

Understanding the Idealistic Distortion Score

What is Idealistic Distortion?

Idealistic Distortion assesses the tendency for individuals to respond to statements in a socially desirable manner. It measures the extent to which a person distorts their relationship in a positive direction (“rose-colored glasses syndrome”).

Where are the Idealistic Distortion items located?

The Idealistic Distortion items can be found on the “Overall Satisfaction/Idealistic Distortion” page of the Facilitator’s Report. Seven items describing idealistic relationship positions make up the Idealistic Distortion scale. One example is, “Every new thing I have learned about my partner has pleased me.” Strong support of this statement and others indicate that an individual may be unwilling to acknowledge their feelings about the relationship and/or their partner in a realistic manner.

Interpretation of Idealism

Very High Idealistic Distortion scores (85% or above) suggest that an individual is invested in presenting their relationship in a highly favorable manner. They may resist acknowledging and discussing problematic areas of their relationship.

Moderate Idealistic Distortion scores (40-60%) suggest that an individual is generally realistic in describing their relationship.

Low Idealistic Distortion scores (0-30%) suggest that an individual has a realistic view of their relationship and will likely be open to discussing problems.

Why is Idealistic Distortion measured?

A potential problem for self-report instruments is the tendencies for some individuals to respond to statements in a socially-desirable manner, resulting in less valid results. To account for this potential bias, PREPARE/ENRICH measures Idealistic Distortion for each individual and then uses this score to adjust individual scores on other scales according to their specific level of idealism. After this adjustment is made, the resulting score is called the *Revised Individual Score (REV)*.

The Role of Idealistic Distortion in Individual vs. Couple scores

Idealistic Distortion is *an individual characteristic* that distinguishes when a person is seeing their relationship in an overly positive manner. Idealistic Distortion scores are used to correct individual scores on other categories by lowering the score downward in order to create a more accurate score-*Revised Individual Score (REV)*. Because idealistic distortion is an individual score, no correction is made to the *Positive Couple Agreement (PCA)* score. As a result, idealistic distortion does not impact PCA scores.

Is Adjustment for Idealism the Same for Each Scale?

No. Since idealism affects some relationship constructs more than others, adjustment for idealism is different for each scale. For example, idealism affects the categories of “communication”, “conflict resolution”, and “closeness” more so than the categories of “leisure activities” and “family and friends”. The adjustment formula is complex as it is based on correlations between the Idealistic Distortion score and responses to each category.

How Differences in Idealistic Distortion Scores Present in Couple Relationships

Differences in Idealistic Distortion scores between couples can result in frustration and misunderstandings. An individual who is highly idealistic, for example, may feel puzzled and disengaged by a more realistic partner’s attempts to discuss issues in their relationship. The more realistic partner may feel that their idealistic partner minimizes or does not understand their feelings. Helping the individuals understand their different tendencies can reduce blame and tendencies for individuals to come to inaccurate conclusions (e.g. “My partner is so negative/always bringing up problems/doesn’t care, etc.)

Idealism across Relationship Stages

Premarital couples tend to be idealistic; married couples in satisfying relationships tend to be moderately realistic, and distressed married couples tend to be very low in idealism-to the point where they are sometimes pessimistic.

Relevant Questions for Couples related to Idealistic Distortion:

1. Do either of you believe you are idealistic about your relationship?
2. Who minimizes problems or overlooks issues most? (Individuals who minimize problems tend to score high on Idealistic Distortion as well as the Avoidance scale)
3. Who raises issues or more often confronts problems in your relationship? (Individuals who raise concerns tend to score low on Idealistic Distortion as well as high on the Assertiveness scale)

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