

ASSESSING READINESS FOR COUPLE THERAPY: THE STAGES OF RELATIONSHIP CHANGE QUESTIONNAIRE

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Client readiness for change is garnering increased interest both conceptually and methodologically. This article describes the reliability, validity, and utility of a measure of readiness for couple relationship change, Schneider's (2003) Stages of Relationship Change Questionnaire (SRCQ). Based on the Transtheoretical Model of Change, the instrument measures change along nine domains of marital functioning. Results indicate that this one-factor instrument may reliably measure readiness for change and discriminate between various stages of change. Most in this sample (n = 406) were in early stages of change, with men more often in the stage of precontemplation and women more often in contemplation. The SRCQ can be completed and scored in under 10 min. Clinical use and research implications are discussed.

Overview and Purpose

Clinical interest in the notion of client readiness to change is growing (e.g., Burrow-Sanchez & Lundberg, 2006; Cordova et al., 2005; Schneider, 2003). Despite important developments in models of couple interventions (e.g., Gurman & Jacobson, 2002), relatively little attention is given to clients' readiness to engage in change. The primary purpose of this study was to report on the reliability, validity, and utility of Schneider's (2003) Stages of Relationship Change Questionnaire, or SRCQ (originally "Readiness for Marital Change Questionnaire, Part 2"; Schneider, 2003). This instrument is a brief nine-item questionnaire that measures readiness for change in couples' relationships based on the Transtheoretical Model of Intentional Behavior Change (Prochaska & DiClemente, 1983)—referred to here as the TTM. The SRCQ measures readiness for relationship change using the nine subscale categories of the Marital Satisfaction Inventory-Revised (Snyder, 1997).

This instrument has at least three potential clinical uses: (a) it allows therapists to assess clients' readiness for intervention, (b) the instrument helps measure whether two partners' stages of change differ or are the same, and (c) it may guide therapists in selecting interventions that are matched with clients' stage(s) of change. There is ample evidence that therapeutic and educational interventions are effective in improving general marital and family functioning (e.g., Shadish & Baldwin, 2003). Moreover, there is mounting evidence that interventions are more effective when matched appropriately with type and intensity of problem (Chambless, 1999; Sprenkle, 2002), and that tailoring therapy to stage of change enhances therapy outcomes (Prochaska & Norcross, 2001). An important first step toward such clinical specificity is the measurement of clients' readiness for change. It is also important to note the Transtheoretical Model assumes that change is desirable. The TTM was conceived primarily to describe process (i.e., how change occurs) rather than assessment (what needs to be changed) or outcome (what changed and to what extent).

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Thus, a crucial starting point in the therapeutic process is the determination of the need for change from the perspective of each client, as well as from the perspectives of the practitioner's clinical judgment and assessment measures. At issue is the juxtaposition of denial in the face of relational distress, as opposed to healthy functioning where change is not seen as needed.

Readiness for Change and the Transtheoretical Model

Narrowly defined, readiness to change refers to affect and cognitions that lead to efforts to change. More broadly defined, readiness also includes initial behaviors (attempted change) because behavior change often includes multiple attempts over time (Carey, Purnine, Maisto, & Carey, 1999). Prochaska and colleagues' Transtheoretical Model views change as having both cognitive and behavioral components, and posits that change occurs over time and progresses through six stages: precontemplation, contemplation, preparation, action, maintenance, and termination (Prochaska & Norcross, 2001).

The Transtheoretical Model of Change is a generic model that describes self-initiated change, and it attempts to distill common change processes and bring them to bear on a range of behaviors (Prochaska, 1999). It is important to note that the stages of change are only one component of the model. The TTM consists of three major components, and the components are posited to work together in ways that have impact on change. These components include (a) processes of change (e.g., consciousness raising, counterconditioning, catharsis), (b) stages of change (e.g., precontemplation, action), and (c) levels of change (i.e., a hierarchy of domains in which problems reside, ranging from situational problems to interpersonal conflict; Prochaska & DiClemente, 1984). Theoretically, different processes should be used depending on the client's stage of change. Empirically, results of a meta-analytic study suggest that clients' use of helping relationships is indeed linked to stages of change (Rosen, 2000).

Stages of Change

The SRCQ measures the main five of the TTM's six stages. The first stages are fundamentally cognitive in nature, whereas the latter stages are characterized primarily by behavior. Prochaska and colleagues typically specify intervals of time for some of the stages, as noted in the descriptions below. However, temporal intervals differ among instruments assessing readiness to change, and the dimension of time remains a topic for empirical scrutiny. *Precontemplation* is described as the stage in which a person does not intend to change in the future (Prochaska & Norcross, 2001). There is a lack of awareness of the problem or unwillingness to change the problem, and thus if someone in precontemplation presents for therapy, it is often due to pressure from another member of the system. *Contemplation* is defined as a period where a person is aware of a problem and intends to change within approximately 6 months (Prochaska & Norcross, 2001). The person is thinking about changing but has not made any plans to do so. In this stage, the advantages of change tend to be seen as equal to the disadvantages (Prochaska & Prochaska, 1999). *Preparation* is the stage in which a person intends to take action within the next month. There tends to be more confidence in the likelihood of successful change, and the advantages of changing start to outweigh the disadvantages (Prochaska & Prochaska, 1999). Typically, some small behavioral changes characterize this stage, but this stage is not marked by effective action, but rather by small steps toward modifying behaviors. *Action* is characterized by the modification of behaviors, experiences, and environment, with the modification of behavior as the hallmark (Prochaska & Norcross, 2001). People in this stage use the processes of change more widely and frequently than in any other; specifically, self-liberation, counterconditioning, and stimulus control (Prochaska & Prochaska, 1999). *Maintenance* is described as the stage in which a person is working to prevent problems from returning. In this stage, processes such as counterconditioning and stimulus control are used to maintain change. A person is in maintenance if he or she has engaged in new behavior for more than 6 months (Prochaska & Norcross, 2001). *Termination*, not measured by the SRCQ, is marked by complete self-confidence that there is no longer need to work to prevent the return of the problem. This phase has also been labeled *Escape*, or *Relapse* in cases where problems may recur. Linear progress through change has been recognized as possibly less common than

progression with some periods of regression: “most individuals will relapse” (Prochaska, DiClemente, & Norcross, 1992, p. 1004).

