Reviewer's report

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

Version: 3 Date: 16 June 2010

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?
Most of the questions were now well defined. At times, however, it was not clear why the authors mentioned certain findings (e.g., in the Introduction section), as the current study had little to offer on these points.

2. Are the methods appropriate and well described?
The methods are now appropriate and well described.

3. Are the data sound?
The data do appear to be 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?
The limitations of the work are improved, but the authors should included caveats about the nature of the data – that is, all data are self-report data, so it is not clear that the reported correlations would hold if one tried to move beyond the self-report domain.

7. Do the authors clearly acknowledge any work upon which they are building, both published and unpublished?
This is improved in the current version of the ms.

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

This ms. reports a study using the Bielefeld Relationship Expectations Questionnaire (BFPE), based on responses by a nationally representative sample of German participants. The current ms. is a revised and resubmitted ms. that I reviewed during its first submission. The authors responded to each of the points of criticism I offered on their first submission, and the ms. was improved in the revision process. I have some continuing issues with the current version.

1. P. 4, bottom half of page: When relating attachment classifications from the BFPE with the AAS, the authors reported a “contingent coefficient” and kappa. Is the first coefficient a contingency coefficient? If this more common name is correct, it should be used.

2. P. 5: I am not sure what it means to say “It is therefore important to control for both life satisfaction as well as social support when interpreting attachment patterns in close relationships.” Is this a suggestion for statistical analyses, stipulating that one should control statistically for life satisfaction and social support when investigating the relations between attachment scores from the BFPE with other, relationship-related dimensions? Or, does is this a recommendation when looking at attachment of individuals in close relationships – that one should somehow control for their levels of life satisfaction and social support? I am not sure what to make of this suggestion.

3. P. 6: I am not sure what the “coverage rate of 59.6%” means. What does a coverage rate represent? If I am confused, so might other readers.

4. P. 10: I know what a “corrected item-total correlation” means, but other readers might not. Better to explain what this means. Also, is there a reference for the requirement that a corrected item-total correlation be at least .40 to be acceptable?

5. P. 10: The authors stated that they reported “Correlation coefficients according to Pearson” between various scores. This is an odd way of wording this. Better to say “Pearson product moment correlation coefficients between …”

6. P. 10: Not sure how to interpret “whereby every further correlation between the BFPE scales is significant and positive, but low.” What does this mean?

7. P. 10: Similarly, what does “conflict-hampering” mean?

8. Pp. 10-11: In general, the discussion of the patterns of correlations in Table 2 leaves much to be desired. The authors would be advised to report simply the
direction and strength of the correlations. Rather than saying that “…physical contact, shared activities, and the communication of positive affects within the relationship tended to decrease moderately with “Fear of Rejection,” …”, the authors might write “… amount of physical contact, shared activities, and communication of positive affect were inversely related to Fear of Rejection, so persons higher in Fear of Rejection reported lower levels of these positive relationship behaviors and experiences than persons lower in Fear of Rejection…” or something like that. At present, this section does not read very well.

9. P. 11: the authors stated that persons who perceived their partners as higher in social support “showed an increased ability and willingness.” “increased ability and willingness” to what?

10. P. 12: The authors stated that BFPE scales exhibited low intercorrelations, except for the high negative correlation between Fear of Rejection and Readiness for Self Disclosure (which was -.6). But, the two dimensions of the Philip Shaver instrument (which are similar to Fear of Rejection and Readiness for Self Disclosure) are correlated almost zero in most samples. Why this big difference across scales?

11. Pp. 12-13: What does it mean to say that “Theory yielded a causal or mediating role of attachment patterns in close relationships for life satisfaction, perceived social support and marital quality”? Does anything in the current ms. support this contention? If not, why mention this?

12. P. 13: The authors wrote that “Greater Readiness of Self Disclosure and heightened Conscious Need for Care increase marital quality …” This is causal language. But, the authors have only correlations and did not fit any path models of any sort. They seem to be going beyond the nature of their data in drawing conclusions. It would be better to write “Higher levels of Readiness for Self Disclosure and heightened Conscious Need for Care were associated with higher levels of marital quality …”

13. Pp. 13-14: The authors wrote that attachment patterns “influence” life satisfaction and “mediate” how social support within these relationships is perceived. Again, this is causal language and language about mediation – and models to support these contentions were never presented in this ms.

What next?

Based on my assessment of the validity of the manuscript, I advise the next step:

- Unable to decide on acceptance or rejection until the authors have responded to the major compulsory revisions

Level of interest
BMC Medical Research Methodology has a policy of publishing all scientifically sound research whatever its level of interest. However if you choose one of the first three categories below, we may ask the authors if they would like the manuscript considered instead for the more selective journal BMC Medicine.

- An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English

As we do not charge for access to published research, we cannot undertake the costs of editing. If the language is a serious impediment to understanding, you should choose the first option below, and we will ask the authors to seek help. If the language is generally acceptable but has specific problems, some or all of which you have noted, choose the second option.

- Needs some language corrections before being published

Statistical review

Is it essential that this manuscript be seen by an expert statistician?

- I was competent to review the statistics in the ms. – no review by an expert statistician is needed.

Declaration of competing interests

We ask all peer reviewers of medical papers to declare their competing interests in relation to the paper they are reviewing. The peer reviewer declaration is included in the report bearing your name that will be sent to the authors, and published on our website if the article is accepted.

I declare that I have no competing interests

**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**: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.