RESEARCHERS DISCOVER WHAT THEY ALREADY KNEW ABOUT VALIDITY: THE CASE OF THE FAMILY-OF-ORIGIN SCALE

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ABSTRACT: This article is concerned with two recent studies of the Family-of-Origin Scale (FOS), Gavin and Wamboldt (1992) and Ryan, Kawash, Fine, and Powell (1994). The external validity analyses conducted for the FOS in these studies assumed the scale to be a unidimensional measure. The present discussion centers on methodological decisions and interpretive strategies that may have prevented a more complete understanding of the scale's dimensional structure and theoretical meaning. It is concluded that a unidimensional view of the FOS is an oversimplification that is inconsistent with the available data. A case is made for a more comprehensive and technically adequate evaluation of the FOS. Specific suggestions are offered.

KEY WORDS: family-of-origin scale; validity; family assessment.

The Family-of-Origin Scale (FOS; Hovestadt, Anderson, Piercy, Cochran, & Fine, 1985) is a popular self-report measure that was designed to tap an individual's perceptions of his or her origin family. Specifically, the scale was intended to provide a self-report measure regarding two dimensions of the family environment that are thought to be relevant to psychological health, namely, autonomy and intimacy. Surprisingly, there have been few attempts to validate the FOS against external criteria, i.e., converging measures of family functioning. Thus, research with the FOS has had to proceed on assumptions about what the scale is measuring.
The development of family assessments has not always been guided by theoretical understandings of how families function or how the family influences the adjustment of individual family members. The development of the FOS, however, specifically reflects psycho-dynamic views regarding the role of family variables in determining psychological health. The FOS consists of 40-items which, according to the test authors (Hovestadt et al., 1985) tap 10 relational characteristics that are thought to influence an individual's capacity for autonomy and intimacy: Clarity of Expression, Responsibility, Respect for Others, Openness to Others, Acceptance of Separation and Loss, Range of Feelings, Mood and Tone, Conflict Resolution, Empathy, and Trust. The results of factor analytic research have been inconsistent with the scale's theoretical structure (Ryan, Kawash, Fine, & Powel, 1994).

Despite the ambiguities that exist as to what the FOS is measuring, strong construct validity claims were recently made in the studies reported by Gavin and Wamboldt (1992) and Ryan and associates (1994). The present paper is concerned with these two studies, which were concerned with scale's internal structure and its external validity. As will be seen, both studies are marked by a number of methodological and conceptual flaws and, in effect, could encourage a misunderstanding and misuse of the FOS.

General discussions of bias have emphasized a failure to consider contrary evidence (Walton, 1991). In a scientific field, bias can be particularly damaging due to its potential to lead the field astray. Discussions of experimenter bias in family science in particular have focused on how researchers use "their data to support their personal opinions through post hoc arguments" (Filsinger & Roosa, 1987, p. 41). It is suggested here that bias need not be limited to the conclusions drawn from a given set of results. Indeed, bias may be built into the study design or data analysis, so that a hypothesis cannot be disconfirmed. This can be accomplished by using research methods that fail to examine the counterhypothesis. A biased approach is unscientific because a truly adequate test of a hypothesis is "an attempt to falsify it, or to refute it. Testability is falsifiability" (Popper, 1959; see also Chow, 1990). From a "conjecture and refutation" perspective, it is of some concern that researchers have discovered what they expected to find with regard to the FOS even if it meant ignoring the research evidence. The immediacy and urgency of this concern relates to the possibility that once a view acquires the status of an accepted truth, alternative explanations are less likely to be considered. The "ac-