

## AN EXPLORATION OF THE MARITAL AND LIFE SATISFACTIONS OF MIDDLE-AGED HUSBANDS AND WIVES

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### Abstract

This study was designed to investigate attitudes concerning marital perceptions and life satisfaction of middle-aged husbands and wives who were in one of two periods of life. Couples in the postparental period were considered to be those who had launched all their children from the home, while couples in the parental period were considered to be those who still had some children in the home. A total of 160 subjects, that is, 80 couples were identified from two sources of intact marriages in the city of Edmonton. Forty of these couples constituted a counselled (C) sample of middle-aged couples who were engaged in marital or family counselling at the time of this investigation. The noncounselled (NC) sample was comprised of 40 middle-aged couples who were not receiving counselling. A modified version of the Middle Years Life Satisfaction Scale (MYLSS), designed by Stinnett and Hayes (1971) was used to measure life satisfaction and the Middle Years Marital Perception Scale (MYMPS), which was based on an older person's perception scale, designed by Stinnett, Carter and Montgomery (1972), was used to obtain background information from the subjects and to investigate their perceptions of marriage. The results of the study indicated that the NC and C samples of middle-aged couples were significantly different from one another with respect to life and marital satisfaction but that they were very similar in other respects, particularly in their reactions to the launching of the last child from the home. Certain qualities that were characteristic of being middle aged also became apparent.

### Résumé

Cette étude examine chez des époux et des épouses ayant atteint un âge moyen leurs attitudes face à leurs perceptions comme couple et à leur satisfaction de vivre. Ces couples appartenaient à l'un de deux groupes selon que leurs enfants habitaient encore avec eux ou avaient déjà tous quitté le foyer. Quarante couples de la région d'Edmonton participèrent à cette étude. Quarante couples (C) suivaient des stages de consultation lors de l'enquête. Les autres couples (NC) ne recevaient aucune forme de consultation. On utilisa une forme modifiée du Middle Years Life Satisfaction Scale (MYLSS) établi par Stinnett et Hayes (1971) pour mesurer le degré de satisfaction de vivre. Pour obtenir les renseignements d'usage des conjoints et pour étudier leurs perceptions du mariage, on employa le Middle Years Marital Perception Scale (MYMPS) de Stinnett, Carter et Montgomery (1972). Cette échelle est établie selon les perceptions d'une personne plus âgée. Les résultats de l'enquête indiquent que les groupes NC et C se distinguent l'un de l'autre par rapport à la satisfaction de vivre et d'être marié. Par contre, ces deux groupes se ressemblent sous plusieurs autres aspects, plus particulièrement leurs réactions lors du départ du dernier enfant de la maison. Certaines qualités pertinentes aux personnes de cet âge sont également devenues évidentes.

An examination of Canadian statistics, suggests that middle-aged divorce as opposed to middle-aged bliss is on the increase. In 1974, for example, 4,755 couples, whose marriages has lasted between 20 to 24 years, were granted divorces while only 3,051 couples with marriages of the same duration

were granted divorces in 1969 (Canada Year Book, 1975). Albeit that these figures represent only a small proportion of the total number of divorces in Canada, specifically between 10 and 15 percent, it is significant to note that the number of individuals seeking termination of their longstan-

TABLE 1  
Rate of divorces per 100,000 population

	Rate of Divorce					
	1969	1970	1971	1972	1973	1974
Duration of Marriage						
20-24 Years	14.52	17.20	16.75	17.70	21.60	
25-29 Years	10.94	11.95	10.98	11.64	12.42	14.83
30 - Years	10.79	11.04	10.10	11.06	11.37	13.79
Total	124.20	139.80	137.60	148.40	166.10	200.60

(Statistics Canada, 1976)

ding partnership has in fact increased, as is indicated by the accelerated rate of divorce per 100,000 population as presented in Table 1.

The slight upsurge observed in the rate of divorces in 1970 compared to those in 1969 appears to reflect the relaxation in 1968 divorce law. Rather than exhibiting an actual increase, a distortion effect likely prevails as a result of the legislation change. Marriages which dissolved immediately following the change in divorce legislation for instance, were probably those which could not be dissolved under the previous legislation (Canada Year Book, 1973, p. 203). Apart from this apparent unnatural rise in 1970, the data presented for the ensuing years suggest that the rate of divorces within each prolonged marital period is in fact increasing.

