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PSYCHODIAGNOSTIC ASSESSMENT OF THE QUALITY OF ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIP

ABSTRACT: Psychodiagnostic assessment of romantic relationships is a process designed to gather information about the couple's functioning. The goal is to identify factors that influence the relationship's quality and, based on this, to provide recommendations for improvement or therapeutic intervention. Professionals use a combination of psychodiagnostic tools, both naturalistic and psychotechnical, depending on the goals of the assessment, the theoretical orientation of the psychologist and the context in which the assessment is made. These tools help explore key areas such as communication, relationship dynamics, emotional interactions, and overall functioning within couple relationships.

This paper provides a review of the most widely used diagnostic tools for assessing romantic relationship, including interview, observation, tests, techniques, and scales. Assessing the quality of a romantic relationship provides insight into the strengths, weaknesses, and specifics of relational dynamics, helping professionals to identify challenges and to plan interventions in order to improve the functioning and mutual satisfaction in the couple's relationship.

KEY WORDS: romantic relationship, couple, partners, psychological assessment, psychodiagnostic tools

INTRODUCTION

The formation of a strong and stable romantic relationship is one of the most important developmental tasks in adulthood. Romantic relationships are particularly important because they are the relationships in which we are most involved, and therefore become the most influential ties in our functioning. We develop connection in which we invest feelings, intimacy, passion, respect, commitment, plans and projections for the future. According to Settersten (2015) our identity, opportunities and activities are intertwined with our close relationships.

Regardless of the form of the romantic relationship, for decades, theory and practice have attempted to assess the determinants that distinguish happy, successful, and functional relationships from less functional ones. With the development of family and couples therapy, the need to assess romantic and marital relationships is increasingly emphasized, especially due to research findings that indicate that close relationships have implications for overall personal well-being, psychological stability, and general health. (Shrout et. al., 2014; Ross et. al., 2019; Gómez-López, Viejo & Ortega-Ruiz, 2019) Since it is a complex construct that includes various components, the process of psychodiagnostic assessment of a romantic relationship is complex and includes the use of naturalistic and psychotechnical tools. (Smith, Guérard, Leduc & El-Baalbaki, 2019; Слепкова и Заеко, 2006) The application is broad and helps partners, therapists, researchers, and other professionals to understand the specifics of partners' functioning in different areas, and their mutual perception of the quality of their relationship. This includes communication patterns, areas of conflict, degree

of attachment, expression of emotions, problem-solving skills and much more. (Domingue & Mollen, 2009; Lee, Taylor, Holbert & Graham, 2019; Smith & Williams, 2016) Depending on the purpose of the psychodiagnostic exploration, a selection of appropriate psychodiagnostic tools should be made, aiming to gather data on the quality of the romantic relationship through specific dimensions of assessment.

In this paper, an overview of psychodiagnostic tools for assessing various aspects of relationship quality and functioning will be made. The goal of the assessment is not only to diagnose potential challenges in the couple's functioning, but also to provide insight into their specificities, strengths and weaknesses, to improve their relationship and the general functioning of the partners. (Antonopoulos & Wagner, 2024; Fentz & Trillingsgaard, 2016) The assessment is particularly useful for psychologists and psychotherapists when working with couples, regardless of the form of their relationship, because it gives them insight into all important aspects of their functioning and helps them develop and select adequate therapeutic interventions.

QUALITY OF ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIP AS A CONSTRUCT

A review of the existing literature on the concept of relationship quality reveals a variety of determinants that influence the quality of romantic relationships. Research shows that a wide range of factors influence the quality of a relationship, and these can be largely determined by the theoretical perspective of the authors or the influences underlying certain psychological models, as well as the type of relationships they are aimed at. Initially, we encounter different formulations that encompass the evaluation of partner relationships across several dimensions, including positive and negative aspects of the relationship, attitudes, behaviors, and interaction patterns. (Johnson, 1995; Fincham & Beach, 2010; Slatcher, 2010; Bradbury, Fincham, & Beach, 2000) Најчесто се користат термините квалитет на партнерска релација, задоволство од партнерска релација, функционалност и слични термини, во чија основа е потребата да се измери одразот на севакушните чувства на парот кон нивниот однос, или степенот до кој партнерите ја перцепираат нивната врска како позитивна или негативна. (Kluwer, 2010; Farooqi, 2014) The terms relationship quality, relationship satisfaction, functionality, and similar formulations are most commonly used, based on the need to measure the reflection of a couple's overall feelings toward their relationship, or the extent to which partners perceive their relationship as positive or negative. (Kluwer, 2010; Farooqi, 2014)

