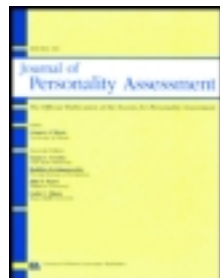


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## The Assessment of Social Intimacy

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**Abstract:** Research exploring the psychological importance of closeness with others has been hampered by the absence of a reliable and valid measure of this variable. The development of the Miller Social Intimacy Scale (MSIS), a 17-item measure of the maximum level of intimacy currently experienced, is presented. Evidence for internal consistency and test-retest reliability as well as for convergent, discriminant and construct validity is discussed in the context of the need for further scientific exploration of this important phenomenon.

Investigators exploring the psychological significance of marriage, close relationships with others, and bereavement have contributed to a growing body of data which suggests that intimacy is an important predictor of healthy psychological and physiological functioning. Lynch (1977) in his book *The Broken Heart* documents the significantly higher risk for most causes of mortality incurred by widowed, divorced, and never married persons for subjects ranging in age from 15 to 64. Gove (1973) reviewed data which indicates that unmarried individuals are characterized by higher rates of psychiatric disorders than are married individuals. The incidence of death due to such diverse causes as suicide, accidents, lung cancer, tuberculosis, diabetes, and even homicide was higher for unmarried persons.

A number of researchers have noted the importance of closeness with others (including closeness with spouse, with friends, or with family members) for the prediction of healthy functioning. Medalie and Goldbourt (1976) completed a 5-year prospective study of the development of new angina pectoris cases among 10,000 married men, 40 years of age and over in Israel. In addition to assessing certain physiological risk factors pertinent to heart disease each subject was asked the following questions: "Does

your wife show you her love?" The response was rated dichotomously. Despite high levels of anxiety, serum cholesterol and the presence of electrocardiograph abnormality the risk of angina pectoris was reduced from 93 to 52 per 1,000 if the respondent felt that he had a loving and supportive wife.

Berkman and Syme (1979) in a 9-year follow-up study of over 6,000 California residents (ages 30 to 70) found that marital status and contact with friends predicted lower mortality rates for both men and women. People who were not married but who had friends, had similar mortality rates as did those who were married and had fewer contacts with friends. In every age and sex category, Berkman and Syme found that individuals who were not married and had few friends had the highest rates of illness and mortality. In Britain, Brown and his associates (1973, 1975, 1977, 1978) employing a retrospective paradigm found that women ranging in age from 18-65 who had experienced severe life events and who lacked a confidant were ten times more likely to be depressed than were those who had been similarly stressed but who had a confidant. More superficial friendships failed to provide even relative protection.

Focusing on relationships with parents during childhood, Greene (cited in Jacobs & Chares, 1980) reports that experiences of lengthy separation from parents play an important role as one of several conditions determining the development of leukemia in children. Thomas and Duszynski (1974) conducted a prospective study of over 1,300 medical students

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(in their twenties and early thirties) and found that psychiatric illness and cancer were associated with the individual's retrospective perception of having had only superficial relationships with both parents throughout childhood.

Investigators exploring the individual's response to bereavement have noted that widows and widowers with only superficial relationships with friends and other relatives evidence a significantly higher risk of illness and mortality than do those who have or who develop close relationships with others after the loss (Lynch, 1977; Jacobs & Charles, 1980).

The importance of intimacy in predicting the individual's response to stress has received empirical support across all age groups studied despite crude and global operationalizations of the variable. Medalie and Goldbourt (1976) asked subjects a single question to assess the quality of their marital relationships and rated the response dichotomously. Brown and his associates (1973, 1975, 1977, 1978) asked subjects but a few questions to assess whether or not they had a confidant. Many other investigators have simply employed marital status to assess intimacy. While other researchers have developed measures of related constructs (e.g., the UCLA Loneliness Scale — Russell, Peplau, & Ferguson, 1978) and measures of closeness in the context of marriage (e.g., the Interpersonal Relationship Scale — Schlein, Guernsey, & Stover, cited in Guernsey, 1977), no measure has yet been developed to assess intimacy *per se*, in the context of various interpersonal relationships. Dean and Lin (1977) noting the absence of a measure of this construct, discuss the need for the development of a precise and valid instrument to further explore the important function of close relationships. The present article reports upon the development and preliminary validation of one such measure, the Miller Social Intimacy Scale (MSIS).

