

Psychometric Properties of a New Family Life Satisfaction Scale

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Summary: A scale of bipolar adjectives, the Family Satisfaction by Adjectives Scale (F.S.A.S.), is presented, consisting of 27 items designed to measure family satisfaction, mainly related to the affective connotation derived from family interaction. After applying the scale to a sample of 274 subjects and 16 patients in family therapy, we obtained (a) acceptable indicators of internal consistency ($\alpha = .976$) and temporal stability ($r_{xx} = 0.758$), (b) clear evidence of unidimensionality, (c) significant linear correlations with other measures of family satisfaction (Family Satisfaction, Olson & Wilson, 1982; Family Satisfaction Scale, Carver, & Jones, 1992), and (d) significant differences between a normal sample and a clinical one.

The Concept and Measurement of Family Satisfaction

As a construct of interest for psychological assessment, family satisfaction has a relatively short history. The work of Campbell, Converse, and Rodgers (1976), and that of Andrews and Withey (1976), straddling the disciplines of sociology and psychology, may be considered the first clear attempts to define and measure it. From a strictly psychological perspective, very few efforts have been made to form a theoretical framework, and these are sometimes merely *ad hoc* explanations of diverse studies whose main objective was to measure the construct. In this line, the F.L.Q. scale (*Family Life Questionnaire*; Guerney, 1977) is without doubt the pioneer instrument for obtaining “a measure of harmony and satisfaction in family life” (1977, p. 344).

It is the works of Olson and his various groups of coworkers that take the merit for offering many of the different and widely used measures of family satisfaction. Olson, Portner and Lavee (1985) used their well-known FACES II scale to obtain a measure of family satisfaction: Subjects completed the test twice, first according to their present perception of their family (real), and second ac-

ording to how they would like it to be (ideal). The discrepancy or proximity between the two scores would reflect the degree of satisfaction with their own family. However, this method has not received empirical support (Daley, Sowers Hoag, & Thyer, 1990; Sigafos, Reiss, Rich, & Douglas, 1985), and a scale designed by Olson and Wilson (1982) has become the most acceptable tool for measuring family satisfaction. Its theoretical base is the Circumplex Model (Olson, 1979, 1991; Olson, McCubbin, Barnes, Larsen, Muxen, & Wilson, 1989), which explains family dynamics through three basic factors: cohesion (or emotional bond among the members), adaptability (or flexibility in the rules, roles and power structures of the family) and communication. Only the first two factors are used in Olson and Wilson’s scale, and they make up the two dimensions of the instrument.

The *Kansas Family Life Satisfaction Questionnaire* (McCullum, Schumm, & Russell, 1988; Schumm, McCullum, Bugaighis, Jurich, & Bollman, 1986) is another well-known instrument for the measurement of family satisfaction, but with a different approach. Its principal characteristic is that the subject must respond *differentially* with regard to how satisfactory his/her relationship with each member of his/her family is (spouse, children, siblings, parents). The subject is asked directly

“How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with . . .?” The more satisfactory the relationships and the more members they include, the higher the total satisfaction.

The *Family Satisfaction Scale* (Carver & Jones, 1992) is a uni-factorial Likert-type scale designed to measure the satisfaction felt by a subject with his/her family. Validity studies show that scores on the scale are related to cohesion, task acceptance, and communication.

Finally, the instrument presented by Barbarin (1996), *Satisfaction with Family Life*, may be considered as the most up-to-date approach to the assessment of family satisfaction. The author points out some theoretical dimensions peculiar to the construct (for which he offers no empirical data) that help to describe the content of the items: (1) love and support vs. hostility, (2) cohesion vs. alienation, and (3) consensus vs. conflict and discord. Barbarin explains that high scores indicate family happiness, good family climate, closeness, affection, acceptance, support and calmness, as well as an orderly and predictable family environment.

Of course, these are not the only instruments that have been used to assess family satisfaction; others may be restricted to quite specific age groups (for example, adolescents: Henry, Ostrander, & Lovelace, 1992; Lummer & Biaggio, 1987), may deduce satisfaction in a tangential way (Antonovsky & Sourani, 1988; Bloom, 1985), or may be part of more comprehensive instruments with more general assessment purposes (Caldwell, 1988; Pless & Satterwhite, 1973; Sarason, Levine, Basham, & Sarason, 1983; Van Der Veen, Huebner, Jorgens, & Neja, 1964).