The interpersonal approach to determining the quality of a relationship is predominantly focused on the patterns of interaction between partners, and the focus of this model is on their communication, their conflict behaviors, and the time they spend with each other.¹ The intrapersonal approach, on the other hand, emphasizes the subjective attitude and assessment of the couple's relationship.² According to the systems theory, the quality of romantic relationships is assessed across multiple dimensions, including commitments, love, communication, conflict and compromises, agreement, and specific tasks at different stages of development of the relationship. In the objective assessment of couples functioning in therapy process with a systemic approach, communication, relationships, system structure, beliefs, rules, repetitive

1 Vangelisti, A. (2002). Interpersonal processes in romantic relationships. *Handbook of Interpersonal Communication*. 643-679.

2 Fincham, F. & Rogge, R., 2010. Understanding relationship quality: Theoretical challenges and new tools for assessment. *Journal of Family Theory and Review*, 2(4), 227-242.

patterns of behavior, and the strengths of the partners are observed. (Спасовска, 2022) The attachment theory, emphasizes the role of early childhood experiences in shaping attachment styles, as well as the influence of different styles on the dynamics of partner relationships, including mutual trust, emotional closeness, intimacy, and conflict management.³ The theoretical basis and clinical practice of cognitive-behavioral couples therapy focuses on communication, problem and conflict resolution, cognitive restructuring, identification and expression of emotions, expression of affection, acceptance and tolerance of differences, as well as potential sexual difficulties that partners may have.⁴

Various authors expand the definition of the quality of romantic relationships with multiple factors that can have an impact on the overall experience of couples. According to Farooqui (2014), love styles, self-affirmation and self-enhancement, personality traits, emotional intelligence, partner support, positivity bias, and economic factors are common determinants of relationship quality. According to Tavakol et al. (2016), partner satisfaction is a multidimensional concept influenced by many factors, including the age of the partners, the duration of the partner relationship, ethnicity, personal characteristics, mental maturity, way of thinking, perception of one's own self and others, life expectations, emotional intelligence of the couple, communication and problem-solving skills, religious beliefs, mutual understanding and respect, love, attachment to each other, intimacy, trust, commitment, loyalty, educational status, family financial situation, economic factors, cognitive and emotional factors, physiological factors, behavioral patterns, social support, violence, sexual function, physical attractiveness, presence of children, parenting style, relationships with relatives and friends, how free time is spent, conflict, stress and many other factors on a individual and social level. According to Becker et al. (2017), couples are more satisfied with their relationship when it is consistent with their partners' expectations, and vice versa. Olson and Olson (2000) identify ten categories that can predict a stable and functional relationship. They are ranked in the following order: communication, flexibility, closeness, personality traits, conflict resolution, sexual relationships, leisure activities, family and friends, financial management, and spiritual beliefs.

Each of these approaches provides a basis for understanding the quality of romantic relationships through various factors, but no single theory or research can include all aspects of partner functioning and their mutual romantic relationship. (Spence, 2021; Wilson & Cousins, 2003). However, they are useful for gaining orientational insight into couples functioning for many purposes, especially in counseling and therapeutic work with partners.

