

Summary

Marriage: An Examination in Terms of System Justification Theory

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Marriage is the type of relationship, among romantic attachments, that has the greatest effect on the life of every individual. Marriage as a relationship where two people come together under the same roof to share life is distinct from other romantic relationships in that it is recognized in the legal system, and that it also presents a married couple a relatively foreseeable direction in life, lowering the possibility of an uncertain future. However, even though intertwined with positive emotions and a feeling of happiness, with all the responsibilities and conflicts it brings along, and the costs one has to pay in such a bond, a decision to get married is in no way an easy one. Previous research underlines that spouses use certain strategies, especially after they have decided to get married and also after they have begun to live in marriage system, to overcome circumstances created by negative implications (Murray, 1994). It is reported that individuals strive to both get on top of problems and also be happier by highlighting, in a non-objective approach, the positive sides in their spouse as well as in their relationship (Murray and Holmes, 1999). This study seeks to answer the question whether married couples get more satisfaction in their relationship when, besides emphasizing the positive sides of their spouses and marital bond in a biased manner, they consider the marriage system as a necessary and justifiable union.

The theory of system justification is a theory developed by Jost and Banaji (1994) as a cognitive interpretation to provide insights into why social systems are justified. The theory argues that humans tend to believe that social systems are just and right rather than being unjustified and unjust (Jost, 1995; Major, 1994). Humans have a strong need for order, stability and a foreseeable future. They may have, however, also to face economic and social inequalities, discrimination and unjust social structures. The system justification theory (Jost and Banaji, 1994; Napier and Jost, 2008) suggests that justification provides palliative functions humans need to reduce their emotional conflicts arising from social inequalities, as a result of which they feel themselves better. Research

has highlighted that, even though it has some social and economic costs especially for disadvantaged groups, rationalising a system satisfy certain psychological needs such as the need for stability, existential needs needed to manage feelings of anxiety and threat as well as the need for a sense of purpose (Godfrey, 2010; Jost and Hunyady, 2005). The present study also investigates within this context the motives which drive humans to justify the conjugal union they live in. Given that other systems satisfy certain cognitive, existential and relational needs (Hennes et al., 2012) and have some palliative functions (Jost and Hunyady, 2002), it can be argued that a matrimonial bond also meets certain existential needs of individuals. Such arguments lead us to the notion of positive illusion, a notion believed to have similar functions.

A review of the existing literature reveals that the notion of positive illusion was first used by Taylor (1983). Taylor and Brown (1988) maintain that humans distort realities in a positive direction promoting their perceptions of the self, instead of taking the environment and the world as they are in an unbiased and absolute manner. They further argue that positive illusions may be adaptive under circumstances that govern close relations (Taylor and Brown, 1994). Positive illusions in close relations can be defined as the inclination to perceive one's partner and relationship in an unrealistically more positive manner. In the initial stage of a romantic relationship people see their relationship through rose-tinted glasses; as a result they tend to exaggerate the positive traits of their partners, tending, in turn, to minimize the negative ones (Murray and Holmes, 1997). The need to believe that one has found the right person for a relationship underlies such a tendency of minimization which can also be defined as cognitive distortion (Murray, Holmes and Griffin, 1996b).

A review of the existing literature on positive illusions reveals that some authors (e.g. Murray, Holmes and Griffin, 1996b; Murray et al., 2009; Scheer, 2002) have drawn on the theory of cognitive dissonance to interpret this notion from certain perspectives. The theory of cognitive dissonance argues that, having to face a dis-

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sonance, people seek to minimize it by changing their behaviour. Similarly, people facing problems in their married life can ignore their problems or minimize their significance, experiencing, in this way, a lower level of cognitive dissonance.

So far as system justification method is concerned, we can say that the motives justifying a system can also be interpreted as a kind of cognitive distortion just like positive illusions. That being the case, Jost and Banaji (2004) define system justification as false consciousness, referring to "beliefs that come in conflict with one's personal and group interests and contribute to the maintenance of the disadvantaged position of one's self and the group one is in (Jost and Banaji, 1994). Just like the palliative functions which a general system justification has for individuals, (Jost and Hunyady, 2002; Jost et al., 2003; Liviatan and Jost, 2011, 2014), a justification of the marriage system might also have similar results for married people. In this respect, it can be argued that the notion of positive illusion represents one of these palliative functions, which might have a positive effect on the marital satisfaction people have in a marital relationship. The present study aims, in the light of these facts, to test the intermediary role of positive illusions in the relation between justification of the marriage system and marital satisfaction.