The Need for a New Measure of Family Satisfaction

Although most of the above-mentioned scales include acceptable psychometric indicators, have been used for a diversity of studies and are still useful for research, a variety of problems and limitations have made necessary the design of the new instrument presented here.

Unspecific Theoretical Framework

In many cases limitations are perceived in the theoretical framework for the construct to be measured; in other cases there is an explicit framework (for example, in the work of Olson & Wilson, 1982), but it has been questioned by other researchers (Schumm et al., 1986). The impression is given that there is more interest in measuring the construct than in *explaining* it. In fact, it would seem obvious that this second step is impossible if there

has not, at least to some extent, previously been some consideration of the construct's theoretical foundation.

Poor Definition

The scales presented either fail to offer a definition of family satisfaction or they present circular definitions, in a direct way (Carver & Jones, 1992), or through the question format of the items (Olson & Wilson, 1982; Schumm et al., 1986), so that almost none escapes the redundancy of affirming that *family satisfaction is shown when subjects state that they are satisfied with their family*.

Debatable Criteria of Validity

Undoubtedly as a consequence of the two previous problems, the criteria of scales used for estimating the validity of the construct are, in most cases, debatable. The delimitation of the construct being unclear, markedly heterogeneous comparisons are made. For example, Schumm et al. (1986), in order to establish construct validity for their scale (*Kansas Family Life Satisfaction Scale*), used measures of satisfaction with quality of life, locus of control, and religiosity. Later, McCollum et al. (1988) used for the same scale marital intimacy and the intimacy between subjects and their parents. Given these data, we believe there is a lack of empirical studies within the framework of construct validity.

Demands of Complex Cognitive Tasks

The instruments of Olson and Wilson (1982), Schumm et al. (1986), or McCollum et al. (1988), in asking directly whether subjects are satisfied with the family, follow the logic of Campbell et al.'s approach (1976), whereby family satisfaction is measured according to the degree of fit between the actual perception of one's family and the image of an ideal family that serves as a reference for the subject. Such an approach involves, in the first place, the capacity to select the different aspects of family life that the subject uses to make this final overall judgment. However, many instruments – and especially that of Schumm and McCollum – lack criteria with regard to what elements of family life to select, or which ones each person chooses.

Absence of Affective Components

Family satisfaction scales assess a specific area of satisfaction with life in general. For Schwarz and Strack (1991), when a specific domain of life is assessed, the most probable scenario is that a standard of quality is

selected and one's current circumstances are compared with it in an exclusively cognitive way, without affective connotations. This conception appears to be present in the above-mentioned authors. However, Schwarz and Strack's approach may be acceptable for other domains of life, namely, income, work, housing (we quote precisely those they give as examples; 1991, p. 39–40), but not for that of the family. Making the affective components involved in family satisfaction more explicit is one of our aims.

An Alternative Framework for Family Satisfaction

We believe that family satisfaction should be conceived, not so much as a global judgment expressed by the subject after comparing his/her family reality with some ideal, but rather as the sum of different *feelings* experienced when he/she is with his/her family. Of course, we do not deny that the subject may make general judgments about his/her family life, but these will be *a posteriori* verbalizations of those feelings or affective states. Each member of the family may have totally different family satisfaction, so that we should not consider the concept as something general that the family "possesses" in a given quantity, e. g., as something supra individual, but rather – more simply, in fact – as deriving from family relationships. Here, family satisfaction is understood only as something related to each subject. Within this theoretical framework, feelings aroused in the subject have their origin in the interactions (verbal and/or physical) that occur between the subject and other members of the family. This approach to the problem can already be found in the work of Bradburn (1969) on life satisfaction and, currently, in reviews such as those of Diener, Sandvick and Pavot (1991). According to this model, a subject with high family satisfaction is one whose positive (reinforcing) family interactions are greater than the negative (punitive) ones.

Using the way subjects feel at a given moment (their emotional response) as an indicator of whether their interactions have been satisfactory or unsatisfactory is an approach that has been considered by other authors (Blechman, 1990; Schwarz & Strack, 1991). If mood (emotional response to the environment) reflects the result of a large number of an individual's interactions, we can justify theoretically the utility of assessing how this individual feels when he/she is with his/her family for obtaining a measure of family satisfaction.