PROCESS OF PSYCHODIAGNOSTIC ASSESSMENT OF THE QUALITY OF ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIP

Psychodiagnostic assessment of the romantic relationship involves the use of psychological principles and methods in order to understand and assess the dynamics, functioning, and quality of the relationship. To make a quality assessment of the relationship, it is important to initially determine the purpose of the diagnostic assessment. In practice, various aspects of individual and partnership functioning are most often assessed to obtain information on specific issues of interest to partners and

3 Ouyang, Xinyue. (2025). Research on the Role of Attachment Style on the Dynamics of Romantic Relationship. *Communications in Humanities Research*. 65. 6-9. 10.54254/2753-7064/2024.19689.

4 Dugal, C., Bakhos, G., Bélanger, C., & Natacha Godbout (2018). *Cognitive-Behavioral Psychotherapy for Couples: An Insight into the Treatment of Couple Hardships and Struggles*.

the professionals who work with them. (Fentz & Trillingsgaard, 2016, Halford et al., 2010) Typically, assessments are a necessary part of a counseling and therapeutic process at different stages of the relationship (premarital, marital, pre-divorce), in divorce cases, when granting custody of children, or for research purposes.⁵ It is especially important when partners are facing conflict situations, emotional difficulties, lack of effective communication, or other dysfunctional patterns of behavior that can affect their overall functioning and quality of life.

The assessment of romantic relationships is a complex process and involves a combination of naturalistic and psychotechnical approach. In clinical and therapeutic settings, assessment is considered the first step in partner treatment, with the aim of identifying the goals of the intervention and guiding treatment planning. However, assessment can be used throughout treatment to monitor progress and make decisions about discontinuation, and further, assessment itself can be used as a therapeutic intervention.⁶ Within the framework of psychodiagnostic assessment, various methods and tools are used, such as interviews, observation, psychological tests, techniques, and scales, to gain a comprehensive understanding of the relationship's condition. They differ based on the specific goals and context in which the assessment is conducted, but the ultimate goal is to use the findings from the assessment to improve the functioning of the partners and their satisfaction with the relationship.

PSYCHODIAGNOSTIC TOOLS FOR ASSESSING THE QUALITY OF A ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIP

The choice of assessment tools always depends on the specific goals of the assessment, as well as the theoretical orientation of the psychologist. A comprehensive assessment uses a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods that, when integrated, provide a more complete understanding of the couple's overall functioning and the quality of the relationship. In the following sections of this paper, an overview of psychodiagnostic tools for assessing the quality of a romantic relationship is presented.

Interview

In a therapeutic and counseling process with partners, every assessment begins with an interview that can be unstructured, semi-structured, or structured. Each interview in a professional context is rooted in an individualized approach that delves into the core of client relationships. It is done with both partners and is aimed at obtaining information about the history and perspective of each partner.⁷ This part of the assessment explores the narrative of the relationship, i.e. how the couple met, how they began their relationship, and what are the significant moments in the development of their partnership. Furthermore, the individual background of the partners is explored, including family dynamics in primary families, experiences from past relationships, cultural influences, developmental expectations, life transitions, assessment of individual and relational strengths and challenges. The assessment

5 Snyder, D.K., Cozzi, J.J., Grinch, J., & Luebbert, M.C. (2001). The tapestry of couple therapy: Interweaving theory, assessment, and intervention. In S.H. McDaniel, D.D. Lusteran, & C. Philpot (Eds.), *A casebook for integrating family therapy: An ecosystemic approach*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association

6 Ritchie, L.L., Knopp, K., Rhoades, G.K. (2019). Assessment in Couple and Family Therapy. In: Lebow, J.L., Chambers, A.L., Breunlin, D.C. (eds) *Encyclopedia of Couple and Family Therapy*. Springer, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-49425-8_384

7 J. Flowers Health Institute's multidisciplinary staff (n.d.). Assessment Tools and Methodologies in Couples Therapy Assessments. Retrieved February 13, 2025 from <https://jflowershealth.com/couples-therapy-assessments/>

process focuses on the strengths of the couple (shared values, communication patterns, supportive behaviors, emotional intelligence, problem-solving skills), the areas that are problematic for the couple (areas of conflict, unmet needs, communication difficulties, jealousy, insecurities, mental health difficulties, etc.), as well as common goals in the future. Data can be obtained in a joint meeting, but also in individual sessions with the partners.⁸