In line with the study aim mentioned above, the hypotheses of the study can be summarized as follows:

1. A significant relationship in positive direction is expected for both spouses between the general system justification and the justification of marriage system.
2. A significant relationship in positive direction is expected for both spouses between the justification of the conjugal union, positive illusions and marital satisfaction variables.
3. Positive illusions between the justification of the institution of marriage and the marital satisfaction are expected to have an intermediary role for both spouses.

Method

Participants

180 couples who were reached by snowball sampling method and were legally married participated in this study. However, the data of 14 couples were not included in the study, because at least one of the spouses did not respond to a large number of items in the scales, and then the extreme values were removed. Analyses were conducted on 166 couples who had been married for at least one year. The ages of participants varied between 22 and 75 years, with average ages of 37.34 ($S = 9.74$) and 40.53 ($S = 10.85$) for women and men respectively. The duration of marriage of participants, all in an ongoing conjugal union, varied between 1 and 50

years, with an average marriage time of 12.01 years ($S = 10.98$). As for the number of marriages, while 164 women (98.8%) said that it was their first marriage, and 2 women (1.2%) said it was their second marriage, 157 (94.6%) male participants said it was their first marriage, and 7 of them (4.2%) stated that they got married twice. Two participants, one female and one male, (0.6%) said it was their third and fourth marriages. The number of children of participants varied between 1 and 7.

Measures

Demographic Information Form

This form includes questions aiming to investigate personal traits of the participants such as age, gender, educational background, socio-economic conditions and the duration of marriage.

Marital System Justification Scale

The Marital System Justification Scale was developed by the researchers specifically for this study with a separate sample of 326 people to investigate to what extent the institution of marriage considered as a micro system is perceived as justified and just, and also to find out the motives with which the marriage system is justified. The values concerning item-total correlation of each item included in the scale vary between .60 and .79. The scale includes no inverse coded item. The Cronbach internal consistency coefficient of the scale was found to be .94. Confirmatory factor analysis was applied to test the factor structure of the the Marital System Justification Scale on the sample group composed of married individuals. Model adjustment indices have shown that data are consistent with the single factor structure. The modification indices proposed have shown, on the other hand, that model adjustment indices are at acceptable levels [χ^2 (df = 185, $N = 332$) = 583.28, $p < .000$, GFI = .85, AGFI = .81, CFI = .87, RMSEA = .08].

Positive Illusion Scale

The Positive Illusion Scale was developed by the researchers specifically for this study with a separate sample of 200 people to investigate the positive illusions which individuals living in a conjugal bond have towards their relationships and spouses.

Based on the level of agreement on the scale items, we can suggest that the participants have positive illusions towards their marital union and spouses, and that they perceive their relations better than it is in reality. The Positive Illusion Scale that is composed of 14 items is a Likert type scale with a typical five-level scaling from 1 'strongly disagree' to 5 'strongly agree'. The Cronbach Alpha internal consistency coefficient of the scale is .96.

The values concerning item-total correlation of each item included in the scale vary between .71 and .89. Confirmatory factor analysis was applied to test whether the factor structure of the Positive Illusion Scale was consistent for this study. Reviewing the model adjustment indices proposed, it was confirmed that the end model was more consistent with the data, with model consistency indices at acceptable levels [$\chi^2(70, N = 332) = 232.85, p < .000$, GFI = .91, AGFI = .86, CFI = .95, RMSEA = .08].

General System Justification Scale

The System Justification Method, the general theory in this sense, is one developed by Kay and Jost (2003) to measure to what extent people perceive an existing system as justified. The scale that is composed of 8 items and a Likert-type scaling of 7 items (1 'strongly disagree', 7 'strongly agree') was adopted into Turkish by Yıldırım (2010). While the Cronbach alpha internal consistency coefficient measured by Kay and Jost (2003) in their study was .88, Yıldırım measured the same coefficient as .67. In our study we measured it as .82 for men and .78 for women.

