

PREPARE ENRICH

• *building strong marriages* •

Understanding the Idealistic Distortion Score

What is Idealistic Distortion?

Idealistic Distortion assesses the tendency of individuals to answer personal questions in a socially desirable manner. It measures the extent to which a person distorts their relationship in a positive direct – or “wearing rose-colored glasses”.

Interpretation of Idealism:

Very High Idealistic Distortion scores (85% or above) indicates a person who wants to create a positive impression about their couple relationship.

- This person may take a defensive stance with the facilitator and the feedback process in general. This individual may be more difficult to work with because of an inability to discuss or admit difficulties in their relationship.

Moderate Idealistic Distortion scores of 40-60% indicates that the person is generally realistic in describing their relationship.

- This person is going to be rather realistic about their partner and their relationship.

Low Idealistic Distortion scores (0-39%) indicate that the person has a more realistic view of the relationship and may be more open to discussing problems in the relationship.

- This person may be pessimistic about describing their relationship.

Where are the Idealistic Distortion Items Listed?

The Idealistic Distortion scores can be found on the Overall Satisfaction/Idealistic Distortion page. These seven items describe ways in which individuals can be idealistic. An example is: “*Every new thing I have learned about my partner has pleased me.*” If a person agrees with this item, it indicates that perhaps they are not acknowledging normal human faults in their partner. They are seeing their couple relationship in an overly idealistic manner. It can also indicate they are invested in appearing “very healthy” on the inventory results.

Why do we measure Idealistic Distortion?

As a Facilitator, you should be aware of whether individuals are dealing realistically with their relationship issues. When an individual is idealistic, they will tend to deny and minimize issues and will try to create an overly positive picture of their relationship. This individual may answer in an idealistic manner throughout the inventory. Thus, the Idealistic Distortion score allows us to adjust their scores downward in order to compensate for their level of idealism. After this adjustment is made, the resulting score is called the *Revised Individual Score (REV)*, and these scores are plotted on the individual satisfaction bar graphs.

Key Factors in Understanding the Idealistic Distortion Score:

Idealistic distortion is an *individual characteristic* that distinguishes when a person is seeing their relationship in an overly positive manner. Their Idealistic Distortion score is used to correct their individual score on other categories by lowering the score *downward* in order to create a more accurate score—called “Revised Individual (REV) Score”. Because idealistic

distortion is an individual score, there is NOT a correction made to the Positive Couple Agreement (PCA) score based on Idealistic Distortion. As a result, idealistic distortion **does not** impact the PCA score.

Is the Adjustment for Idealism the Same in Each Category?

No, the adjustment for idealism is greater for some categories than others. That is because idealism affects some categories more than others. For example, idealism affects the categories of communication, conflict resolution and closeness much more than leisure activities or family and friends. The exact formula is complicated and is based on the correlation between the Idealistic Distortion score and the response to each category.

Differences in Idealistic Distortion Scores can Create Tension in the Relationship:

The larger the difference between the Idealistic Distortion scores for a couple, the more frustration both may be feeling in the couple relationship.

The person with the high Idealistic Distortion score may feel that their partner is “always” bringing up problems. Conversely, the person with the lower Idealistic Distortion score may feel that their partner “does not understand me” or accept the fact there are problems in their relationship.

Both partners will end up feeling frustrated unless each can begin understanding the others point of view.

Idealism in Premarital vs. Married Couples

It may also be helpful to look at Idealistic Distortion as a continuum, with high scores being very idealistic, mid-range scores being realistic, and low scores indicating a degree of pessimism about the relationship. It is often true that premarital couples are idealistic, those in satisfactory marriages are realistic, and those couples in therapy are pessimistic.

What does Idealistic Distortion measure versus Marriage Expectations?

The Idealistic Distortion scale measures how much a person is being idealistic and distorting their answers in a positive direction. The Marriage Expectations scale, for engaged couples, measures how realistic their expectations of marriage are.

Therefore, if a person scores high on Idealistic Distortion, they usually score low on Marriage Expectations because they have excessively high expectations for their future marriage. On the other hand, if a person scores lower on the Idealistic Distortion scale, they will usually have a high Marriage Expectations score because they realize that marriage will sometimes be challenging.

Relevant Questions to Raise with Couples on Idealistic Distortion:

Do not share the specific Idealistic Distortion Scores with the Couple as it may simply confuse them. Instead, discuss marriage expectations and refer to the marriage expectations exercise in the Couple's Workbook.

1. Do either of you think you are idealistic and are wearing rose colored glasses when describing your couple relationship?

Most premarital couples will be idealistic. This is normal for this stage in their relationship. On the other hand, most couples coming for marital therapy are pessimistic and have very low scores on idealism.

2. Who tends to minimize problems or overlook issues in the relationship the most?

The person who minimizes problems most often is idealistic and typically has a higher Idealistic Distortion score compared to their partner. They may also score higher on the avoidance scale.

3. Who raises issues or more often confronts problems in the relationship?

The person who raises the most concerns or issues about the relationship is typically the most realistic and has a lower Idealistic distortion score than their partner. They may also score higher on the assertiveness scale.

*** For more information see page 18 of the Facilitator's Manual**

**Understanding the Idealistic Distortion Score
Copyright © 2009 Life Innovations, Inc.**