There have been different iterations of how the stages are viewed, including the “revolving door” model and the “spiral model.” In the former, a person enters via the first stage and progresses through the stages, but often relapses and may move through the stages several times (Prochaska & DiClemente, 1986; see also Sutton, 1996). In the latter, individuals may cycle back to earlier stages, but movement may not be as far back (Prochaska et al., 1992). Although the stages have been widely accepted, they have also been criticized due to the inconsistent psychometric support among instruments that measure change, including poor psychometric properties (e.g., low ability to discriminate among stages), subscales with differing psychometric properties (i.e., one subscale may be psychometrically weak and another strong), or limited availability of psychometric data (see Carey et al., 1999). Criticisms also include the arbitrary nature of the intervals (see Schneider, 2003; Sutton, 1996), although it should be noted that one study found that stages derived from TTM algorithms tended to be stable over time in a non-clinical population (Morera et al., 1998). Moreover, there is debate and conflicting evidence as to whether the data support a stage model of change or a continuum of change. A stage model is appropriate if adjacent stages of change are more highly correlated than non-adjacent stages (e.g., McConaughy, DiClemente, Prochaska, & Velicer, 1989). Other scholars argue that readiness to change is better conceptualized along a continuum rather than a series of discrete stages (see Budd & Rollnick, 1996; Sutton, 1996) and cite evidence that non-adjacent stages are also often highly correlated to each other. One purpose of this study was to test the SRCQ’s ability to discriminate between stages.

Applying the Transtheoretical Model to Couples

The TTM has typically been applied to individuals rather than dyads or other systems (e.g., Nigg et al., 1999; Rollnick, Heather, Gold, & Hall, 1992), with two exceptions. The first is Dorian and Cordova’s (2001) adaptation of the 32-item Stages of Change Questionnaire, used in Cordova’s evaluation of the Marriage Checkup (Cordova et al., 2005; see also Cordova, Warren, & Gee, 2001). This unpublished 32-item instrument is an adaptation of the McConaughy, Prochaska, and Velicer (1983) Stages of Change Questionnaire. Its four scales measure four stages of change.

The present instrument is the second adaptation of the TTM to couple relationship change. Schneider (2003) developed a three-component instrument to measure readiness to change: the Readiness for Marital Change Questionnaire, Parts 1, 2, and 3. Part 1 is a 40-item instrument with items designed to factor into four discrete stages of change. Part 2 (renamed “Stages of Relationship Change Questionnaire”), used in this study, is a nine-item instrument with items designed to assess readiness for change along the nine subscale categories of the Marital Satisfaction Inventory-Revised (Snyder, 1997). These categories have been demonstrated by Snyder’s extensive research as important to couple functioning. Schneider (2003) noted that the application of these particular subscales was intended to measure readiness for change in specific realms of behavior, rather than measuring general aspects of the stages of change. Part 3 measures the respondent’s confidence in resolving problems in the nine dimensions of Part 2. Schneider (2003) also noted that some of the difficulties of applying the TTM to couples include the notion that changing the relationship is not an individual decision, and that many areas of change may be desired or needed.

Study Purposes

The primary purpose of this study was to evaluate aspects of reliability and validity of the SRCQ for future clinical and research use. The establishment of reliability (consistency) and validity (soundness) of any quantitative instrument is important in helping both researchers and clinicians to collect accurate data toward accepting or rejecting hypotheses (Salkind, 2000), and these aspects are particularly important in the application of the TTM to a relatively new area. Factor analyses and tests of reliability were thus conducted to examine whether the SRCQ measures stage of change consistently, and analyses of construct and discriminant validity were conducted to examine the extent to which the instrument does so accurately. A secondary

purpose of this study was to examine readiness to change of a group of participants preparing for various types of relationship education. The function of the first purpose is that a reliable stage of change instrument might allow therapists and other interventionists to determine clients' readiness for intervention, determine differences in readiness between clients, and match interventions to stage of change. The latter purpose provides baseline findings regarding readiness for change, which likewise may help to inform intervention. Such an instrument might also allow researchers to examine links between readiness for change and changes in relationship satisfaction, and between stages of change and change processes.

METHOD

Sample

The data for this study were gathered from participants in the Bluegrass Healthy Marriage Initiative (BHMI), an organization that facilitates couple education and research by partnering with community organizations. As a BHMI partner, each community organization works with BHMI to provide couple education to its members in the ways that fit them best. This non-stratified sample consisted of members in various community organizations that partnered with BHMI, including civic and faith-based organizations, as well as social service agencies within eight counties in the central Kentucky Bluegrass region. Participation in the study was thus solicited by BHMI through the various organizations with which the participants affiliate, and each individual was given the freedom to participate or refuse participation. The data were collected on-site at the organization (e.g., agency office, church, or police division) via self-report surveys from participants prior to any relationship education; individuals were later offered opportunities for couple relationship education classes as their respective organizations initiated a variety of classes. No incentive was offered for participation other than the opportunity to later participate in relationship education.

