The Implications of Marriage Life Role Salience on Attitudes Toward Counseling in Youth
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Introduction
• Relationships are an integral part of adolescence, and it is important for youth to have realistic expectations about effort to maintain healthy relationships.
• Marriage Life Role Salience (MLRS) and Attitudes Toward Counseling (ATC) are important aspects of this relationship effort.
• Marriage Life Role Salience includes:
  • potential commitment to marriage role
  • potential importance of marriage role
  (Amatea et al., 1986)
• MLRS is related to the concept marital locus of control, or beliefs that you can have personal control over events in the marriage. Locus of control is linked to higher levels of marital quality (Myers and Booth, 1999).
• One method for gaining control may be to seek counseling when needed.
• When marital or relationship problems occur, individuals with positive attitudes toward counseling are more likely to seek relationship counseling services.
• Previous studies have found youth have neutral Attitudes Toward Counseling (Gardner et al., 2004), with females having more positive Attitudes Toward Counseling than males (McMullen and Gross, 1983; Johnson, 2001).
• The majority of youth have positive attitudes toward marriage and view it as a lifelong commitment (Martin et al., 2003), but the relationship between MLRS and ATC has not been previously studied.
• Compared to previous studies, our study has a large sample size and is unique with nearly equal samples of European-Americans/African-Americans and boys/girls.
• Gender Schema Theory (Bem, 1981) suggests that men and women are socialized differently and process information through socialized gender schema. Hence, males and females may process ATC and MLRS through the society’s imposed gender schema and therefore, may differ on these variables.

Research Questions:
• Is higher MLRS related to more positive ATC among Alabama high school youth?
• Does this relationship between MLRS and ATC differ by gender?

Methods
• Sample: 4,013 students in 9th-12th grade.
  • 59% Female
  • 41% Male
  • 44% European-American
  • 49% African-American
  • 7% other
• Study participants completed self-report questionnaires prior to receiving a relationship education course.
• We assessed MLRS using the Marriage Life Role Salience Scale (Amatea et al., 1986), a 2 item scale with a Cronbach’s Alpha of .825.
• We assessed ATC with the Attitudes Toward Counseling Scale (Gardner et al., 2004), a 4 item scale with a Cronbach’s Alpha of .826.

Results
• In our large sample, a bivariate Pearson’s correlation indicates that MLRS is moderately associated with ATC (r=.17, p<0.0001).
• Independent Samples T-tests found that girls have significantly higher ATC than boys, t(3947)=5.07, p<0.0001 (M=3.09 and M=2.94, respectively).
• Independent Samples T-tests found that girls have significantly higher MLRS score than boys, t(3770)=5.13, p<0.0001 (M=4.29 and M=4.15, respectively).
• A hierarchical linear regression of the association between MLRS and ATC (i.e., ATC x MLRS) with gender as a moderator found significant main effects of MLRS on ATC as well as a significant interaction between gender and ATC (β=.123, SE=.032, β=.085, p<.001).
• With similarly low MLRS scores, boys have less positive ATC than girls. With similarly high levels of MLRS, boys and girls have similarly positive ATC.

Discussion
• On average, when young people have high levels of potential commitment to and ideas of potential importance of marriage they tend to have more positive attitudes toward counseling.
• At low levels of MLRS, boys and girls have differing levels of ATC, but the gender differences diminish when MLRS is higher (see Figure 1).
• In general, girls may have more positive attitudes toward counseling than boys, but when marriage value/commitment is high both genders have similar attitudes toward counseling.
• It seems boys that place a higher emphasis on marriage or relationship value and commitment may be more apt to seek out and use additional resources such as counseling.
• The correlation between MLRS and ATC is modest, possibly because of a societal norm towards high MLRS that limits variability.
• Willingness to consider counseling may be a indicator of how much effort one is willing to put into a difficult relationship.

Implications
• Girls may be more likely to consider counseling regardless of MLRS, while boys likeliness to consider counseling is related to their level of MLRS.
• By teaching the value of relationship work ethic and commitment (MLRS), gender schemas could possibly be broken down and counseling could be more accepted by young males.
• More research on what influences Marriage Life Role Salience and Attitudes Toward Counseling is needed (i.e., what factors predict inter- and intra-individual differences).

Figure 1. Test of simple slopes for relationship between MLRS and ATC by gender. Low levels of MLRS indicate a score of 1 on a scale 1-5. High levels of MLRS indicate a score of 5 on a scale 1-5.
References


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