### Method

#### Participants

A total of 252 subjects were recruited from the following sources:

1. Unmarried student sample: 72 male and 116 female undergraduate unmarried volunteer University of Waterloo students were recruited from 5 first, second and third year classes. Different classes completed different scales as part of the initial psychometric investigation. Class 1,  $n = 39$ ; Class 2,  $n = 25$ ; Class 3,  $n = 45$ ; Class 4,  $n = 20$ ; Class 5,  $n = 59$ . The number of subjects and the class generating the data will be specified in the discussion of the results. The average age for this group was 21.3 years.

2. Married student sample: A group of 17 married couple volunteers were recruited from married student residences on the University of Waterloo campus. the average age for this group was 24.3 years.

3. Married clinic sample: 15 married couples seeking conjoint marital therapy at the Lafayette Clinic, a psychiatric facility in Detroit, Michigan, were administered the MSIS as part of the routine intake procedure. The average age was 36.3 years.

#### Procedure

An initial item pool ( $n = 30$ ) was generated by systematic interviews with 50 (22 male and 28 female) undergraduate students which explored the nature and function of their relationships with friends, acquaintances and family members in an attempt to specify some of the defining characteristics of relationships that they considered to be intimate. Subjects who described themselves as lonely consistently described their friendships as lacking a subset of these qualities which helped in the selection of items from the initial item pool. Subjects' descriptions of the components of close relationships in terms of frequency as well as depth led to the development of 10 point frequency and intensity scales. In order to assess the possibility of a social desirability response set interfering with subjects' ratings, a social desirability scale (17-item) was imbedded with items randomly interspersed among the intimacy items. The social desirability scale items were constructed as analogs of a subset of Marlowe-Crowne

Table 1  
Miller Social Intimacy Scale

	Very Rarely			Some of the Time			Almost Always			
1. When you have leisure time how often do you choose to spend it with him/her alone?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
2. How often do you keep very personal information to yourself and do not share it with him/her?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
3. How often do you show him/her affection?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
4. How often do you confide very personal information to him/her?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
5. How often are you able to understand his/her feelings?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
6. How often do you feel close to him/her?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
	Not Much			A Little			A Great Deal			
7. How much do you like to spend time alone with him/her?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
8. How much do you feel like being encouraging and supportive to him/her when he/she is unhappy?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
9. How close do you feel to him/her most of the time?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
10. How important is it to you to listen to his/her very personal disclosures?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11. How satisfying is your relationship with him/her?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
12. How affectionate do you feel towards him/her?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
13. How important is it to you the he/she understands your feelings?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
14. How much damage is caused by a typical disagreement in your relationship with him/her?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
15. How important is it to you that he/she be encouraging and supportive to you when you are unhappy?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
16. How important is it to you the he/she show you affection?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
17. How important is your relationship with him/her in your life?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Need for Approval items modified to be appropriate in the context of intimacy. Very poor test-retest reliability ( $r = .25$ ; 2-month interval); low inter-item correlations; poor internal consistency (Cronbach alpha coefficient was .52) and insufficient evidence for convergent validity ( $r = .40$  with the Marlowe-Crowne Need for Approval Scale) resulted in the decision to delete the 17 social desirability items.

Seventeen intimacy items (6 requiring frequency and 11 requiring intensity ratings on 10-point scales) were selected on the basis of both high inter-item and item-total correlations (greater than .50). Two of these items (#2 and #14) are opposite-keyed so that a rating of 10 is scored as a 1 and vice versa. By instruct-

ing subjects to describe their relationship with their closest friend the ratings are summed to yield the maximum level of intimacy experienced at present. The measure is structured so as to permit an assessment of intimacy in the context of friendship or marriage. The revised MSIS is presented in Table 1.

Internal consistency was assessed by calculating the Cronbach alpha coefficient. Evidence for test-retest reliability was obtained from two administrations of the MSIS over a 2-month interval to a group of subjects with the unmarried student sample.

In addition to exploring reliability, several types of validity were investigated. To explore the convergent validity of the intimacy scale, one group with-

in the unmarried student sample (Class 3,  $n = 45$ ) completed the MSIS and a version of the Interpersonal Relationship Scale (IRS) developed by Schlein, Guernsey, and Stover (1971, cited in Guernsey, 1977) which assesses interpersonal trust and intimacy in the marital relationship. The instructions for the IRS were modified so as to permit an assessment of trust and intimacy in the context of the subject's closest relationship. Another group (Class 5,  $n = 59$ ) completed the MSIS and a measure of loneliness developed by Russell, Peplau, and Ferguson (1978).

To explore discriminant validity, subjects (Class 3,  $n = 45$ ) completed the MSIS and Fitts' Tennessee Self-Concept Scale (1965), a measure of self-esteem; (Class 1,  $n = 39$ ) Jackson's Personality Research Form (1967) and the Marlowe-Crowne Need for Approval Scale (Crowne & Marlowe, 1964).