The sample consisted of 406 adults in committed relationships. Most respondents were married (79%), and the mean length of marriage was 14.3 years. Of those cohabiting or in a committed relationship for 1 year or more (21%), the mean length of the relationship was 2.75 years. Participants' ages ranged from 20 to 77 years, with a mean of 40 years (7% missing data). In terms of race and ethnicity, 84% were Caucasian, 9% were African American, 2% were Native American, and 5% were other minorities (3% missing data). About 54% reported being parents. Half of the participant data was gathered from faith-based partner organizations (51%). Of the remainder, 25% came from social service agencies, 20% from civic organizations (law enforcement), and 4% from participants in medical centers. In terms of education, 17% had a high school diploma or less, 21% had some college or a 2-year college degree, 29% had a bachelor-level degree, and 23% had graduate-level degrees (1% missing data). The modal family income was \$50,000–\$75,000 (responses were measured by category), with frequencies fairly evenly distributed along a normative bell curve. Almost all participants identified themselves as Christian: 35% were Catholic, 47% were Protestant, and 11.5% were Non-denominational Christian. Of those remaining, 2.5% stated various other religious preferences, and 4% stated no preference (2% missing data). Some of the data consisted of responses from both partners in a relationship, but there was also a portion of the data that came from individuals whose partners were not respondents. In such cases, couples' responses may be correlated, which creates the potential for non-independence of data. To achieve independence of data (Kenny, Kashy, & Bolger, 1998), and to test applicability to different groups, analyses were conducted on subsamples of the total sample ($n = 406$) and reported by sex ($n = 182$ men; $n = 224$ women). Two additional sets of analyses were conducted on a subset of data consisting of coupled responses ($n = 198$) and of coupled parents ($n = 123$).

Measure

The Stages of Relationship Change Questionnaire. The SRCQ is a nine-item, self-report instrument that measures readiness for relationship change along nine categories. Respondents rated themselves by choosing one of five stem sentences possible for each item (see the appendix). Each stem represents one of the stages of change; for example, "I do not intend to

make any changes” (precontemplation) or “I am actively making specific changes” (action). Each of the nine items serves as a completion segment that corresponds with the chosen stem; for example, “about how we communicate our affection” or “about how we handle our finances.” The SRCQ determines stages according to the Likert-scale response to the particular item. Thus, the five stems are scaled such that choosing the first stem (“I do not intend to make any changes”) is rated as 1 and indicates the stage of *precontemplation*. Likewise, for example, selecting the third item (“I am getting ready to make some specific changes”) is rated as 3 and indicates the state of *preparation*. A score of 5 (“I have *recently made* changes and I am working to prevent problems from returning”) indicates the stage of *maintenance*, suggesting that the respondent has made changes and is now working to prevent recurrence of problems. Because the TTM conceptualizes the stages as largely experientially sequential (Prochaska & Norcross, 2001), the stages are operationalized ordinally, a step strengthened by evidence that stages may have a degree of temporal stability (Morera et al., 1998). It is thus possible to create a stage of change score by calculating the mean response across items. Because the first stages are largely cognitive in nature, and the latter stages primarily behavioral, a global score is an indication of a continuum of the extent to which a respondent is intending to change versus acting on change.

RESULTS

Reliability

Principle components factor analysis. Initial factor analyses were conducted using oblique (promax) rotation, run separately for men, for women, for couple-level data, and for coupled parents. An oblique rotation was chosen because it allows factors to correlate, leading to a conceptually clearer picture. The potential axes are free to take any position in the factor space, and potential factors are not required to be orthogonal, facilitating simplicity of interpretation (Abdi, 2003). However, each of the exploratory factor analyses yielded a single factor; no other eigenvalues exceeded the value of 1. The eigenvalue for men was 3.32, and the single factor explained 47.4% of the variance. The eigenvalue for women was 4.11, and the factor explained 51.4% of the variance. The eigenvalue for the subsample of couples was 3.72, and the factor explained 46.5% of the variance. The eigenvalue for the subsample of parents was 4.38, and the factor explained 43.8% of the variance. The single factors were reliable, with Cronbach’s alpha levels of .79 (men), .86 (women), .82 (couples), and .86 (coupled parents). Factor loadings are reported in Table 1.

Item	Factor loadings and alpha levels			
	Men (<i>n</i> = 182)	Women (<i>n</i> = 224)	Couples (<i>n</i> = 198)	Coupled parents (<i>n</i> = 123)
<i>Changes about . . .</i>				
Leisure time together	.56	.72	.70	.71
How we solve problems	.75	.71	.73	.70
Communicating affection	.80	.77	.80	.72
How we handle our finances	.41	.59	.52	.60
Sex with my partner	.76	.70	.65	.66
Roles and expectations	.61	.80	.72	.75
Managing anger/aggression	.49	.65	.44	.49
How we raise our children	—	—	—	.73
Overall satisfaction with marriage	.79	.79	.81	.86
Cronbach’s alpha	.80	.86	.82	.86

Table 2
Confirmatory Factor Analyses

Item <i>Changes about . . .</i>	Factor loadings			
	Men	Women	Couples	Coupled parents
Leisure time together	.44	.60	.59	.61
How we solve problems	.65	.62	.71	.65
Communicating affection	.76	.66	.74	.70
How we handle our finances	.28	.47	.47	.44
Sex with my partner	.76	.66	.50	.56
Roles and expectations	.45	.82	.72	.74
Managing anger/aggression	.41	.59	.42	.40
How we raise our children	—	—	—	.55
Overall satisfaction with marriage	.74	.79	.79	.88
Model fit indices				
<i>n</i>	182	224	198	123
χ^2	24.9	23.0	16.2	18.7
<i>df</i>	17	14	17	18
<i>p</i>	.095	.060	.508	.412
CFI	.978	.985	1.00	.998
RMSEA	.052	.058	.000	.018

