

# Toward a Culturally Robust Measure to Assess Marital Relationships

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## Abstract

The Marital Comparison Level Index (MCLI; Sabatelli, 1984), grounded in social exchange theory, was developed to measure marital complaints by asking respondents to contrast their marital experiences with their marital expectations. Translated versions of the MCLI have been used in non-Western cultures such as in Korea and China (e.g., Chan & Rudowicz, 2002; Yang, 2004). However, since each individual's standards and expectations for evaluating relationships are culturally influenced, it follows that measures reflecting Western cultural values may not be reliably applied to different cultural settings. Therefore, the goal for this study was to revise the measure in a culturally relevant way to be used to study Asian couples, with a particular emphasis on Korean couples.

Guided by an ecological/exchange framework (Sabatelli, Lee, & Ripoll-Núñez 2018), the culture-specific aspects (e.g., intergenerational exchanges) of marital relationships were included along with contemporary aspects of marriages (e.g., technology use, work-to-relationship spillover) in the revisions of the MCLI. Using the sample of Korean and American married individuals (N=676), measurement invariance testing was conducted to assess whether the measure performs in the same way across two cultures. Results showed that there was a second-order factor, which is marital quality, that underlies the five first-order factors (i.e., emotional intimacy, sexual intimacy, marital conflicts, intergenerational relationships, and complaints about partner's lifestyle). The identified second-order factor structure showed an adequate level of measurement invariance, indicating the potential for explaining cross-cultural relevance of the marital construct. Taken together, the present study serves as an impetus for international scholarship that could promote cultural and racial diversity in relationship research.