Interviews occupy a central position in psychological assessment, providing essential information about the current state of clients, their experiences, their attitude towards the process and for understanding key issues about their relationship. Research shows that the majority of marriage therapists in the United States do not use structured methods, and they predominantly use interviews for partner assessment. (Lavee & Avisar, 2006; Bray, 1995) By applying effective interviewing techniques, meaningful data can be obtained on the basis of which the work with the couple will be structured, depending on their goals. Although the use of the interview as a diagnostic tool is more than necessary, it is still important to emphasize that a quality assessment is based on the use of a combination of tools in order to be more comprehensive.

Observation

Observation of a couple's interaction in understanding their relationship is invaluable for assessing the quality of their relationship because it provides insight into specific behaviors, as well as sequences of actions that occur before and after them. (Bulling et al., 2023) Studies show that 60-65% of interpersonal communication in psychotherapy is nonverbal, and it can be good representation of the attitudes and emotional state of clients. For these reasons, psychologists and therapists are particularly careful in their observation, and they begin to notice all significant reactions and behaviors from the moment the sessions with partners are scheduled until their completion. Systematic observation of partners' interactions refers to communication patterns (are they clear, respectful, empathetic or is there shouting, avoidance of communication, etc.), emotional responses (expression of positive and negative emotions), conflict resolution (constructively through compromise and agreement, or through escalation, avoidance), distribution of power, attitude towards issues related to intimacy, security, trust, support. (Kenny, Kashy, Cook, 2020; Liekmeier, 2024) Likmeier's (2024) research on the process of observing partner interactions shows that observed interactions during therapy sessions do not correspond with the partners' self-assessment findings, which emphasizes the need for the observation method to be indispensable in assessing relationship quality. There is an attempt to create quantitative observational methods (e.g., the Marriage Interaction Coding System) that seek to systematically collect data on the quality of a relationship by monitoring nonverbal cues and emotional responses. (Heyman, Weiss & Eddy, 1995; Humbad, Donnellan, Klump, & Burt, 2011) However, the naturalistic approach to observation still retains its deserved primacy, because it is the relationship between partners and the evaluator that supports and encourages the authenticity of the partners.

Tools for assessing the quality of a romantic relationship

Over the years, numerous instruments have been developed to assess the quality of a romantic relationship, ranging from self-assessment inventories to

8 Lebow, J., & Snyder, D. K. (2022). Couple therapy in the 2020s: Current status and emerging developments. *Family process*, 61(4), 1359–1385. <https://doi.org/10.1111/famp.12824>

complex tests and scales that contain a wide range and scope of assessment. (Delatore & Wagner, 2020) Depending on the goals of the assessment, a selection of the most useful tools can be made that will be able to respond to the needs of the examination. It is important to note that the previously mentioned diagnostic procedures have a predominantly qualitative form, while the application of psychotechnical tools in the assessment of partner relations has both qualitative and quantitative aspects, so their application can be wider. Table 1 contains an overview of various tools used to assess the dynamics and quality of couple’s relationship, designed to assess different aspects of their functioning. They are grouped into three sections: Personality Assessment Tools, Relationship Quality Assessment Tools, and Projective Techniques.

Table 1. Diagnostic Tools for Measuring the Quality of Romantic Relationships

Type	Tool	Description	Key Features
Personality Assessments	NEO Personality Inventory-Revised (NEO PI-R) ¹	Measures five broad personality traits: Neuroticism, Extraversion, Openness, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness	The assessment of satisfaction and compatibility in partner relationships involves comparing the individual profiles of both partners, focusing on their similarities and differences. This process helps determine how each partner's personality traits align with the achievement of shared goals in the relationship, assesses the level of compatibility, and explores the connection between individual characteristics and the overall relationship dynamics.