As can be seen, family satisfaction is not related here – as in other scales – to specific aspects (cohesion, fair-

ness, acceptance . . .); rather, all events involving, and interactions with, members of the family can be taken into account with regard to the perception and general sensation of family life on the part of subjects. This postulate means that family satisfaction should have sound internal consistency (unidimensionality in the empirical plane).

In sum, we believe that the family satisfaction experienced by a subject is a product of the continuous play of interactions (verbal and/or physical) he/she maintains with the other family members. When these interactions are reinforcing, the subject will tend to be satisfied; when they are punitive, the subject will tend to be unsatisfied. As a final result, a complete group of interactions will come to be global and quite stable, an entire new group of interactions being necessary for them to change from one pole (satisfaction) to another (dissatisfaction). The evaluation the subject makes about family satisfaction, and in which this result is reflected, will necessarily take into account both cognitive and, fundamentally, affective aspects. With the aim of correctly obtaining this assessment of family satisfaction, data-collection methods should take into account (and therefore request) the feelings evoked by a subject's family and avoid his/her making a summary personal judgment – always a much more complex cognitive task – about the matter. A more extensive theoretical justification with regard to the conceptualization of family satisfaction can be found in Barraca Mairal (1997).

Construction of the Initial Family Satisfaction by Adjectives Scale (F.S.A.S.)

The F.S.A.S. was designed in accordance with the theoretical postulates formulated in the previous section. Thus, it was felt that, in principle, the items should avoid using the direct question "are you satisfied with . . .?" and opt rather for another format. Nor was it felt appropriate to use Likert-type items, but rather to adopt a format with bipolar adjectives, which we considered most suitable for the theoretical framework outlined above, for the following reasons:

- a) The instrument would thus be more sensitive to the affective component of family satisfaction. Scales of adjectives are a suitable and proven means of studying emotions (Anderson, 1990), and there are even precedents for their use in the assessment of emotion in the family context (Fine, 1986; Fluitt & Paradise, 1991), for which they are used here. Furthermore, this format appears to provoke less strong reactions (Ávila &

Giménez de la Peña, 1991), which is especially important when dealing with a topic as central to subjects' lives as the family.

- b) The scale would thus avoid subjects having to carry out the complex deliberations referred to in the introductory section. The F.S.A.S. asks directly about the feelings aroused in the subject when he/she is with his/her family, and presents the selected adjectives that best reflect these feelings. The basis for this format is based on deductions such as those of Ávila and Giménez de la Peña (1991).
- c) There is evidence to suggest that, when subjects respond to bipolar adjectives, the response pattern generated is closer to that of the questions that include the term "satisfaction" than to those that opt for the term "happiness" (Campbell et al., 1976).
- d) Another advantage is that a scale of adjectives is usually quicker and easier to read and understand. Equally, it can be used repeatedly in a continuous assessment, since verbal categories are more difficult to remember than Likert type items.

Scales of adjectives are usually preceded by a word or sentence that defines the specific area to be assessed. In this case the instrument was preceded by the sentence: "When I am at home, with my family, I mostly feel . . .," the items being represented by a variety of adjectives that may reflect the different emotions evoked by the family. The specification "at home" derives from the fact that it was felt convenient to emphasize the most natural situation possible for family interactions. Subjects were able to choose between six alternative responses for each pair of adjectives, defined by the headings "Totally," "Quite" and "To some extent," in order to make it easier for them to choose the right degrees (Babbie, 1979).

With the object of finding the adjectives most pertinent to the question being studied, we looked at already existing scales of family satisfaction, plus some others that, despite not measuring family satisfaction as such, concerned the question of whether family dynamics or situations were pleasant or unpleasant (*Family Adaptability and Cohesion Scales II & III*, Olson et al., 1992; *Family Assessment Device*, Epstein, Baldwin, & Bishop, 1983; *Family Environment Scale*, Moos, & Moos, 1986; *Self Report Family Inventory*, Beavers & Hampson, 1995; *Positive Attitudes Toward Living at Home*, Amato, 1988). From these scales we extracted an initial 177 adjectives and, after a series of refinements with the object of leaving only those that were not totally redundant, and of relevance to the construct being measured, we brought the number down to 111. Later, three experts in family therapy selected the adjectives that, by unanimous opinion, had theoretical relevance for the measurement of family satisfaction. After this final qualitative selection, 52 ad-

jectives remained. This first scale was used for a pilot test on a small sample of 30 subjects (fourth-year psychology students), the purpose of which was to observe possible uncertainties and problems that could be generated by the scale in the sample. Subjects were thus asked to put down all of their doubts in writing. The scale was modified again in accordance with the responses of the subjects to the adjectives and their explicit suggestions.

