-RF scales were indicated. The association between women’s scores on BXD and partner-rated Dyadic Consensus did not reach the threshold for interpretation as it had in men. Instead, results indicated a statistically significant negative association of this magnitude between scores on BXD and partner-rated Dyadic Satisfaction.

**Discussion**

The goal of the current study was to examine the ability of MMPI-2-RF scale scores selected based on previous research to relate to self-reported and partner-rated markers of relationship quality. Overall, results indicated negative associations of a medium effect size between scores on EID, RCd, RC4, FML, and self-rated relationship satisfaction, as well as scores on FML and self-rated relationship consensus, for both men and women. Results also indicated significant negative, clinically meaningful associations of a small effect size between scores on RC4 and partner-rated relationship satisfaction, as well as between RC4, FML, and partner-rated consensus, for both men and women. When taken as a whole, these results provide strong support for the convergent validity of scores on the selected MMPI-2-RF scales for assessing relationship characteristics in committed couples.

Results of the current study indicated there were clinically meaningful negative associations between scores on FML and self- and partner-rated marital satisfaction and consensus for both men and women. These associations are consistent with recommended content interpretations of FML scores, in that individuals with high scores on this scale tend to report conflictual family relationships that are characterized by poor support (Ben-Porath & Tellegen, 2011). They are also congruent with empirical findings for this scale, as in the Technical Manual for the MMPI-2-RF, Tellegen and Ben-Porath (2011) demonstrated that scores on FML were related to experiencing family conflict and having strong negative feelings about family members. Our results extend these previous findings, however, as they suggest if an individual in a committed relationship has a high score on FML both they and their partner are likely to be dissatisfied with the relationship and describe having high levels of disagreement about important issues.

In the current study, scores on EID and RCd were negatively related to self-rated marital satisfaction in both men and women. Scores on EID and RCd are both indicative of nonspecific distress (Ben-Porath & Tellegen, 2011), thus these associations suggest individuals who are feeling dissatisfied with life more generally are also likely to be dissatisfied in their committed romantic relationship. These results, however, stand in contrast to previous research demonstrating relations of negative affectivity and neuroticism with relationship satisfaction (e.g., Donnellan et al., 2005; Watson et al., 2000). This is because no significant relations with RC7 or facets of this scale (i.e., AXY, ANP) and relationship qualities were apparent in the current study. However, this discrepant result may not be too surprising from an empirical perspective, as many measures of negative affectivity and neuroticism have a strong association with nonspecific distress (Noordhof, Sellbom, Eigenhuis, & Kamphuis, 2015; Ormel, Rosmalen, & Farmer, 2004; Tellegen et al., 2009). Tellegen (1985) suggested this characteristic, which he has alternatively called unpleasantness (Watson & Tellegen, 1985) or demoralization (Tellegen et al., 2003), is responsible for the substantial intercorrelation of self-report scales assessing characteristics associated with mood and anxiety difficulties. As such, future studies may want to determine if making the distinction between nonspecific distress and negative affect is useful in furthering our understanding of the role of personality in relationship dynamics.

It should be noted that the association between scores on EID, RCd, and relationship satisfaction reached a meaningful effect size only when the individual was rating their relationship with their partner. An individual’s levels of nonspecific distress (as assessed by EID and RCd) was not significantly related to their partner’s perceptions of the relationship. It is possible that individuals with high scores on these scales, which are also associated with a high likelihood of experiencing internalizing disorders (Ben-Porath & Tellegen, 2011), do not voice their unhappiness about a partner or their relationship due to their tendency to make internal attributions about the source of problems (Joormann, 2009). Alternatively, it may be that the high levels of hopelessness that are likely to be experienced by individuals with high scores on these scales encourage stable attributions about the likelihood of change being low. Future research should aim to assess why individual reports of nonspecific distress are related to individual perceptions of relationship dysfunction, but not partner perceptions. Despite this need for future research, results of this study do suggest addressing the individual’s dissatisfaction in their intimate relationship could be a target for treatment if they achieve a high score on EID or RCd.