Confirmatory factor analyses. Next, a more rigorous maximum-likelihood confirmatory factor analysis was performed using structural equation modeling (AMOS 7.0; Arbuckle, 2006). This method offers the advantage of testing whether the correlation matrix can be reproduced given the results of exploratory factor analysis, and it indicates how well the data fit the specified model. Missing data were imputed using the expectation maximization method. This method imputes missing values by creating a covariance matrix with the existing data and fitting expected values (Acock, 1997). Model fit indices and coefficients are reported in Table 2. According to Kline (2005), good structural model fit indices include a nonsignificant chi-square, CFI values above 0.90, and RMSEA (root mean square error of approximation) values lower than 0.05, although 0.08 is acceptable. The fit for the measurement model for men was good ($\chi^2 = 24.9$, $df = 17$, $p = .095$, CFI = 0.978, RMSEA = 0.052). Item-total correlations ranged from .41 to .76, with the exception of “how we handle our finances,” which was .28. Although this factor loading was low, this item was retained to enable the examination of the applicability of the instrument in its entirety to all respondents. The item’s inclusion did not have a negative impact on the factor’s overall robustness, and it loaded well for other subsamples. For women, item-total correlations ranged from .47 to .79; the model fit was acceptable ($\chi^2 = 23.0$, $df = 14$, $p = .060$, CFI = 0.985, RMSEA = 0.058). In the couples model, the measurement model fit was good ($\chi^2 = 16.2$, $df = 17$, $p = .508$, CFI = 1.00, RMSEA = 0.000). Item-total correlations for the couple subsample ranged from .50 to .79. For parents, item-total correlations ranged from .40 to .88; the model fit was good ($\chi^2 = 18.7$, $df = 18$, $p = .412$, CFI = 0.998, RMSEA = 0.018). These coefficients are not dissimilar in range to other stages of change instruments (e.g., SOCRATES; Burrow-Sanchez & Lundberg, 2006). Note that reliability coefficients are not reported in confirmatory factor analyses, and that standardized factor loadings of 0.40 and higher are considered reliable when the sample exceeds 150 (Stevens, 1996).

Validity

Content validity. The wording of the instrument’s stem sentences represents the stages of change and corresponds with extant descriptions of the various stages. In addition, the SRCQ

measures change along the specific content domains from Snyder's (1997) MSI. Thus, the instrument specifies realm of change, not merely stage. The instrument assesses a single item per each domain of relationship functioning. The dimensions of each domain of functioning are not assessed with multiple items.

Construct validity. A modest test of construct validity was conducted by correlating SRCQ mean scores with a conceptually related item. Participants responded to a separate, single item ("To what degree is there need for change in your relationship?") along a 5-point scale. Responses to this item ranged from "no significant change is needed at all = 1" to "there is a need for almost total change = 5." Responses were significantly correlated with the overall mean readiness for change score ($r = .45$ for men, $r = .56$ for women, and $r = .54$ for couples, $p < .01$). An additional test was conducted by correlating SRCQ scores with relationship adjustment as measured by the 14-item Revised Dyadic Adjustment Scale (RDAS; Busby, Crane, Larson, & Christensen, 1995; Crane, Middleton, & Bean, 2000). As a related construct, one would expect readiness for change to correlate negatively with overall relationship adjustment. The overall mean SRCQ score was significantly and negatively correlated with the overall mean for relationship satisfaction ($r = -.34$ for men, $r = -.36$ for women, and $r = -.43$ for couples, $p < .01$). Note that these variables are posited to be related to the SRCQ but are not overlapping concepts, and thus these correlations constitute a general test of construct validity rather than of convergent validity. A current challenge to establishing concurrent validity is that, to date, there are no published instruments on couples' stages of change. Further bivariate correlations are reported in Tables 3 and 4.

Discriminant validity. A key consideration of this instrument is the extent to which it is able to accurately identify respondents at differing levels of change. As a step toward determining this capacity, two separate tests were conducted. Respondents were grouped first by perceived need for relationship change, and second by relationship satisfaction. Analyses of variance were then computed to examine whether SRCQ scores differed among groups according to expectations.

SRCQ scores by need for change. The item "To what degree is there need for change in your relationship?" was used to cluster respondents into four groups, ranging from those who indicated "no significant change is needed" (Group 1) to "many changes are needed" (Group

Table 3
Correlations Between SRCQ Scores and Other Variables: Men/Women

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
SRCQ	1	.56**	-.40**	-.42**	-.19**	-.36**	-.12	-.08
Need for change	.45**	1	-.64**	-.81**	-.54**	-.77**	-.23**	-.16**
RDAS consensus	-.31**	-.52**	1	.67**	.58**	.89**	.09	.11
RDAS satisfaction	-.32**	-.69**	.52**	1	.56**	.85**	.25**	.16*
RDAS cohesion	-.20**	-.54**	.47**	.53**	1	.83**	.15*	.18*
RDAS total	-.34**	-.72**	.82**	.82**	.84**	1	.17*	.15*
Income	-.19*	-.10	.13	.15	-.01	.09	1	.47**
Education	-.16	-.08	.24**	.08	.18*	.21**	.30**	1
Mean (Men)	1.72	1.93	3.86	3.82	2.91	3.60	4.60	5.77
SD (Men)	.71	1.01	.56	.77	.82	.57	1.45	1.01
Mean (Women)	2.11	2.35	3.74	3.68	2.76	3.45	4.01	5.57
SD (Women)	.90	1.06	.71	.82	.90	.70	1.80	1.10

Notes. Men's coefficients displayed in bottom left. Women's coefficients displayed in top right. Income: 1 = under \$10,000, 7 = \$150,000 or more. Education: 1 = no formal schooling, 7 = graduate degree.

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

Table 4
Correlations Between SRCQ Scores and Other Variables: Couples

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
SRCQ	1								
Need for change	.54**	1							
RDAS consensus	-.37**	-.51**	1						
RDAS satisfaction	-.34**	-.54**	.43**	1					
RDAS cohesion	-.31**	-.54**	.46**	.45**	1				
RDAS total	-.43**	-.66**	.81**	.73**	.83**	1			
Sex	.10	.12	.02	.04	-.02	.00	1		
Income	-.19*	-.09	.11	.07	-.01	.06	-.06	1	
Education	-.04	-.01	.02	-.07	.07	.01	-.01	.24**	1
Mean	1.93	1.90	3.93	3.97	2.98	3.67	.51	4.50	5.95
SD	.85	.80	.55	.56	.85	.51	.50	1.53	1.02

Notes. Income: 1 = under \$10,000, 7 = \$150,000 or more. Education: 1 = no formal schooling, 7 = graduate degree.
* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

4). Analyses of variance were computed comparing the SRCQ scores among the different groups; separate analyses were conducted for the full sample of men and women, then for coupled individuals.

