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Preface- Family Assessment

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Preface

Assessing families suggests both interesting measurement issues and significant clinical applications. This volume is a collection of important papers to explore the topic in some depth.

Some of these papers were first given at the Buros-Nebraska Symposium on Testing and Measurement. Others have been written especially for this volume. All are outstanding examples of scholarship in this very thorny area of psychological measurement beyond the individual. We commissioned papers that examined the history of measurement with families and to cover family issues that are of particular interest to both clinicians and researchers.

The book is divided in three sections. Drs. Halverson and Carlson introduce our topics in two important chapters. Halverson provides readers with a discussion of quantitative measurement of the family from multiple perspectives. He provides a brief, but comprehensive, overview of the history of family assessment by exploring the development of techniques and instruments used for measuring various aspects of the family and interactions within the family system. Dr. Halverson identifies the major shortcoming of the evolution of family assessment as being the development of "too many measures measuring too many constructs."

Dr. Carlson explores the theoretical and practical issues in family assessment. Using family systems theory, Carlson explores the assessment process highlighting the different purposes served by clinical and research assessment procedures. Whereas structural

adequacy in measurement is essential to the goal of research in verifying theory, clinicians' use of assessment to guide treatment calls for the functional or treatment utility of measures through the multi-function, sequential family assessment process that leads to decision making and evaluation. A multisystem-multimethod approach to family assessment is recommended by Dr. Carlson to guide family assessment.

The second section of the volume explores the assessment of particular family dynamics. These include aspects of marital quality, assessment of sibling relationships within families, constructs and measurement techniques associated with family health, and special challenges associated with assessing families from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds.

Dr. James Bray's chapter is an in-depth look at the theory and measurement of family health. He views the health of the individual from the ecological perspective of the family, both in terms of the development of individual health/adjustment and maintenance and resolution of problems. Bray acquaints the reader with the basic assumptions of systems approaches to families and to family health. He reviews research and theory regarding healthy family functioning and issues to be addressed when studying families. Bray provides an organizational framework for studying the family that includes: status, process, affect, and organization.

Although previous chapters illustrate the challenges inherent in family assessment, Dr. Jane Close Conoley and Lorrie E. Bryant's chapter suggests that assessing ethnically diverse families further complicates the measurement process. Cultural sensitivity, the array of constructs examined in multicultural family assessment with a variety of populations, and adequacy of measurement techniques are analyzed and suggestions are offered to clinicians for the utilization of valid assessment procedures. Conoley and Bryant argue against the use of ethnic glosses and suggest that clinicians view families in the context of their specific family systems as well as from the perspective of their cultural norms. Identification of family membership and roles of family members are discussed within the context of various cultures.

Michelle Schicke's chapter is an exposition of sibling relationships as they relate to psychosocial development and family structure. The research literature on the characteristics and the quality of sibling relationships is reviewed and issues involved in the assessment of these relationships are discussed. Schicke's investigation illustrates the multiplicity of influences on any one individual in the family system in his or her relationship with other family members. The

birth of a sibling, birth order, quality of interactions among siblings, combined with other relationship variables and individual characteristics such as gender and temperament, influence and are influenced by parental involvement and response.

Dr. David Johnson provides a critical review of the assessment of marital quality. In doing so, he offers readers a thorough understanding of the constructs used to define marital quality, the measures designed to assess those constructs, and the methodological issues of marital assessment in life course research. Johnson explores the issues involved in defining marital quality and examines three perspectives currently used in its conceptualization: marital adjustment, subjective evaluation of marital quality, and marital quality as a set of traits.

The third section of this volume explores family assessment issues with particular targets of concern including the effects of divorce on children, the influence a child with disabilities has on the family dynamics, and methods to assess the effectiveness of parent training efforts with parents who have aggressive children.

Dr. Paul Amato explores current issues in the measurement of parental divorce on children. Methodological and measurement flaws are identified and suggestions are offered for improving research efforts directed at assessing outcomes of divorce for children. Amato offers a distinction between research that examines how divorce affects children and research that investigates how children cope with the effects of their parents' divorce. Research has mainly focused mainly on the effects of divorce, little research has been conducted regarding children's adjustment. Amato addresses each conceptual framework separately, offering insight into measurement issues associated with each.

Elaine B. Werth's chapter focuses on assessment of treatment effects for families who have aggressive boys. Her work is timely in its analysis of parent training as a treatment of choice for facilitating change in both parents and acting out youngsters. With current concerns about youth violence at high levels both clinicians and researchers are interested in creating and measuring effective approaches to remedy this intractable problem. Werth's chapter illustrates the complexity of attaining attendance and compliance to treatment and identifying the most appropriate targets for measurement.

Dr. Marjorie Padula describes the many concerns faced by families who have a child or adult with a disability. She critiques the major paper and pencil measures that have been used for family assessment with reference to the special concerns of families who have a member

with a disability. Some of the perspectives she raises include the negative focus of many items, the lack of voice given to the person with the disability, and a tendency in some measures to consider family dynamics only in relation to the person with the mental or physical challenge. Dr. Padulla also provides a comprehensive set of constructs that must be investigated if such families are to be helped to access appropriate resources and improve their quality of life.

Overall, the authors have tackled very big issues. They have illuminated issues associated with measuring more than one person, that is, creating constructs that define systems and interactions. They have considered these measurements from both clinical and research perspectives. Finally, they have created a framework that captures normal developmental milestones for families and families in reaction to significant stressors. It is an important work that continues the Buros Institute tradition of being at the cutting edge of measurement concerns.

Jane Close Conoley
Elaine B. Werth
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