¹ Piedmont, R. L., & Rodgereson, T. E. (2013). Cross-over analysis: Using the FFM and NEO PI-R for assessing couples (pp. 375-394). In P. T. Costa and T. A. Widiger (Eds.), Personality disorders and the five-factor model of personality (3rd ed). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

	Myers-Briggs Type Indicator ¹	The MBTI operationalizes personality preferences through questions that assess an individual's tendency toward one end of a spectrum in the following 4 categories: Energy, Perceiving, Judging, Orientation.	This personality inventory categorizes individuals into 16 distinct personality types. It can help couples understand each other's cognitive styles, decision-making processes, and communication preferences.
	Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory ² ³	Psychological test designed to measure the presence of psychopathology in an individual by using three validity scales and ten clinical scales.	This test does not measure relationship dynamics, but experienced clinicians can interpret the findings on relational level. It can help identify psychological abnormalities that may impact the relationship, as well as reveal strengths and weaknesses in emotional regulation and coping strategies for managing challenges.
Relationship Quality Assessments	Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS)	32-item questionnaire that measures an individual's perceptions of his/her relationship with an intimate partner.	The assessment is made across four dimensions: Dyadic Consensus, Dyadic Satisfaction, Dyadic Cohesion, and Affective Expression. The obtained results may indicate positive or negative dyadic adjustment.

1 Douglass, F. M. & Douglass, R. (1993). The Validity of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator for Predicting Expressed Marital Problems. *Family Relations* Vol. 42, No. 4, pp. 422-426

2 Psychological test designed to measure the presence of psychopathology in an individual by using three validity scales and ten clinical scales.

3 Lee, T. T. C., Taylor, A. M., Holbert, A. M., & Graham, J. R. (2019). MMPI-2-RF predictors of interpersonal relationship characteristics in committed couples. *Psychological assessment*, 31(9), 1118–1124. <https://doi.org/10.1037/pas0000735>

	Relation Quality Scale (RQ) ⁴	Measures an individual's perception of his or her relationship quality in their current partnership.	The relation quality accessed with this scale is observed as the degree to which a commitment between partners exists, mutual enjoyment (including companionship) is present, and a sense that this person is the "right" one.
	Locke-Wallace Marital Adjustment Test (MAT) ⁵	Short (15-item) self-report measure of marital satisfaction and areas of disagreement.	Assesses the degree of satisfaction and overall adjustment within a marriage. It helps in understanding how couples feel about their relationship, communication, and various aspects of marital life.
	Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS) ⁶	A 7-item scale designed to measure general relationship satisfaction.	The scale is designed to evaluate various aspects of the relationship, such as communication, emotional intimacy, and general satisfaction and it is commonly used in research, therapy, and counseling settings to gauge relationship satisfaction.
	The Marital Satisfaction Scale (MSS)	Includes 101 yes-no items aiming to reveal couples' opinions about their marriages.	The scale is comprised of two parts. The first part contains 92 items related to the sub-dimensions of the marital satisfaction, and the second part includes 9 items to be responded by individuals with children accessing their understanding of parenting.

4 Chonody, J. M., Gabb, J., Killian, M., & Dunk-West, P. (2018). Relationship Quality Scale (RQ) [Database record]. APA PsycTests. <https://doi.org/10.1037/t77170-000>

5 Fink, B.C., Shapiro, A.F. (2019). Locke-Wallace Marital Adjustment Test. In: Lebow, J.L., Chambers, A.L., Breunlin, D.C. (eds) Encyclopedia of Couple and Family Therapy. Springer, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-49425-8_405

6 Hendrick, S. S. (1988). A generic measure of relationship satisfaction. Journal of Marriage and the Family, 50, 93-98

	Couple Satisfaction Index (CSI) ⁷	Widely used assessment tool for measuring relationship satisfaction in romantic partnerships. The CSI comes in a 32-item version and shorter versions of a 16-item and a 4-item scale.	Measures various aspects of relationship satisfaction, including communication, intimacy, and overall happiness. It is particularly valuable for initial relationship assessments, tracking changes in satisfaction over time, and evaluating the effectiveness of couples therapy.
Projective Techniques	Relational Drawings ⁸	The drawings in working with couples and families can be seen as spontaneous expressions of their condition, and can be used as metaphorical and nonverbal method.	When using drawings in couple assessment it is crucial to note that the content of the drawings is not central, but rather the partners' interactions, reflections, experiences etc.
	Genogram ⁹	A family tree showing the partners' family history through at least 3 generations.	Genograms can be used to elicit couple narratives and expand cultural stories, to reframe and detoxify family legacies, to discover unique strengths and resources, to look at life changing events, to uncover sources of current dysfunction, to find sources of resilience, and to place the current issue in the context of the family evolutionary patterns.