One-way ANOVAs were conducted separately for men and women to account for dependence of data. A significant main effect was found between groups for men and women, respectively ($F(3, 180) = 30.95, p < .001$ and $F(3, 221) = 37.41, p < .001$). Men and women in Group 1 had lower SRCQ scores ($M = 1.26, SD = .383$ and $M = 1.46, SD = .639$) than Group 2 ($M = 1.90, SD = .655$ and $M = 1.87, SD = .670$); Group 2 had lower scores than Group 3 ($M = 2.47, SD = .811$ and $M = 2.67, SD = .853$). For men, the mean scores for Group 4 were actually slightly lower than those of Group 3 ($M = 1.92, SD = .630$ versus 2.88 for women). This result may be expected due to the nature of these stages of change: those in the action stage (“I am actively making specific changes”) may perceive the need for change more acutely than those in the maintenance stage (“I have recently made changes and I am working to prevent problems from returning”). This trend was observed for men, and the mean scores were not significantly different between groups for either men or women.

An additional one-way ANOVA was run to compare the SRCQ scores of coupled respondents, again grouped by “need for change.” Similar to prior results, a significant difference was found among the groups ($F(3, 184) = 28.32, p < .001$). As expected, a Tukey’s HSD post hoc analysis showed significant differences between all groups except the last two mean SRCQ scores. Group 1 had lower SRCQ scores ($M = 1.40, SD = 0.57$) than Group 2 ($M = 1.97, SD = 0.75$); Group 2 had lower scores than Group 3 ($M = 2.82, SD = 0.82$). Group 4’s scores were again lower than those of Group 3 ($M = 2.63, SD = 0.76$). Item-level results are reported in Table 5. These results suggest generally that the mean SRCQ scores of the various groups tended to differ as expected. The exception to this was the item “change about sex with my partner,” in which Group 1 differed significantly from Groups 2–4. The scores of Groups 2–4 differed in the expected directions, but the differences were not significant for this item.

SRCQ scores by relationship satisfaction. Using the Revised Dyadic Adjustment Scale scores, where 48 is the established cutoff distinguishing relational distress (Crane et al., 2000), relationship satisfaction scores were used to group couples’ responses into three groups: *low* (scores of 47 and below; $n = 58$), *median* (scores of 48–55; $n = 69$), and *high* (scores of 56 and higher; $n = 48$). It was reasoned that if the SRCQ accurately discriminates, then mean SRCQ scores should differ among couples grouped according to levels of relationship satisfaction.

Table 5
Post Hoc Tukey's HSD Analyses of SRCQ Means by "Need for Change" for Men and Women

SRCQ item	Degree of need for change			
	Group 1 (no change) <i>n</i> = 63	Group 2 (few changes) <i>n</i> = 89	Group 3 (some changes) <i>n</i> = 25	Group 4 (many changes) <i>n</i> = 9
Leisure time together	1.43 (0.87) ^a <i>1.50 (0.91)^a</i>	1.89 (0.92) ^a <i>1.89 (0.96)^a</i>	3.25 (1.28) ^b <i>2.88 (1.31)^b</i>	2.00 (0.71) ^a <i>2.00 (0.81)^a</i>
How we solve problems	1.44 (1.03) ^a <i>1.42 (0.86)^a</i>	1.97 (1.09) ^a <i>2.24 (1.42)^b</i>	2.63 (1.19) ^b <i>3.13 (1.31)^c</i>	2.60 (1.34) ^b <i>3.33 (0.57)^c</i>
Communicating affection	1.38 (0.68) ^a <i>1.35 (0.69)^a</i>	2.18 (1.33) ^b <i>2.04 (1.34)^b</i>	2.50 (1.07) ^c <i>3.06 (1.36)^c</i>	3.00 (1.58) ^c <i>2.50 (1.00)^b</i>
How we handle our finances	1.53 (0.84) ^a <i>1.65 (1.23)^a</i>	2.08 (1.29) ^a <i>2.20 (1.28)^a</i>	2.00 (0.76) ^a <i>2.69 (1.49)^a</i>	1.80 (0.84) ^a <i>3.50 (1.73)^b</i>
Sex with my partner	1.39 (0.80) ^a <i>1.28 (0.68)^a</i>	2.11 (1.17) ^b <i>2.09 (1.35)^b</i>	2.88 (1.36) ^b <i>2.50 (1.37)^b</i>	2.60 (1.14) ^b <i>3.50 (1.29)^b</i>
Roles and expectations	1.23 (0.60) ^a <i>1.38 (0.98)^a</i>	2.11 (1.17) ^b <i>1.76 (1.20)^a</i>	2.88 (1.35) ^c <i>2.60 (1.35)^b</i>	2.40 (1.14) ^b <i>2.75 (0.50)^b</i>
Managing anger/aggression	1.21 (0.85) ^a <i>1.52 (0.96)^a</i>	1.95 (1.37) ^b <i>1.56 (1.16)^a</i>	3.34 (1.13) ^c <i>2.33 (1.60)^b</i>	1.75 (0.96) ^b <i>3.25 (0.50)^b</i>
Overall satisfaction with relationship	1.23 (0.84) ^a <i>1.00 (0.00)^a</i>	1.64 (1.16) ^a <i>1.49 (1.07)^a</i>	2.63 (1.30) ^b <i>2.29 (1.44)^b</i>	2.60 (1.52) ^b <i>2.67 (0.58)^b</i>
Overall SRCQ mean	1.41 (0.65) ^a <i>1.39 (0.43)^a</i>	1.98 (0.71) ^b <i>1.97 (0.79)^b</i>	2.78 (0.70) ^c <i>2.84 (0.89)^c</i>	2.39 (0.93) ^c <i>2.93 (0.88)^c</i>

Notes. Women's coefficients are italicized. Means with differing postscripts differed significantly, $p < .05$. All item means differed significantly between "no change" and "some change," and "no change" and "many changes" ($p < .05$), except "finances" for men ($p < .10$).