Previous studies suggest agreeableness is related to positive interactions between romantic partners, as well as overall relationship satisfaction (Donnellan et al., 2005; Karney & Bradbury, 1995; McCrae et al., 1998). This association was replicated in the current study through the demonstration of significant associations between scores on RC4, which can be used to assess agreeableness (Sellbom et al., 2008), and relationship consensus and satisfaction as rated by the individual and their partner. In all cases, these associations were of sufficient magnitude to be considered clinically significant (i.e., > .30 for self-ratings and > .20 for partner-ratings), with the exception of the association between men’s scores on RC4 and self-rated relationship consensus (r = -.26), which approached the required medium effect size required for interpretation. A similar, yet more inconsistent pattern of findings when examined across genders, was demonstrated by associations between an individual’s scores on BXD and partner-rated satisfaction and consensus. However, given that results were more consistent across genders and raters for RC4, we concluded that scores on RC4, not BXD, were likely most indicative of these relationship characteristics. Importantly, post hoc analyses indicated there were statistically significant and clinically meaningful (i.e., r > .20) associations between men’s and women’s scores on RC4 and relationship length (r = -.23 and -.32, respectively). A similar
pattern of association with relationship length was demonstrated for BXD \((r = - .25\) and \(- .31\) for men and women, respectively). Analyses examining whether relationship length mediated the association between scores on these MMPI-2-RF scales on the relationship characterizations did not provide any evidence of consistent indirect effects across genders. Thus, overall, it appears that individuals with high scores on RC4 are not only likely to be disagreeable (Sellbom et al., 2008), but that this disagreeableness may negatively impact both their and their partner’s satisfaction and contribute to lower levels of agreement about important issues.

The primary limitation of the current study is related to the use of a nonclinical sample, who were expected to have less psychopathology and impairment than is reflected in other populations with whom the MMPI-2-RF is used. Given the normative nature of the sample, the range of scores on the MMPI-2-RF scales and on the DAS may be restricted, resulting in attenuation of the correlation magnitudes. Second, this study’s sample included only those who reported being in a heterosexual relationship and was comprised primarily of individuals who identified their ethnicity as White. Thus, future studies will want to determine the extent to which these results generalize to individuals with a marginalized sexual or ethnic identity. Third, data used in this study were collected in the 1980s. As such, it is possible these findings do not reflect societal changes that have altered how relationships are perceived by men and women. However, results were consistent with more recent findings from the larger personality literature regarding the association between personality traits and relationship perceptions (e.g., Barelds & Barelds-Dijkstra, 2006), suggesting these associations may be robust to these types of attitudinal changes. Nonetheless, continued work with more recently collected samples is likely needed. Lastly, no statistically significant associations were demonstrated between the Dyadic Cohesion or Affectional Expression scales of the DAS and the selected MMPI-2-RF scales. It may be that MMPI-2-RF scale scores are not suited to assessing these characteristics. However, had this study been conducted in a clinical population (e.g., couples seeking treatment for relationship difficulties), the evidence that MMPI-2-RF scale scores can validly assess relationship qualities may have been more apparent. It is possible more extreme scores on scales of the MMPI-2-RF, as would be expected in clinical samples, may be associated with a broader range of relationship difficulties. It is also possible that couples’ descriptions of cohesiveness and affection in their relationships may not be associated with the personality characteristics that we examined, but instead be related to interpersonal characteristics like warmth. Future studies should examine this possibility. More broadly, we suggest future studies continue examining associations between MMPI-2-RF scale scores and self- and partner-rated relationship qualities using different methods of operationalizing relationship difficulties.

Overall, results of the current study indicate MMPI-2-RF scale scores provide useful information about individuals’ and their partners’ perceptions of their relationship. Based on the results of this study, we suggest interpretations of high scores on FML, EID, RCd, and RC4 should include statements regarding their or their partner’s likely characterizations of their committed relationship. Specifically, high scores on FML are likely to be useful for identifying dissatisfaction or perceived lack of consensus in the relationship that is observed by both the individual and their partner. Individuals with high scores on EID and RCd are likely to be dissatisfied in their relationship with their partner. However, it seems likely that this dissatisfaction is entirely self-referential, as there was no similar association demonstrated between scores on these scales and partner ratings of the relationship. Finally, high scores on RC4 are also likely to signal that both the individual and the partner recognize problems with relationship satisfaction and consensus, perhaps as a result of the individual’s tendencies toward being disagreeable. More broadly, results of this study suggest that scale scores on the MMPI-2-RF may be useful in screening for potential relationship difficulties, as they provide indications of when further assessment specifically aimed at identifying the nature of relationship problems is warranted.

1 Results of these analyses are available from Tayla T. C. Lee.

References


Gattis, K. S., Berns, S., Simpson, L. E., & Christensen, A. (2004). Birds of a feather or strange birds? Ties among personality dimensions, similar-
MMPI-2-RF RELATIONSHIP CHARACTERISTIC PREDICTORS

7


Received October 4, 2018
Revision received February 28, 2019
Accepted April 20, 2019