Psychometric Properties of the Scale

Sample

The initial scale of 52 items was applied to a sample of 274 subjects (126 men and 148 women) with a mean age of 25.23 (standard deviation 2.02). The sample shows a high level of education: Only 10.5% had not attended a university, while 59.6% were graduates, and 29.2% had done postgraduate studies. In 74.5% of the cases subjects lived with their father and/or mother, while the remainder lived with a partner or alone. The scale was also applied to 16 subjects (mean age 24.25) who were receiving family counseling therapy.

Analysis and Selection of Items

For each of the 52 items various psychometric indicators were obtained (by means of SPSS for Windows Version 6.1): (a) corrected discrimination index, (b) variance, (c) loadings in the principal rotated factor (principal components, varimax rotation), and (d) alpha coefficient of the scale when the item was eliminated. On the basis of these item analysis results, the 27 items that fulfilled the following conditions simultaneously were retained: (a) discrimination index above 0.45, (b) variance above 1.00, (c) loadings in the principal factor above 0.30, and (d) alpha coefficient of the remaining scale (when the item was removed) equal to or above that of the complete scale ($\alpha = 0.9808$). Table 1 shows the most important statistical characteristics of these items (mean, variance and item total correlation) recalculated for the scale of 27 elements.

Reliability

Internal Consistency

In the final scale very high indicators of consistency were obtained, both in the general sample and in the subsamples of men and women. Cronbach's α for the general

Table 1. Statistical analysis of the items.

Item no.	Mean	Variance	Item total correlation
1	4.67	1.01	0.80
2	4.73	1.39	0.66
3	4.32	1.02	0.75
4	4.66	1.17	0.80
5	4.18	1.46	0.74
6	4.48	1.31	0.76
7	4.54	1.20	0.79
8	5.01	1.08	0.70
9	4.76	1.25	0.86
10	4.65	1.25	0.83
11	4.66	1.57	0.71
12	4.57	1.24	0.86
13	4.40	1.75	0.71
14	4.67	1.31	0.87
15	4.01	1.46	0.69
16	4.56	1.51	0.70
17	4.51	1.66	0.82
18	5.11	1.00	0.72
19	4.45	1.32	0.77
20	4.51	1.56	0.77
21	4.33	1.53	0.69
22	4.69	1.03	0.84
23	4.29	1.45	0.76
24	4.43	1.49	0.79
25	4.51	1.91	0.74
26	4.55	1.29	0.76
27	4.78	1.28	0.87

sample was 0.976 ($M = 123.05$; $SD = 24.59$); subsample of men $\alpha = 0.974$ ($M = 123.97$; $SD = 22.48$); subsample of women $\alpha = 0.977$ ($M = 122.26$; $SD = 26.30$).

Temporal Stability

After 4 weeks subjects responded to the F.S.A.S. again. Although, according to the theory on family satisfaction presented here, it was supposed that satisfaction would not change significantly in the space of a few weeks, some doubts existed about the behavior of the instrument, given that, as a scale of adjectives, it should in principle be more sensitive to changes in the situational or stimulus conditions than a Likert-type scale (Ávila & Giménez de la Peña, 1991). In general, it seems that when an adjectives format is involved, scores are more variable over time than they are for items made up of sentences, perhaps because sentences are more easily recalled.

The results obtained show an acceptable test-retest reliability ($r_{xx} = 0.758$; $p < 0.001$), bearing in mind what we have said before. As in the case of internal consistency, the results differ for men, women, and the total sample. In the sample of women, higher coefficients (greater stability) were obtained ($r_{xx} = 0.794$; $p < 0.001$) than in the men's sample ($r_{xx} = 0.695$; $p < 0.001$).