One-way ANOVAs were run to compare the SRCQ scores of coupled respondents among these groups, again conducted separately for men and women to account for dependence of data. Similar to prior results, significant differences were found among the groups for men and women, respectively ($F(2, 90) = 13.35, p < .001$ and $F(2, 89) = 7.23, p < .001$). Tukey's HSD post hoc analyses showed significant differences between all groups. As expected, men and women in the *low* satisfaction group had the highest mean global SRCQ scores ($M = 2.21, SD = .67$ and $M = 2.52, SD = .94$). Likewise, the median satisfaction groups ($M = 1.68, SD = .64$ and $M = 1.99, SD = .72$) had higher means than the high satisfaction groups ($M = 1.51, SD = .63$ and $M = 1.52, SD = .77$). Item-level results are reported in Table 6. As expected, all item means differed significantly between *low satisfaction* and *high satisfaction*. Differences at the item level were sometimes not great enough to differ significantly, which may not be surprising given that (a) this sample was not on average clinically distressed and (b) the construct of relationship satisfaction is not synonymous with stage of change.

Stage of Change

The second purpose of this study was to examine participants' baseline stages of change. Results are reported in Table 7. To assign respondents to particular stages, mean scores were calculated and a stage was assigned accordingly. Scores that clustered around "1"

Table 6

Post Hoc Tukey's HSD Analyses of SRCQ Means by Couple Relationship Satisfaction

SRCQ item	Relationship satisfaction		
	Group 1 (low satisfaction) <i>n</i> = 58	Group 2 (median satisfaction) <i>n</i> = 69	Group 3 (high satisfaction) <i>n</i> = 48
Leisure time together	2.26 (1.15) ^a <i>2.33 (1.24)^a</i>	1.82 (0.91) ^a <i>2.94 (1.06)^a</i>	1.28 (0.54) ^b <i>1.65 (0.95)^b</i>
How we solve problems	2.10 (1.12) ^a <i>2.70 (1.46)^a</i>	1.74 (1.02) ^a <i>2.31 (1.28)^a</i>	1.54 (1.18) ^a <i>1.69 (1.26)</i>
Communicating affection	2.70 (1.37) ^a <i>2.67 (1.32)^a</i>	1.59 (0.88) ^b <i>2.09 (1.29)^a</i>	1.56 (1.00) ^b <i>1.47 (0.98)^b</i>
How we handle our finances	2.05 (1.32) ^a <i>2.71 (1.62)^a</i>	1.79 (1.08) ^a <i>2.37 (1.19)^a</i>	1.62 (0.90) ^a <i>1.75 (1.27)^b</i>
Sex with my partner	2.42 (1.39) ^a <i>2.81 (1.44)^a</i>	1.87 (1.03) ^a <i>1.73 (1.17)^b</i>	1.33 (0.70) ^b <i>1.71 (1.19)^b</i>
Roles and expectations	2.00 (1.21) ^a <i>2.25 (1.29)^a</i>	1.46 (0.87) ^b <i>2.13 (1.39)^a</i>	1.42 (0.78) ^b <i>1.19 (0.40)^b</i>
Managing anger/aggression	2.21 (1.32) ^a <i>2.48 (1.50)^a</i>	1.63 (1.28) ^a <i>1.66 (1.10)^b</i>	1.39 (1.09) ^a <i>1.48 (1.12)^b</i>
Overall satisfaction with relationship	2.00 (1.17) ^a <i>2.30 (1.38)^a</i>	1.24 (0.75) ^a <i>1.65 (1.14)^b</i>	1.52 (1.12) ^b <i>1.03 (0.18)^c</i>
Overall SRCQ mean	2.23 (0.69) ^a <i>2.54 (0.95)^a</i>	1.69 (0.72) ^b <i>2.10 (0.88)^a</i>	1.50 (0.67) ^b <i>1.53 (0.49)^b</i>

Notes. Women's coefficients are italicized. Means with differing postscripts differed significantly, $p < .05$. All item means differed significantly between "low satisfaction" and "high satisfaction" ($p < .05$), except "problems" and "finances" for men ($p < .10$).

were assigned to "precontemplation" (range: 1.0–1.49); scores that clustered around "2" were assigned to "contemplation" (range: 1.5–2.49), those that clustered around "3" to "preparation" (range: 2.5–3.49), and so forth. In terms of modal responses, men more often responded as being in precontemplation and women more often responded as being in contemplation. At the item level, percentages for males ranged from 52% in precontemplation on "leisure time together" (vs. 38% of women in precontemplation on this item) to 71% of men in precontemplation on "managing anger and aggression" (vs. 60% of women). To the extent that these stages are accurately measured, it would make sense for levels of relationship satisfaction to be non-distressed. As expected, the mean levels of relationship satisfaction were non-distressed: the mean score on the RDAS was $M = 50$ ($SD = 8.0$) for men, $M = 49$ ($SD = 10.0$) for women, and $M = 52$ ($SD = 7.0$) for couples (with a clinical cutoff score of 48). Among the subsample of couples, there were no significant differences between men's and women's mean subscale and total scores.

To determine whether men's and women's mean scores differed significantly at the item level, a one-way ANOVA was computed comparing means for each item. Among the full sample, all means differed significantly (see Table 8 for results) with the exception of "sex with my partner." The same analysis was conducted using couple-level data; this step was potentially important because it included paired respondents who presumably rated paired relationships. In this analysis, no significant differences were observed between partners' mean readiness for change scores ($F(1, 186) = 1.89, p > .05$; Table 8).