It appears, moreover, that the majority of these divorces are granted to individuals in the early stages of the postparental period, i.e., the stage in the life cycle when the children leave home (Glick, 1947). Greenleigh (1974) and Peterson (1973) state that divorces are less likely to occur as the length of the marriage increases. By observing the decreasing rate of divorces granted to individuals in Canada as the length of the marriage increases, this statement is confirmed. The data therefore suggest that once the launching of the children has occurred the parents' marriage is put to the test (Kerckhoff, 1976; Le Shan, 1973), and the excuse of staying together for the sake of the children is no longer valid (Greenleigh, 1974). Some marriage counsellors believe that this child-centredness in marital idealologies accounts, in part, for the rising number of middle-age divorces (Fengler, 1973). This upsurge in middle-age divorce, coupled with Peterson's (1973) prediction that the number of divorces granted to individuals in the postparental period will increase, arouses curiosity and interest for acquiring insight into the middle-aged postparental couple.

The research findings surrounding middle-aged couples are contradictory in nature. Some investigators of middle age believe that this period

of life is painful (Gruenberg, 1950; Levy & Munroe, 1943; Lewis, 1945), while others believe that it is a peaceful time with new found freedoms (Christensen, 1950; Deutscher, 1964; Fried & Stern, 1948). More recent investigators have adopted a developmental approach, suggesting that this period of life constitutes change and perhaps personal growth as a result of particular life events and biological changes (Erikson, 1950; Greenleigh, 1974; Kerckhoff, 1976; Kimmel, 1976; Le Shan, 1973; Rappaport, 1976; Schaie & Gibbon, 1975). Middle age for these researchers is seen as a "halfway house" (Bradbury, 1975) or a midpoint in life since it is a time for reflection and decision making which is independent of painful or peaceful experiences.

Some investigations of middle-aged couples' marriages report that older couples consider their marriages to be either as satisfactory or more satisfactory than previous years (Bossard & Boll, 1970; Fried & Stern, 1948). Others state that of the satisfactory marriages, most had been satisfactory from the beginning and the unsatisfactory had always been unsatisfactory (Fried & Stern, 1948). Additional studies support the contention that satisfaction declines over the years (Blood & Wolfe, 1960; Pineo, 1961; Safilios-Rothchild, 1967; Townsend, 1957), while others report that neither a spike nor decline exists in marital satisfaction (Rollins & Cannon, 1974; Rollins & Feldman, 1970). Such controversy and polarized viewpoints appear to arise as a result of poor measurement techniques or inadequate experimental designs. Stinnett and Hayes (1971) capture the limitations of the measurement indices used in the research of middle-aged couples through a critical analysis. These investigators discovered that the tests are usually designed for other age groups; that the tests are not specific in their examination of the areas of life satisfaction and that the tests measure various areas of life satisfaction on the basis of only one question.

A majority of the studies are limited in their use of sampling criteria since they tend to use samples which are readily accessible and therefore not necessarily representative (Barry, 1970). Middle-aged couples of the middle class, for example, have been extensively examined (Burr, 1970; Cuber & Haroff, 1963; Deutscher, 1964; Rose, 1955; Stinnett & Hayes, 1971). Examinations based on selected populations, moreover, fail to provide answers to certain questions because they lack a control group. The study by Stinnett and Hayes (1971), for example, reflects this weakness since the investigators merely examined a sample of middle-aged couples who were the parents of university students. Other studies are restricted by their use of the dependent variable, specifically in terms of satisfaction versus dissatisfaction, adjustment versus maladjustment, or success versus lack

of success. Divisions of this sort are often found to be dependent upon investigator judgment or bias which inevitably leads to data distortion (Scanzoni, 1966). Furthermore, such divisions lend themselves to directional investigations. By observing stable marriages, for example, factors conducive to success are usually examined while the examination of dissolved marriages (i.e., divorced couples) usually leads to factors conducive to marital failure (Mathews & Mihanovich, 1963). Albeit that marital stability and divorce determine inclusion into these opposing categories, it does not logically follow that the stable marriage is free from problems, maladjustment or dissatisfaction. This assumption has often been neglected in the literature (Barry, 1970) and as such leads one to question the verifiability of past investigations and future investigations should they fail to make that distinction.

