



IRRATIONAL BELIEFS
IN
STUDY AND MARRIAGE

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ABSTRACT

Two context-specific measures of irrational belief were developed in an attempt to improve upon the traditional general tests, such as Jones' (1968) Irrational Beliefs Test (IBT). The first measure, '*Beliefs About Study*' (BAS), was administered together with the IBT, for comparison, to 180 full-time adult matriculation students. In comparison with the IBT, BAS items were designed with study related specificity, with reduced item repetition and reduced cognitive impurity; items focusing more on emotion and behaviour than cognition were avoided. Typical self-report measures of procrastination, anxiety, depression and affect, together with some atypical objective measures of academic procrastination, perseverance and performance, were employed as dependent variables.

Although the BAS and IBT both bore weak to modest linear relationships with the dependent variables, high BAS scores effectively predicted dysfunction and did so significantly better than high IBT scores, in support of the hypothesis that context-specific tests are likely to have greater discriminant validity than general ones. Students identified by their high scores on BAS subscales as being 'at risk' scored significantly higher on procrastination, anxiety, depression and negative affect and lower on perseverance, grade-point-average and aggregate than students with lower BAS scores. Procrastination was found to be a highly influential variable in distinguishing unsuccessful students from the successful ones.

The second measure of irrationality, '*Beliefs About Marriage*' (BAM), was administered to 88 married individuals, including 40 couples, consisting mainly of middle aged (mean age = 39 years), middle class couples, married

for a mean of 14 years. BAM comprises 100 items which are specifically marriage related, with emphasis on cognitive purity and content diversity, as for BAS. In addition, BAM requires a spouse to give two ratings for each marital concept considered, for example, the frequency of approval from one's partner: one rating is for belief 'B' (how frequently approval 'should' be given), the other for perceived reality 'R' (how frequently approval 'is' given), as perceived by the spouse.

These ratings yield a measure of '*dissonance*', defined by their difference (B-R). '*Dissonance*' scales correlated highly with unhappiness, unlike the belief scales, which had variable relationships; the correlation between full-scale belief and happiness was non-significant. Results support the hypothesis that irrational belief is better defined as '*dissonance*' using Cognitive Dissonance Theory (CDT; Festinger, 1957) than as extreme belief using Rational Emotive Theory (RET; Ellis, 1958). Moreover, RET can be regarded as a dissonance 'minitheory' (Aronson, 1992), subsumable by CDT.

The 'B' and 'R' ratings of BAM also generate measures of '*attributional dissonance*' (perceived partner shortcomings), '*self attributional bias*' (over-estimation of one's marital contributions) and '*perceived marital quality*' (the quality of one's perceived marital realities). For spouses generally, '*attributional dissonance*' was highly associated with the unhappiness of the couple. However, a strong sex difference was found for '*self attributional bias*'; for wives, it was highly associated with the unhappiness of the couple; for husbands, it was unrelated. For spouses generally, '*perceived marital quality*' was highly correlated with happiness. Findings are discussed in relation to previous research and future implications.

STATEMENT

This report contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other qualification in any university. To the best of my knowledge, it contains no material previously published or written by another person, except when due reference is made in the text of the report.

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