Items	Sex	Precontemplation		Contemplation		Preparation		Action		Maintenance	
		Response = 1	Response = 2	Response = 3	Response = 4	Response = 5					
Leisure time together	M	52 (94)	37 (68)	4 (8)	4 (7)	2 (3)					
	F	38 (85)	38 (85)	7 (16)	11 (24)	5 (12)					
How we solve problems	M	56 (102)	26 (47)	4 (7)	9 (16)	4 (8)					
	F	36 (81)	27 (61)	9 (20)	19 (42)	8 (17)					
Communicating affection	M	56 (102)	25 (46)	7 (13)	9 (17)	2 (3)					
	F	42 (93)	26 (58)	10 (22)	15 (33)	6 (14)					
How we handle our finances	M	—	—	—	—	—					
	F	44 (96)	19 (41)	13 (27)	15 (32)	9 (20)					
Sex with my partner	M	56 (102)	24 (43)	6 (10)	11 (20)	3 (5)					
	F	48 (106)	25 (55)	8 (18)	12 (27)	6 (13)					
Roles and expectations	M	64 (117)	22 (40)	3 (6)	7 (13)	3 (5)					
	F	47 (103)	29 (63)	11 (23)	9 (20)	5 (11)					
Managing anger/aggression	M	71 (129)	9 (17)	3 (6)	8 (15)	6 (11)					
	F	60 (125)	9 (18)	9 (19)	15 (31)	8 (17)					
Overall satisfaction with marriage	M	64 (117)	20 (36)	3 (6)	7 (12)	5 (9)					
	F	54 (118)	19 (41)	8 (17)	12 (27)	7 (16)					
Mean response range		1.5–2.49	2.5–3.49	3.5–4.49	4.5–5.0						
Overall stage of marital change (categorized by mean)	M	47 (85)	35 (63)	17 (30)	1 (2)	0.6 (1)					
	F	28 (62)	42 (93)	20 (45)	8 (18)	2 (5)					

Note. Values are given as rounded percentages and *n* in parentheses.

Table 8
SRCQ Item and Total Mean Comparisons by Sex

Item <i>Readiness to change about . . .</i>	Sex	Full sample		Couple subsample	
		Mean (SD)	<i>F</i> (df)	Mean (SD)	<i>F</i> (df)
Leisure time together	M	1.65 (0.87)	15.79*** (400)	1.83 (1.04)	0.64 (179)
	F	2.07 (1.17)		1.96 (1.09)	
How we solve problems	M	1.78 (1.15)	18.99*** (399)	1.85 (1.14)	3.44 (181)
	F	2.33 (1.34)		2.20 (1.37)	
Communicating affection	M	1.75 (1.05)	12.51*** (399)	1.92 (1.87)	0.51 (182)
	F	2.17 (1.29)		2.05 (1.30)	
Sex with my partner	M	1.79 (1.13)	3.54 (397)	1.91 (1.41)	0.25 (176)
	F	2.02 (1.27)		2.00 (1.30)	
Roles and expectations	M	1.61 (1.04)	10.03*** (399)	1.69 (1.04)	0.76 (175)
	F	1.97 (1.18)		1.84 (1.21)	
Managing anger/ aggression	M	1.66 (1.24)	7.35** (386)	1.76 (1.28)	0.00 (170)
	F	2.03 (1.42)		1.75 (1.24)	
Overall satisfaction with marriage	M	1.67 (1.14)	7.24** (397)	1.62 (1.15)	0.02 (175)
	F	2.00 (1.33)		1.64 (1.16)	
Overall mean	M	1.72 (0.71)	22.40*** (402)	1.84 (0.81)	1.89 (186)
	F	2.11 (0.90)		2.01 (0.88)	

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

DISCUSSION

The main purpose of this study was to test aspects of reliability and validity of the Stages of Relationship Change Questionnaire (Schneider, 2003), and a second purpose was to examine trends in stage of change among nonclinical participants preparing for marriage education. The SRCQ yielded a single factor that was reliable for both men and women and for couples and parents, and results suggest that the SRCQ is a brief and reliable measure of stages of change. Item-total correlations were similar to other instruments that measure stages of change (Burrow-Sanchez & Lundberg, 2006; see also Carey et al., 1999). An exception to this was men's responses to readiness to change about "how we handle our finances," but the coefficient was acceptable in the couple and parent subsample analyses.

Validity analyses results suggest that the instrument operates in psychometrically sound ways. With regard to content validity, a strength of the SRCQ is that it measures change along specific content domains that are important to couple functioning rather than measuring stage alone. A degree of construct validity was established by correlating items related to couple interactions that yielded zero-order correlation coefficients in the expected directions. Similarly, the tests of discriminant validity yielded results in generally expected directions. When responses were grouped according to participant "need for change," all item means differed significantly between *no change* and *some change*, and *no change* and *many changes*. Likewise, when responses were grouped according to relationship satisfaction, item means differed significantly between *low* satisfaction and *high* satisfaction, as expected. Taken together, these analyses suggest the SRCQ identifies respondents at differing levels of change.

Despite being relatively sound, however, the results are not conclusive. For example, given the trend in the lack of significant differences between SRCQ scores on those in the groups indicating need for "some changes" versus "many changes," it is plausible to conclude that those in the action stage would score higher in their need for change than those in the maintenance stage (as was typically the case). Thus, there may even be a decrease in felt need

for change—and action toward change—for those in maintenance. However, this is only one explanation. Such results could possibly stem from other aspects for which the TTM's stages of change have been criticized, such as the inexact nature of the intervals of stages (see Schneider, 2003; Sutton, 1996). Again, further validity testing with instruments with conceptually similar measures might yield more decisive results.

With regard to the study's second purpose, the majority of men and women in this sample were in earlier stages of change, with men tending to be in precontemplation and women tending to be in contemplation. This is not surprising, given the finding that mean relationship adjustment scores were above the cutoff point for clinical distress. Thus, for this sample, preventative educational interventions might be selected that are appropriate for clients at earlier stages, and specifically, any interventions for men might best be geared toward the precontemplation stage (e.g., consciousness raising), in order to maximize retention and improve outcomes. An analysis of the full sample indicated that women's mean SRCQ scores were higher than those of the men, suggesting that women were generally thinking more about making changes in their relationships than were men. This is consonant with literature that suggests that women tend to recognize problems sooner and seek treatment sooner than men do (Doss, Atkins, & Christensen, 2003). These findings also support previous research that suggests that in general, women tend to be more relationally minded, or "psychologically minded" (Shill & Lumley, 2002). When a subsample was examined using couple-level data, however, no differences were found in readiness to change for coupled men and women, a finding consonant with a recent study that found no gender differences in awareness of and reporting of problems (Moynehan & Adams, 2007). Further research will be needed to better understand differences in readiness for change. It may be more common among clinical couples for one partner to be relatively more eager (and ready) for change, whereas the other partner may be resistant to change (e.g., Shoham & Rohrbaugh, 2002). Further research of clinical samples is also needed to test for potentially important differences in psychometric properties.