One might conclude therefore that there is a need to explore the marital and life satisfaction of middle-aged couples in a way that is conducive to comparative analysis. Comparisons of stable versus unstable groups of married couples, however, introduce problems of exclusion and overmagnification, since the examination of stable marriages inherently implies satisfaction, efficiency or goodness while examinations of unstable marriages (i.e., the separated or divorced) imply failure (Scanzoni, 1966). By comparing an intact, although not necessarily happy group of middle-aged couples with a group of middle-aged couples who are also within an intact marriage but who have openly admitted to being caught up in some sort of crisis by entering counselling with professionals, a framework could be presented that would help one understand why some middle-aged marriages remain organized and why some become disorganized. That is to say, there is a need to explore the differences in marital perceptions and life satisfactions of two types of organized marriages which are operationally distinguished from one another through a theoretically significant variable — counselling. The absence of counselling would not necessarily imply that couples are not experiencing problems but rather that as a group they may experience them to a lesser degree than couples who seek therapeutic assistance. Clearly, if a middle-aged couple's problems are due solely to middle age, the counselled group and noncounselled group should be very similar. Further, if the initial stage of the postparental period represents the decisive turning point of whether the couple will continue with the marriage or end it through divorce, an examination of middle-aged couples prior to and following the launching of the last child is required. Such comparisons, however, have seriously been neglected in the literature surrounding middle-aged postparental couples.

The general purpose of this study, therefore, was to examine the variables influencing marital relations and life satisfactions among couples whose marriages were of relatively longstanding and who were primarily in the postparental period of life. By employing a framework which could explore the attitudes of a counselled and non-counselled group of couples who were either entering or in the postparental stage, a better understanding and appreciation of the difficulties and joys encountered in this period of life were anticipated.

The following hypotheses were made concerning suggested relationships:

1. The sample of middle-aged couples who are receiving counselling will report less satisfaction with marriage and life than the sample of middle-aged couples who are not receiving counselling.
2. Early postparental couples (those couples in the initial postparental stage — where the last child was launched (i.e., has left parental bed and board) less than one year before the time of the investigation) will demonstrate less satisfaction with marriage and life than either the late postparental couples (those couples who launched the last child between one and ten years ago) or parental couples (those couples with some children still in the home).

## METHOD

### *Sample*

The five operational criteria for the middle-aged couples under investigation in the present study were: that they be married and living together; that they be between the ages of 40 and 60; that they have been married to the present partner for at least 15 years; that they have had at least one child, and if children were no longer in the home that the launching of the last child did not occur more than ten years prior to the time of this study.

Essentially two samples were identified. The noncounselled (NC) sample of 40 couples was drawn from middle-aged couples in the city of Edmonton who were not receiving counselling. The counselled (C) sample included 40 middle-aged couples who were currently engaged in marital or family counselling at various agencies and offices of private practitioners in the city of Edmonton. These samples are described in greater detail, later in the paper.

The researchers' concern for obtaining samples which would be demographically comparable was essentially met. The average age for the non-counselled sample, for instance, was 51.40 years while the average age for the counselled sample was 45.40 years. The standard deviations for the NC and C samples were 1.32 and 1.50 respectively. Albeit that the C sample tended to be younger than the NC sample no significant difference was found between the two groups when employing the .05 level of significance.

The average length of the marital period for both samples was also similar in that no significant difference was found between the mean marital period of 29.98 years ( $SD = 1.80$ ) for the NC sample and 29.10 years ( $SD = 1.80$ ) for the C sample. Hence, there was little variability in the length of the marital period for the two samples.

The average number of children for the NC sample was 3.63, while the average number of children for the C sample was 4.05. The samples were not found to be statistically different with respect to the number children in the family.