Validity

Factorial Validity

In the introduction, we presented the theoretical basis on which a scale for the assessment of family satisfaction should be constructed. It was explained that the concept of family satisfaction proposed here was not confined to specific areas (for example, cohesion, fairness, acceptance, etc.), but was rather defined as a global result of all family interactions. In accordance with these assumptions, and given the unidimensionality found in other instruments of family satisfaction (Carver & Jones, 1992; Guerney, 1977; Olson & Wilson, 1982), it was expected that the instrument – despite its multiple adjectives – would be unidimensional, since among all the items there was high and positive covariance. In order to test the unidimensionality hypothesis, we carried out a factorial analysis on the matrix of correlations among items. The method of Principal Components was used for the extraction and Kaiser's criterion for the retention of factors ($\lambda \geq 1$). Table 2 shows the most relevant data

Table 2. Factorial analysis of the items of the scale.

Items	Factors		
	F _I	F _{II}	F _{III}
1	.82	-.13	-.25
2	.68	.18	-.42
3	.77	-.01	.00
4	.82	-.10	-.25
5	.76	.37	.01
6	.78	-.30	.07
7	.81	-.17	-.22
8	.72	-.13	.02
9	.88	-.01	-.18
10	.85	-.09	-.15
11	.73	-.06	.11
12	.87	-.16	-.11
13	.72	.42	.08
14	.88	-.02	-.03
15	.71	.06	.43
16	.72	.22	.22
17	.84	-.25	.15
18	.74	.24	-.14
19	.79	-.25	.26
20	.79	-.25	.23
21	.70	.42	.23
22	.86	-.15	-.08
23	.77	-.08	.35
24	.80	.27	-.00
25	.76	.22	-.18
26	.78	.04	.06
27	.89	-.07	-.11
Eigenvalue	16.83	1.21	1.07
% Variance	62.3	4.5	4.0
% Accuml. Var.	62.3	66.8	70.8

Table 3. Convergent validity of the scale.

	F.S.A.S.	FAM SAT	F.S.S.
F.S.A.S.	–		
FAM SAT	0.6459*	–	
F.S.S.	0.7872*	0.6863*	–

* $p < 0.001$

for the dimensionality analysis: factor loadings of each item, eigenvalues, proportion of explained variance, and proportion of variance accumulated by the factors. Three factors appear with an eigenvalue greater than 1, but the first alone explains 62.3% of the variance. The three factors together account for 70.8% of the variance.

Convergent Validity

In order to estimate the convergent validity of the F.S.A.S., two instruments were chosen, the objective of both of which was to obtain a measure of family satisfaction. The selected instruments were *Family Satisfaction* (Olson & Wilson, 1982) and the *Family Satisfaction Scale* (Carver & Jones, 1992). This is the first time that such scales have been compared empirically, and it was thus considered convenient to show the correlations between Olson and Wilson's *Family Satisfaction* (FAM SAT in the table) and Carver and Jones' *Family Satisfaction Scale* (F.S.S. in the table), even though this comparison does not correspond exactly to the objectives of the present work. Table 3 includes the correlations obtained between the three instruments.

The closest relationship is found to be between the F.S.A.S. and the *Family Satisfaction Scale* ($r_{xy} = 0.787$), which established the *Family Satisfaction* ($r_{xy} = 0.646$) as being weaker.

Additional Data on Construct Validity

An additional method used to obtain data about construct validity was to apply the F.S.A.S. to a clinical sample of young people (with characteristics similar to those of the sample) who, at the time of completing the scale, were participating in family counseling therapy. This circumstance led us to suppose that the family satisfaction of this group would be significantly lower than that of the general sample (serving as a control here). However, given the small number of subjects available ($N = 16$), the results obtained here cannot be generalized and must be considered as an indication only of tendencies or as preliminary information of an orientational nature.

The 16 subjects of the clinical sample were not compared with the total sample, but with a random subsample (generated by SPSSWIN) of 20 subjects. Given that previously the two groups had been adjusted for age, educational level and type of family situation, they were

considered to be equivalent. The clinical sample mean was 97.56 (SD = 26.46) and the general sample mean 121.56 (SD = 15.94). The statistical contrast value (Mann Whitney's U) was 68.5; $p = 0.0028$. This indicates that at a level of $p < 0.005$, the difference between the two groups is significant both for the contrast of one tail and for that of two; that is, there are reasons to trust the capacity of the scale to discriminate between a general sample and a clinical group undergoing family therapy.