Beyond the SRCQ's psychometrics and the observed frequencies in this study, theoretical questions remain. For example, the Transtheoretical Model is based largely on individual therapy and has typically been applied to individual goals, rather than conjoint endeavors. The application of the TTM to couples creates complexity, as implied by the differences between results for men and women. Desired change may consist of individual cognitions and/or behaviors for the respondent only, the other partner only, or of couple interactions. And although the TTM's "levels of change" construct includes interpersonal and family systems-level conflict in the five domains in which problems are located, by and large, the TTM does not explicitly offer mechanisms of dealing with systemic-level conflict and change. Contextual theorists have long posited that there are important direct and indirect influences in family systems (e.g., Bertalanffy, 1968; Bowen, 1978), and concepts from family systems theory (e.g., homeostasis, feedback loops) and related theoretical propositions suggest that systemic forces are powerful and should be taken into account. The use of the SRCQ may allow therapists to take a step toward doing so.

Clinical Use

The results of this research suggest that the SRCQ can be used by therapists to compare differences in readiness to change between partners. To do so more easily, each partner's scores can be plotted simultaneously on a single page, as is done in the Marital Satisfaction Inventory-Revised (Snyder, 1997; see the appendix). Doing so in clinical practice might allow for easy identification of similarities and differences, and for the clinician to select treatment strategies (alternately, if necessary) appropriate to a couple's stage(s). Scores may also be graphed, and differences noted (see the appendix). If a global score is desired, it is possible to sum an individual's item scores, divide by the total number of items used, and assign a stage according to the following ranges: 1–1.49 = precontemplation; 1.5–2.49 = contemplation; 2.5–3.49 = preparation; 3.5–4.49 = action; and 4.5–5.0 = maintenance. In this sample, couples' stages of change did not differ significantly between partners. Whether this tendency might persist in clinical settings is an important empirical question. Regardless, the challenge of tailoring treatment is a common one faced by marriage and family therapists and by other clinicians

who assess and treat couples, but use of the SRCQ may be one step in helping therapists in that process.

Limitations

A limitation of the SRCQ is its inability to make distinctions between those who do not have a problem versus those who do not yet see a problem. It cannot be assumed that someone in the stage of precontemplation is necessarily in denial, nor can it be assumed that the person does not need change. It should be noted that the SRCQ offers only a specific method by which to measure stages in the process of change. Assessment instruments should be used, along with the clients' desires and the therapist's clinical judgment, to determine the need for change.

A challenge to the construct of stages of change is the somewhat arbitrary nature of the stages. The number of stages in the TTM has varied over the course of its development (e.g., the stage of preparation was a later addition to the model). Also, there is variability in temporal intervals of the stages among instruments assessing readiness to change. The SRCQ sidesteps this problem somewhat by not specifying an exact measure of time. Rather, the stem sentences rely upon the respondent's subjective cognition for earlier stages (e.g., "I do not intend to change" and "I am thinking about changing") and upon the respondent's perceptions of behavior for later stages ("actively making" or "I have recently made changes"). This may be seen as disadvantageous from a normative, modernist point of view, but may be seen as advantageous from a more person-centered, ipsative point of view (Gaylin, 2001) as is often important in clinical settings. Nonetheless, one study found that stages derived from TTM algorithms tended to be stable over time in a nonclinical population (Morera et al., 1998).

Although Schneider's (2003) initial work showed that the SRCQ is correlated with his more extensive 40-item instrument, the SRCQ's psychometrics would benefit from additional tests of validity. In addition, as with many uses of Likert scales, the question remains as to the appropriateness of treating data as interval versus ordinal (Jamieson, 2004). If ordinal, it is appropriate to report modal data and frequencies (e.g., percentages), inappropriate for means and standard deviations. However, researchers regularly treat data as interval in order to draw at least tentative conclusions regarding potentially important differences.

The generalizability of this study is limited due to the convenience nature of the sample, and that it consists of predominantly Caucasian, middle-class, heterosexual couples. Moreover, there may be somewhat of a floor effect of the SRCQ scores among this nonclinical sample. As noted previously, further studies are needed with clinical populations to test for potential differences in psychometric properties and differences among partners regarding stage of change. Additional caveats spring from the multidimensional nature of the construct of readiness to change. Despite limitations, the SRCQ is a brief instrument that may be useful in research and intervention. The relatively satisfactory psychometric properties of the SRCQ support its further clinical and empirical usage, as well as further psychometric testing. Such measures may eventually help to advance research on couple change and may help therapists and educators to tailor treatments that are suited to couples at their various stages of change.

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APPENDIX

Stages of Relationship Change Questionnaire (Schneider, 2003). Reprinted with Permission.

a) I do not intend to make any changes...

b) I am thinking about making changes, but have not made any specific decisions yet...

c) I am getting ready to make some specific changes...

d) I am actively making specific changes...

e) I have recently made changes and I am working to prevent problems from returning...

- ___ 1. ...about how we spend our leisure time together.
- ___ 2. ...about how we communicate while solving problems.
- ___ 3. ...about how we communicate our affection.
- ___ 4. ...about how we handle our finances.
- ___ 5. ...about sex with my partner.
- ___ 6. ...about our roles and the expectations we have for each other.
- ___ 7. ...about managing my anger and avoiding physical aggression.
- ___ 8. ...about how we raise our children.
(skip if this does not apply)
- ___ 9. ...about my overall satisfaction with our marriage.

Example of Tabled Data (Schneider):

	H	W	Diff.
Time together	4	4	
Problem solving	1	2	*
Affection	2	1	*
Finances	2	1	*
Sex	1	3	**
Role Expectations	5	1	****
Anger	4	4	
Childrearing	4	4	
Overall	2	4	**
Stage of Change:	2.77	2.66	
	Prep.	Prep.	

Example of Graphed Data (Schneider):