The Blishen Occupational Class Scale (Blishen, 1965) which employs the numbers 1 to 7 to rank various Canadian occupations with 1 representing the highest and usually professional occupational group, and 7 representing the lowest or unskilled occupational group was used to establish the subjects' occupational class or level. No significant difference was found between the two groups in terms of occupational level since occupational level 5 of the Blishen scale was found to be the largest group for both samples.

With respect to educational level, the samples were again found to be demographically comparable. The completion of high school was found to represent the average level of schooling for both the NC and C husbands and NC and C wives.

In addition, income levels for both samples were comparable in that no significant difference was found between the mean amounts of incomes for the two samples. The income category of \$14,000 to \$19,999 per annum represented the average level of earnings of both NC and C samples.

### *Instruments*

Data pertaining to the middle-aged couples' evaluations of life and marriage were obtained from two questionnaires: The Middle Years Life Satisfaction Scale and the Middle Years Marital Perception Scale.

#### *Middle Years Life Satisfaction Scale (MYLSS)*

The MYLSS, designed by Stinnett and Hayes (1971), was employed in the present study in an attempt to determine which areas of life were the most and least satisfying for middle-aged couples. The MYLSS is a Likert-type attitude inventory comprised of 35 statements intending to measure the life satisfaction of the middle-aged individual in seven different areas. The levels which are believed to reflect the life satisfaction of the middle-aged person are: marital relations; health; standard of living; occupation; relations with children; leisure time and social participation; and self-concept. Because this instrument is the only one of its kind at this time, that is, the only one

which is specifically geared toward the middle-aged individual per se, it was deemed essential for the present investigation. It did, however, lack a life area which the researchers believed to be a crucial one for the middle ager — that is, aging. Therefore, the original MYLSS was slightly modified for the purposes of the present investigation by including five statements to reflect the phenomenon of aging. Content validity of the original MYLSS was determined by presenting each statement on a card and having all cards sorted by six professionals in the family life area into the seven existing categories. These specialists agreed 92.4% that the statements belonged in the seven categories. Reliability of the items was computed with the Spearman-Brown formula yielding a split-half reliability of .99, thus indicating high internal consistency.

#### *Middle Years Marital Perception Scale (MYMPS)*

The MYMPS or the perception scale is an abridged form of the Older Person's Perception Scale designed by Stinnett, Carter and Montgomery (1972). Respondents are asked to choose one of several alternatives to each of ten statements that best describe their feelings. The ten basic questions regarding the respondents' perceptions of marriage pertain to the following: the individual's own marital happiness; whether his own marriage has improved or worsened over time; the happiest period of his marriage; whether he believes that most marriages become better or worse over time; the most rewarding aspect of his present marital relationship; the most troublesome aspect of his marital relationship; what he believes to be the most important characteristic of a successful marriage; what he believes to be the most important factor in achieving marital success; the major problem in his present period of life; and the happiest period of his life. Because the responses to these types of questions were considered important for understanding middle-aged couples, the questions and format of the Older Person's Perception Scale were maintained for the MYMPS. However, since the original scale was designed for older persons like senior citizens, such alternative responses as "middle years" or "the present time" within one question became redundant when referring to middle-aged individuals. Hence, one of these items was omitted and otherwise little alteration of the scale was deemed necessary. Besides including these ten statements about the individual's perceptions of marriage, the MYMPS also included 16 questions pertaining to the demographic and background information of the respondents.

Albeit that the senior test author employed the original questionnaire in one study (Stinnett,

Carter & Montgomery, 1972) and portions of it in two others (Stinnett, Collins & Montgomery, 1970; Stinnett & Hayes, 1971), data concerning reliability and validity were unfortunately not reported. However, despite this limitation, the MYMPS was still believed to be the best instrument available to measure the marital perceptions of middle-aged couples and was therefore used in the present study.

### *Procedure*

#### *Noncounselled Sample*

Methods for procuring the counselled and noncounselled samples of middle-aged couples were different. First of all, with regards to the noncounselled sample of middle-aged couples, the researchers obtained the 1971 grade 12 computer print-out sheets of Edmonton City high schools in order to secure the addresses of these students' parents. For the first page of ten computer sheets which represented local high schools, a researcher's index finger was allowed to fall randomly on a student's name and that student's name, address and telephone number were obtained. Once this first name had been chosen, every fifth name was selected thereafter. A total of 250 names were acquired following this method.

