Reviewer's report

**Title:** Standard values and relationship specific validity of the Bielefeld Relationship Expectations Questionnaire (BFPE)

**Version:** 2 **Date:** 10 November 2009

**Reviewer:** Keith Widaman

**Reviewer's report:**

In assessing the ms., in accord with BMC guidelines, I considered the following points:

1. Is the question posed by the authors well defined?
   Some of the questions were well defined, but others were not. Most specifically, the information regarding specificities for the various scales was not well presented at all, so that part of the results was very confusing.

2. Are the methods appropriate and well described?
   In general, the methods appear to be appropriate. However, I have provided details below about how I think the methods were poorly described, and the authors should fix these problems.

3. Are the data sound?
   The data are the soundest part of this ms. The data derive from a nationally representative sample, so the sampling appears to be very strong – and the sample size is rather large. However, I have concerns about some of the instruments used – more information is required to determine whether all of the measurement instruments are sound.

4. Does the manuscript adhere to the relevant standards for reporting and data deposition?
   Yes it does.

5. Are the discussion and conclusions well balanced and adequately supported by the data?
   I have concerns about certain results reported in the ms. – these are discussed in detail in my comments for the authors (see below). As a result, I am not sure that some of the conclusions are warranted, because the data may be faulty.

6. Are limitations of the work clearly stated?
   No. I think the authors tried to make such a statement (see my comments below). The authors made some statement about how the data may not be a good basis for general conclusions, and I think this statement is amiss.

7. Do the authors clearly acknowledge any work upon which they are building,
both published and unpublished?
The authors cited their own prior research adequately as well as prior work using
the BFPE, but the authors did not cite adequately prior research by others using
other measuring instruments that is relevant to the current paper.

8. Do the title and abstract accurately convey what has been found?
Yes.

9. Is the writing acceptable?
Not fully acceptable. There were numerous problems of wording and grammar.
The authors should seek the advice of persons more well acquainted with
English grammar and composition to fix these problems.

Major Compulsory Revisions

1. p. 4: The Bielefeld Relationship Expectations Questionnaire (BFPE) is the
central topic of the current paper. Two or three issues. First, the BFPE has 3
scales (Fear of Rejection, Readiness for Self Disclosure, and Conscious Need
for Care), but the authors never indicated in this ms. how these three scales were
developed. Were they derived using common factor analysis or principal
component analysis? Some information here would be very valuable. Second,
the authors should discuss how the three dimensions from the BFPE are related
to two-dimensional representations obtained in a series of studies by Philip
Shaver and colleagues. In the Shaver research, the two large dimensions are
termed Anxiety and Avoidance. The traditional three types of attachment are then
shown as follows: (a) Anxious attachment – high on Anxiety dimension; (b)
Avoidant attachment – high on Avoidance dimension; and (c) Secure attachment
– low on both Anxiety and Avoidance. The Shaver approach has been the basis
of a large amount of research. How do the BFPE dimensions relate to the Shaver
dimensions? What basis is there to argue that the BFPE dimensions are an
improvement over the two Shaver dimensions?

2. p. 7: The authors argued that the relation of attachment dimensions to general
life satisfaction has “not yet been investigated.” I am not sure what to make of
this claim. Are the authors referring to the relation between life satisfaction and
attachment as assessed by the BFPE? If this is the claim, the authors should say
so clearly. Prior research using other instruments has looked at general life
satisfaction and attachment scores using other instruments. If the authors want to
extend this research by using the BFPE, they should cite this prior research and
offer hypotheses regarding how BFPE scores related to life satisfaction.

3. p. 8: It is odd to say that “Approximately 756 men … and 753 women …
participated …” Is this the approximate number or the precise number?

4. p. 8: The three dimensions – Fear of Rejection, Readiness for Self Disclosure,
and Conscious Need for Care – might be better named. I am not sure just what
names I would use, but I recommend that the authors find better terms – terms
that are more directly related to attachment theory and research.

5. pp. 8-10: The ms. would be improved if the authors provided one or two items for each of the scales used. Particularly important are the dimensions obtained from the Social Support Questionnaire. Social support is measured in many different ways, and many of these ways are incompatible with one another. As a result, simply referring to an instrument as a measure of social support provides almost no indication of what is being measured. The authors should list some example items so readers would know what is being asked.

6. p. 10: For the Life Satisfaction Questionnaire, the authors reported that 10 domains are assessed, with 7 questions per domain. How highly correlated are scores across the 10 domains? Is there a great deal of redundancy? Information here would be valuable.