Discussion

Our objective in this work was the presentation of a scale for the assessment of family satisfaction which, by virtue of its sound theoretical framework and good psychometric properties, may come to constitute an alternative to existing instruments. We believe that the statistical results obtained by the F.S.A.S. have lived up to expectations. Its high internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.976$ – even after rejecting 25 items – and especially its temporal stability (test-retest correlation = 0.758), usually problematic in adjectives scales, are indices that point to a good reliability. As is well known, the test-retest reliability coefficient depends partly on the variability of the sample from which it is obtained. This may be the reason we obtained a lower coefficient of reliability in the subsample of males. Nevertheless, further studies with more heterogeneous samples, and with different time intervals between applications, would clarify their effect on the magnitude of the reliability coefficient.

The results obtained after the factorial analysis clearly fulfill several of the unidimensionality tests based on the quantity of eigenvalues and of loadings of the first factor (Martínez Arias, 1995). The unidimensionality of the F.S.A.S. is not – contrary to what Carver and Jones (1992) say about their own scale – a limitation, but rather a logical and predictable result, bearing in mind the theoretical conception presented and the results obtained by other authors who have constructed scales of family satisfaction (Carver & Jones, 1992; Guernsey, 1977; Olson & Wilson, 1982). It indicates the existence of a clear and well-defined construct, on which subjects' results depend. Furthermore, the existence of a single important factor allows a simpler and more direct interpretation of the scores.

Other aspects of the scale's validity are also worthy of mention. Considerable percentages of common variance (41.71% and 61.96%, respectively) were obtained with the scales *Family Satisfaction* (Olson & Wilson, 1982) and *Family Satisfaction Scale* (Carver & Jones, 1992). The stronger correlation with the latter instrument prob-

ably results from the inclusion of affective components in its items, an aspect that coincides with the theoretical postulates on which the F.S.A.S. is based. In contrast, given the results, it can be affirmed that the Circumplex Model (on which Olson and Wilson's scale is based) does not appear to bear such similarity to our instrument. Nevertheless, solely from the data available here it is impossible to clarify whether or not these are the ultimate reasons for this shared variance. Further, more detailed studies that compare the scales may be able to resolve these doubts. In any case, we believe that, as a scale of adjectives, the F.S.A.S. has some clear advantages over alternative instruments: greater response speed, simplicity, ease of understanding, less likely to provoke strong reactions, and lower recall of responses, which allows repeated and continuous assessment when research or clinical work requires it.

The scale has been found to be sensitive enough to detect the differences between a general and a clinical sample; however, as already pointed out, the clinical sample size was small, so that this result should be considered merely as an initial demonstration of the scale's usefulness in these contexts.

The satisfactory behavior of the scale of adjectives in the statistical tests lends firm support to the theoretical framework from which it has been constructed. On the other hand, we are aware that it is limited here by the characteristics of the general sample used. The F.S.A.S. has demonstrated its effectiveness with a group composed predominantly of university students, and its possible behavior with a more heterogeneous sample is unknown. Despite these limitations, we have considered it useful to present it to other researchers interested in the area of family relationships, confident that it will inspire further research in the field.

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Appendix A

Final version of the *F.S.A.S. (Family Satisfaction by Adjectives Scale)*. [A Spanish version of the *F.S.A.S.* can be found in Barraca Mairal and López Yarto (1997)]

When I am at home, *with my family*, I mostly feel ...

	Totally	Quite	To some extent	To some extent	Quite	Totally	
1. happy							unhappy
2. alone							accompanied
3. cheerful							Miserable
4. consoled							disconsolate
5. understood							misunderstood
6. tranquil							disturbed
7. discontented							contented
8. insecure							secure
9. pleased							displeased
10. satisfied							dissatisfied
11. inhibited							at ease
12. discouraged							encouraged
13. censured							supported
14. uncomfortable							comfortable
15. harassed							relieved
16. not Respected							respected
17. relaxed							tense
18. excluded							involved
19. agitated							serene
20. calm							nervous
21. attacked							protected
22. joyful							sad
23. free							weighed down
24. appreciated							not appreciated
25. not close							close
26. stimulated							repressed
27. bad							well