A cover letter printed on university letterhead was addressed to the parents of each of the 250 students identified. The letter outlined the purpose of the investigation and assured the couple of anonymity should they be willing to participate. The letter also informed the couple that a researcher would be contacting them by telephone within two weeks of their having received the letter in order to arrange an interview time for them to complete the two questionnaires.

Seventy-nine, that is 31.6% of these letters had been returned unopened presumably because the family had moved. Forty-eight couples (19.2%) had no longer maintained the same telephone number as listed on the computer print-out sheets. A total of 127 couples or 50.8% of the original 250 names which were identified were thus not contacted by the researchers.

During a telephone conversation with the 123 couples contacted, that is, with 49.3% of the original 250 identified, the researchers attempted to enlist their cooperation and determine through questioning whether they conformed to the necessary criteria. Only 29 couples (11.6%) did not meet the criteria, while 54 couples (21.6%) refused to participate. If the couples met the operational criteria and if they were willing to participate in the study, the researchers arranged for an interview to take place. A total of 40 couples were seen by the researchers following this procedure.

A major problem which may have been encountered with this method of enlisting the

cooperation of middle-aged couples is a couples' tendency to be willing to participate only when "they had nothing to hide". A "happiness" bias may therefore have been introduced into the study, since couples who were experiencing marital difficulties may have tended to avoid participation.

#### *Counselled Sample*

With respect to the counselled sample of middle-aged couples, the researchers mailed a similar cover letter to the one sent to the NC subjects to 25 agencies and 15 private practitioners who reportedly dealt in marital and family counselling. These agencies and practitioners were identified by the Edmonton Telephone Directory and by the Directory of Community Services for Edmonton (AID). Within two weeks from the mailing date of this letter the researcher telephoned the counsellors involved in order to enlist their cooperation in using their clients to complete the two questionnaires.

Apart from the five major operational criteria for the couples under investigation, the only other specifications were that the middle-aged couples be willing to participate in the study and that they be receiving counselling at the time of their participation. No time limitation as to the length of time spent in counselling was set although the researchers were aware of the possibility that couples who had just entered counselling might have different perceptions of life and marriage than couples who had been in counselling for some time. The reason for refraining from this time limitation was due, in part, to the difficulties encountered in procuring the counselled sample of middle-aged couples. A large portion of the counsellors contacted, for example, refused to participate in the study. A majority of these counsellors were concerned about the issue of confidentiality.

If the counsellor did have couples fitting the criteria, he informed his clients about the research project during his counselling session with them and asked if they would be willing to complete two questionnaires in the presence of a researcher. If the clients agreed to participate in the study, the counsellor gave the researcher their names and telephone numbers. The researchers in turn, telephoned the couples to arrange a convenient time for the appointment. Forty middle-aged counselled couples had been identified and hence a total of 80 counselled husbands and wives participated in the study.

For both samples, the postparental groups of 40 C and 40 NC couples were divided into early postparental (those who launched their last child less than one year prior to the time of the study) and late postparental (those who had launched their last child between one and nine years before)

categories. This division was deemed essential in conducting the study because it was believed that the time variable of the child's departure should be taken into account. The division rendered 22 early postparental and 18 late postparental husbands and wives for the NC sample and 20 early postparental and 20 late postparental for the C sample.

### Results

Because the hypotheses in the present investigation were primarily concerned with life satisfaction and marriage, both the Marital Relations subscore and the total life satisfaction score of the MYLSS as well as the first three perceptions of the MYMPS (nos. 1-3) were utilized in the analysis. The total life satisfaction score was used to represent the level of life satisfaction for the middle agers, while the Marital Relations subscore and the responses to items 1, 2 and 3 of the MYMPS were to represent the middle agers' marital satisfaction and marital perceptions.