7 Rogge, Ronald. (2007). The Couples Satisfaction Index: CSI-16. 10.13140/RG.2.1.3149.7364.

8 Crenshaw, D.A., Gil, E. (2016). Family Drawing in Couple and Family Therapy. In: Lebow, J., Chambers, A., Breunlin, D. (eds) Encyclopedia of Couple and Family Therapy. Springer, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-15877-8_561-1

9 McGoldric, M., Gerson, R., Petry, S. (2008). Genograms: Assessment and Intervention (3rd ed.). Norton Professional Books

	Thematic Apperception Test (TAT) ¹⁰	Type of projective test (a personality test) that involves describing ambiguous scenes to learn more about a person's emotions, motivations, and personality	TAT may be implemented to uncover unconscious thoughts, assess personality, and explore motivations, which makes it useful in clinical, research, and professional settings. In working with couples it can provide insight of the dynamics of each partner.
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Writing a report and recommendation

Depending on the context of the relationship assessment, it is sometimes necessary to present the obtained results from the assessment in a formal report and communicate the findings to the couple. In cases where data is being systematized for research purposes, reporting is different and is based on research methods and principles. Essentially, the report is an integration of the information obtained to gain a comprehensive understanding of the relationship. The feedback can also be shared in a therapy session, where the findings of the assessment, the implications for the relationship, and recommendations for interventions or further steps are presented. This reporting process is sensitive and tailored to the needs of the couple, as well as the specific goals for which the assessment was conducted. Sometimes the report can also be used as a therapeutic intervention, providing partners with insight into their functioning and areas of dysfunction. (Đurić – Jočić, 2018)

CONCLUSION

The process of psychodiagnostic assessment of the quality of romantic relationship represents a systematic approach to analyzing various aspects of this relationship, in order to identify factors that influence its quality and to offer appropriate recommendations for its improvement or therapeutic support. (Lavik et al., 2022) Professionals conducting couple's assessments can use a combination of psychodiagnostic tools to conduct a quality and comprehensive assessment of areas of interest, depending on the purpose of the exploration. (Antonopoulos & Wagner, 2024) It is usually recommended to use a combination of naturalistic and psychotechnical tools, but their selection depends on the theoretical background of the psychologists or therapists conducting the assessment, the questions that are required to be answered, and the context in which the exploration is being done. The psychodiagnostic tools can help understand the ways in which partners communicate, develop and maintain their relationship, and how they function in the context of their shared life. (Lavee & Avisar, 2006; Bray, 1995)

This paper reviews the most commonly used diagnostic tools for assessing couples, starting from interview, observation, use of tests, techniques and scales.

10 Araoz, D. L. (1972). The Thematic Apperception Test in marital therapy. *Journal of Contemporary Psychotherapy: On the Cutting Edge of Modern Developments in Psychotherapy*, 5(1), 41–48. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02110528>

Psychodiagnostic assessment of a romantic relationship offers valuable insights into the specifics of partner functioning, their strengths and weaknesses, the characteristics of their relational dynamics, and the general functioning of the couple. It is important to note that psychodiagnostic assessment is a complex process that requires experience and dedication in analyzing the individual and joint aspects of building a partnership. It is important to note that psychodiagnostic assessment is a complex process that requires experience and dedication in analyzing the individual and joint aspects of building a romantic partnership. Consequently, the assessment can help professionals who work with couples to detect the difficulties that partners are facing, as well as to plan and implement targeted interventions and provide guidance to enhance partners functioning and strengthen mutual support and satisfaction.

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