7. p. 11, top half of page: The authors reported both the split-half reliability and the coefficient alpha for each scale. [Side note: the authors should use the term “coefficient alpha” for these reliability values, not Cronbach’s alpha – Cronbach (1951) wrote a prominent article about coefficient alpha, but coefficient alpha was proposed by someone else prior to this article – and even Cronbach calls it “coefficient alpha.”]. But, the authors never indicated how they computed the split-half reliability. If this was computed as the simple correlation between a sum score on one half of the items (e.g., even numbered items) and a sum score on the other half of the items (e.g., the odd numbered items), then the resulting correlation would have to be adjusted using the Spearman-Brown prophecy formula – because the total scale is twice as long as either split half. For the first scale – Fear of Rejection – the authors stated that the split-half reliability was .76. If this was not adjusted with Spearman-Brown formula, it should be. The Spearman-Brown (SB) adjusted value would be:

\[
SB \text{ adjusted reliability} = \frac{2(r)}{1 + r} = \frac{2(.76)}{1 + .76} = .86
\]

This value of .86 is the estimated reliability of the total scale. Incidentally, the .86 obtained in this fashion is identical to the coefficient alpha reported for this scale. This is not surprising, because coefficient alpha is often described as the average of all possible split halves. The authors need to provide more information here about what they did, because the current presentation does not allow an informed evaluation.

8. p. 11: The authors reported sensitivities for each of the scales in Table 1, but never indicated “sensitivity for what.” I am not sure what to make of these purported sensitivities.

9. p. 11: The authors should report the magnitude of correlations among the 3 dimensions from the BFPE. They could report both the simple correlations among the 3 dimensions and then the correlations among the 3 dimensions corrected for attenuation. This would provide valuable information about how distinct these three dimensions are empirically.

10. pp. 11-12 and Table 2: The correlations between dimensions from the BFPE
are important to report (as noted in the prior comment), and this importance is underscored here. Why? Because the correlations of the three BFPE dimensions with other variables do not show a strong pattern of discriminant validation. For example, Fear of Rejection correlates strongly positive with Conflict, but negatively with the remaining 3 scores from the PFB; Readiness for Self Disclosure shows the reversed pattern of correlations. Is this because the two BFPE scales are strongly negatively correlated with one another?

11. p. 12, middle of page: The authors discussed the differing levels of correlation of social support with the different BFPE dimensions, emphasizing one correlation (.43), and calling other correlations (-.32 and .20) only “weak.” But, the authors did not report tests of significance of the difference between these correlations. In terms of absolute magnitude, I am not sure that a correlation of .43 differs significantly from a correlation of .32.

12. p. 12 and Table 2: The authors reported only positive correlations of all BFPE scales with importance of family/children and with partnership/sexuality. Because other results in this table showed that BFPE Fear of Rejection correlated in a different direction (positive vs. negative) with other variables in comparison with both Readiness for Self Disclosure and Conscious Need for Care, I expected that some of the correlations with FLZ importance of family/children and partnership/sexuality would be positive and other correlations would be negative. Are the authors sure that the signs of all of these correlations are correctly reported?

13. p. 13, bottom half of page: The authors discussed reliability results presented in this ms. relative to values reported in prior studies. However, because I am unsure just how the present authors reported certain values, such as split-half reliabilities, I am not convinced that these points of discussion are correctly considered. Specifically, if the split-half reliabilities in the current study are lower than in prior research, but the coefficient alphas are about the same as in prior research, my conclusion is that the current authors probably reported erroneous estimates of split-half reliability. See Comment 7 above for more specifics.

14. pp. 13-14: Sensitivities once again discussed in confusing fashion, as it is not clear to what these sensitivities refer.

15. p. 15, middle of page: The authors begin a paragraph with a statement that “Based on the data from a representative sample, general conclusions cannot be drawn …” This is confusing at least, dead wrong at worst. Representative samples should be the basis for stronger general conclusions than are results from small, non-representative, haphazard samples. Not sure what the authors were trying to say here – re-writing is essential.

16. p. 15: the authors stated that information from clinical samples, standard values would be indispensable for broad clinical application. However, the authors provided no information in the current ms. about information from clinical samples, so I cannot see how this conclusion is justified based on information contained in the present ms.
**Level of interest:** An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

**Quality of written English:** Needs some language corrections before being published

**Statistical review:** Yes, and I have assessed the statistics in my report.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare that I have no competing interests