A t-test was conducted to test the first hypothesis and a highly significant statistical difference was found in the anticipated direction for both the Marital Relations subscore ( $p < .000001, NC, \bar{X}, 18.34; C, \bar{X}, 14.64$ ) and the life satisfaction score ( $p < .00007, NC, \bar{X}, 150.23; C, \bar{X}, 140.19$ ). The C sample tended to have lower scores on all life areas measured by the MYLSS.

In order to determine which areas of life were the most and least satisfying, mean subscores of the seven life areas of the MYLSS were obtained. The data revealed that both NC males ( $\bar{X} = 20.88$ ) and NC females ( $\bar{X} = 21.28$ ) as well as C males ( $\bar{X} = 20.08$ ) and C females ( $\bar{X} = 20.30$ ) scored highest in the area of Relations with Children, suggesting that this area of life reflects the highest degree of satisfaction for middle-aged couples regardless of the sample they were in. Both males ( $\bar{X} = 16.80$ ) and females ( $\bar{X} = 15.53$ ) in the NC sample scored lowest in the life area of Aging while the C sample scored lowest on Marital Relations (males,  $\bar{X} = 15.38$ ; females,  $\bar{X} = 13.90$ ). Although the NC middle agers appeared to show more concern about growing old and the C sample showed more concern over their marital relationship, the differences between these means for these respective life areas was not significant.

A highly significant difference was discovered between the NC and C samples in the types of responses given to questions regarding their present marital happiness ( $p < .00007$ ); the happiest marital period ( $p < .0004$ ) and their marital happiness over the years ( $p < .00009$ ) on the MYMPS. The majority of the counselled respondents reported that their marriages were unhappy ( $n = 39$ ). Responses to question 2 revealed that the greatest proportion of the NC subjects ( $n=37$ ) viewed the present time as the

happiest period of married life while the C subjects ( $n = 33$ ) reported that the time in their lives when the children were small was the happiest.

An analysis of variance indicated that there was no significant difference in the way husbands and wives scored on the MYLSS. The same was true for the MYMPS since there was no significant difference in the way husbands and wives responded to selected perceptions of their marriage.

Examination of a frequency distribution revealed that the NC sample of middle-aged husbands and wives, tended to view their present marital relationship favourably and as a group they tended to perceive their marriages as improving in marital happiness over the years. The counselled sample, on the other hand, tended to view the present marital situation unfavourably and perceived it as deteriorating in happiness over the years. Despite such differences, both samples reported that companionship ( $NC, \bar{X} = 40; C, \bar{X} = 27.50$ ) was the most rewarding aspect of their middle-aged marriage. An inability to express true feelings ( $\bar{X} = 41.30$ ) and the relationship with the spouse ( $\bar{X} = 56.25$ ) were reported as being the major difficulties in this period of life for the C sample, while the NC sample tended to report that it had no trouble at all ( $\bar{X} = 32.50$ ) or that the greatest concern was the children's welfare ( $\bar{X} = 27.50$ ). Mutual respect was considered to be the most important characteristic of the successful marriage by all groups with the exception of the C males who reported that the expression of true feelings was the most important characteristic of a successful marriage.

The method used to examine the second hypothesis was two-fold. First, a two-way analysis of variance was conducted to determine whether the early postparental group would exhibit less satisfaction with life and marriage than the late postparental group by controlling for the NC and C sample membership. The results of the analysis of variance revealed that there were significant differences among the three groups of early postparental, late postparental and parental couples for both the NC and C samples on Marital Relations ( $p < .00004$ ) and life satisfaction ( $p < .04$ ). These differences were in the anticipated direction. That is, the early postparental group reported less satisfaction with life and marriage than either the late postparental or parental groups.

The results of a three way Chi-square represented the second method of examining this hypothesis. The data showed that there was a significant difference between the NC and C samples' responses to all three questions on the MYMPS: no. 1,  $p < .0001$ ; no. 2,  $p < .005$ ; no. 3,  $p < .0001$ . In addition, a significant difference was found in the manner of responses to all

questions for the early postparental, late postparental and parental groups (no. 1,  $p < .0001$ ; no. 2,  $p < .02$ ; no. 3,  $p < .0002$ ). The early postparental tended to view the marriage less favourably than either the late postparental or parental couples.