As one aspect of construct validity, subjects (Class 2,  $n = 25$ ) completed the MSIS twice, once to describe a casual friend and once to describe their closest friend. The construct validity of the scale was also explored by comparing the mean intimacy scores of the married with those of the unmarried students and the scores of the married students with those of the couples in marital therapy.

### *Results and Discussion*

#### *Reliability*

The magnitude of the Cronbach alpha coefficients ( $\alpha = .91$ , Class 3,  $n = 45$ ;  $\alpha = .86$ , Class 1,  $n = 39$ ) reveal that the 17 items assess a single construct as was intended. A test-retest reliability of  $r = .96$  ( $p < .001$ , Class 2,  $n = 25$ ) over a 2-month interval and  $r = .84$  ( $p < .001$ , Class 4,  $n = 20$ ) over a 1-month interval suggests that there is some stability in the maximum level of intimacy experienced over time.

#### *Convergent Validity*

Subjects who described their closest relationship as characterized by high levels of trust and intimacy on the 52-item IRS (Schlein, Guernsey, & Stover,

1971, cited in Guernsey, 1977) also scored high on the MSIS ( $r = .71$ ,  $p < .001$ , Class 3,  $n = 45$ ). Subjects who described themselves as lonely on the UCLA Loneliness Scale also scored low on the MSIS ( $r = -.65$ ,  $p < .001$ , Class 5,  $n = 59$ ).

#### *Discriminant Validity*

As expected, scores on the Fitts' (1965) Tennessee Self-Concept Scale were moderately correlated in a positive direction with those on the MSIS ( $r = .48$ ,  $p < .002$ , Class 3,  $n = 45$ ). Jackson's Personality Research Form produced some interesting sex differences in its relationship with the MSIS. Females with high intimacy scores also scored high on the Need for Nurturance subscale ( $r = .44$ ,  $p < .04$ , Class 1,  $n = 21$ ). High scoring males (Class 1,  $n = 18$ ) were characterized by high needs for Affiliation ( $r = .41$ ,  $p < .05$ ); Dominance ( $r = .46$ ,  $p < .05$ ); and Exhibition (friendly extraversion,  $r = .57$ ,  $p < .05$ ) and low need for Aggression ( $r = -.42$ ,  $p < .05$ ) scores.

Correlations with the Marlowe-Crowne Need for Approval Scale were .36 for males (Class 1,  $n = 18$ ) and .02 for females (Class 1,  $n = 21$ ), neither of which was statistically significant.

#### *Construct Validity*

As expected, the mean MSIS scores for descriptions of the subjects' closest friends were significantly greater than for descriptions of their casual friends ( $t = 9.18$ ,  $p < .001$ , Class 2,  $n = 25$ ).

Table 2 presents descriptive statistics for the MSIS generated by the three samples.

The mean MSIS score for the married students was significantly greater than that for the unmarried students ( $t = 8.17$ ,  $p < .001$ ) which supports the assumption made by many researchers that marital relationships generally involve greater intimacy than do nonmarital relationships. The mean MSIS score for the married students was significantly greater than that for the distressed married clinic sample ( $t = 6.41$ ,  $p < .001$ ), however, which points to heterogeneity in the level of intimacy experienced by married persons. It is important to note

Table 2  
Descriptive Statistics for the MSIS

Sample	Student Sample						Married Clinic Sample		
	Unmarried			Married					
	Males	Females	Total	Males	Females	Total	Males	Females	Total
Size	86	130	216	17	17	34	15	15	30
Mean	134.9	139.3	137.5	152.5	156.2	154.3	124.5	133.8	126.3
Standard Deviation	21.9	16.8	19.1	10.9	7.3	9.3	23.7	20.8	22.3
Median	139.0	139.0	139.0	151.2	156.0	155.8	124.0	140.0	127.0
Maximum	170	170	170	168	168	168	161	157	161
Minimum	74	103	74	132	142	132	66	95	66

that the mean MSIS score for the unmarried student sample was significantly greater than that for the married clinic sample ( $t = 2.56, p < .02$ ). This is the reverse of what one would expect if marital status per se were a valid measure of intimacy, and supports the contention that the MSIS affords greater precision as an assessment technique with regard to intimacy.

In summary the psychometric data reported suggests that the MSIS is a reliable and valid measure of social intimacy. The construction and preliminary validation of the scale provides a promising beginning for the further scientific exploration of a phenomenon so familiar and yet so often taken for granted that it often escapes the scientific inquiry it merits.

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