### DISCUSSION

The hypothesized relationship between NC and C samples was supported in that the counselled group of middle agers acquired significantly lower mean scores on Marital Relations and life satisfaction than the NC sample of middle agers. In addition, the types of responses emitted on the MYMPS by the NC sample were significantly different from the types of responses emitted by the C sample. The NC couples, for instance, viewed their marital situation favourably since they reported that the present time was the happiest time of their marriage and that the marriage essentially improved over the years. The C sample on the other hand rated present marital happiness as unhappy and as deteriorating over the years.

Interestingly, despite such differences, both samples of middle-aged couples received relatively high scores on life areas of Self-Concept, Health and Standard of Living. That Self-Concept would be high for both samples tends to parallel the findings of Neugarten (1968) who found that the reassessment of the self in the middle years constituted such self-awareness and mastery and competence that fairly strong and positive self-concepts were inevitable. Of the couples who preferred to choose the "other" category on the question related to the greatest advantage of the present period of life on the MYMPS, all responses tended to focus on such things as emotional maturity, self-awareness, personal growth and increased confidence as being the major advantages of the middle years. Satisfaction with the life areas of Standard of Living and Health also suggested that the middle agers in this study generally considered themselves to be in the "prime of life". At the same time, the fact that the life area of Aging was the lowest for the NC sample and relatively low for the C sample suggests that the prospect of growing old or unattractive is of concern to middle agers, particularly women.

With respect to the present study's concern for information regarding the maintenance and disorganization of the middle-aged marriage, mean subscores of the MYLSS showed that the C sample of middle agers exhibited the least satisfaction with Marital Relations. That the C sample was found to be significantly less satisfied with marriage and life than the NC sample suggests that the C sample's responses could provide insights into the problems encountered in

the middle years. By examining the percentage distribution of the MYMPS it was discovered that the greatest difficulty with the counselled sample middle-ager's marriage was an inability to express true feelings. Hence, it would appear that dissatisfaction with the marital relationship was related to poor or inadequate communication skills. This type of problem, however, is not peculiar to middle-aged couples (Bach & Deutsch, 1970). More noteworthy is the notion that the prospect of communication between the middle aged husband and wife may only have been a recent occurrence. For postparental couples, at least, children are no longer in the home and the couple is once again, as in the early period of marriage, faced with each other. For parental couples too, growing teenagers tend to spend less time at home and the parents, once again, begin to feel the necessity of being able to communicate.

The finding that companionship was the most frequently chosen response for the most rewarding aspect of the middle-ager's marriage and that the inability to express true feelings was found to be an integral part of problems in marriage parallels the findings of Stinnett, Carter and Montgomery (1972), Blood and Wolfe (1960) and Lipman (1961) who reported that these qualities are the most important things couples can give one another in the later years of marriage. Perhaps this is because the husband and wife in the later years of marriage depend more on each other and less on the children. The finding that mutual respect was considered to be the most important characteristic of a successful marriage by the largest proportion of the middle agers in this study suggests that respect is an integral part of the husband and wife relationship in the later years. Fried and Stern (1948) found that women who returned to work following the rearing of the children reported that their husband's respect for them increased thereby improving their relationship.

Hence, the qualities of companionship, mutual respect and the expression of true feelings appear to be important for the success of the middle-aged marriage. The inability to express true feelings appears to adversely affect the marital satisfaction of middle-aged couples. The foregoing discussion has therefore given some indication that the marital and life satisfaction of the subjects in this study were influenced to some degree by the possible departure of the children from the home.

Having divided the postparental group (all children launched from the home) of 40 C and 40 NC couples into early and late postparental categories to examine the second hypothesis, it was discovered that couples who had recently launched their last child from the home (early postparental) were in fact faced with a crucial event in their lives. Because both the NC and C

samples followed this pattern, it would appear that child launching may be a problem that all middle-aged couples must face.

In summary, the framework presented in this study revealed that NC and C samples of middle-aged couples were significantly different from one another with respect to life and marital satisfactions but that they were very similar in other respects, particularly in their reactions to the launching of the last child from the home. Certain qualities that were characteristic of being middle-aged also became apparent.

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