Dyadic Adjustment Scale

In this study we used the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS) to measure the marital satisfaction of married individuals. The Dyadic Adjustment Scale (Fıfıloğlu and Demir, 2000) is generally used to measure the quality of relationship of married couples and the harmony in a conjugal union, but some authors (e.g. Duman Temel, 2013) also used this scale to measure marital satisfaction. The scale was translated and adopted into Turkish by Fıfıloğlu and Demir (2000). The Cronbach alpha internal consistency coefficient of the scale is .92.

Procedure

The first page of the scale includes information about the study as well as the informed consent form used to obtain the consent of the participants for their voluntary participation, followed by Demographic Information Form, Positive Illusion Scale, Marital System Justification Scale, General System Justification Scale and Dyadic Adjustment Scale. The forms were given to married couples in closed envelopes and returned by participants also in closed envelopes.

Results

We used the Actor-Partner Interdependence Model (Kenny, 1996) to test the intermediary role of positive illusions in the relation between the justification of marriage system by married couples and their marital satisfaction. The model was also used to test the predictor

role of marriage system justification on positive illusions and that of positive illusions on marital satisfaction. First, all the relations between the variables in the model as well as error associations regarding variables were defined, and in the end it was confirmed that the model had an excellent consistency with data. After the model was applied, the insignificant effects in the model were removed from the model one-by-one beginning from the one with the lowest t-value, continuing the procedure until only significant relations remained in the model. Figure 1 shows the end model only containing only significant relations. Consistency indices of the model indicate an excellent consistency between the model and data [$\chi^2(7, N = 166) = 19.77, p > .05$, GFI = .96, AGFI = .95, NNFI = .99, CFI = .98, RMSEA = .04]

The actor effects in the model shown in Fig. 1 show that the level of marriage system justification by men significantly predict the positive illusions they have in their conjugal life ($\beta = .35, p < .001$). Besides, positive illusions men have about their marital union and spouses significantly and positively predict their marital satisfaction ($\beta = .48, p < .001$). The justification of the marriage system by women significantly and positively predict the positive illusions they entertain in their marriage ($\beta = .34, p < .001$). Positive illusions of women also predict their marital satisfaction in a positive and significant way ($\beta = .82, p < .001$). The partner effects in the model show that only one effect is significant. In line with this, positive illusions women entertain in their marriage do positively and significantly predict the marital satisfaction of men ($\beta = .38, p < .001$).

The main purpose of the study is to test the mediating role of the positive illusions of spouses in their marriage between legitimizing the marriage system and marital satisfaction. To this end, bootstrap method suggested by Shrout and Bolger (2002) was used to specify whether the indirect effects in the model were significant. The values in this study were calculated by means of 2000 bootstrap sampling and 95% GA. The results of the analysis show that three intermediate effects are significant. Firstly, the analysis has shown that positive illusions of men towards their conjugal relationship and spouses have a statistically significant intermediate effect on the relationship between the justification of the marriage system by men and their marital satisfaction ($b = 4.86, GA [3.42, 6.63], p < .01$). The results show that positive illusions towards the conjugal union and the spouse also have similar effects on women. Positive illusions of women towards their relationship have a statistically significant intermediate effect on the relation between the justification of the marriage system by women and their marital satisfaction ($b = 9.31, GA [6.13, 12.18], p < .01$). Looking at it from the perspective

of partner effects, we see that positive illusions women entertain towards their marriage have a significant intermediate effect on the relation between the justification of the marriage system by women and marital satisfaction of men ($b = 3.86$, GA [2.55, 5.49], $p < .01$).

Discussion

As mentioned above, the main purpose of the present study is to investigate the intermediate role of positive illusions on the relation between the justification of the marriage system and marital satisfaction. The results show, in line with the expectations, that positive illusions of both women and men assume an intermediate role in the relationship between the justification of the marriage system and marital satisfaction. As a result, individuals who evince a higher level of justification of the marriage system have more positive illusions towards their relationships and spouses, as a result of which they have a greater marital satisfaction. As is generally the case with general system justification, individuals involved in the marriage system may also tend to see it as justified and necessary. At this point, we should underline the palliative effect of positive illusions. To maintain this system they are already in, individuals can view their spouses and conjugal relationship from a more positive perspective, thereby drawing on some cognitive distortions. In other words, individuals who justify the system of marriage have more positive illusions towards their marital life, and such biased evaluations have an increasing effect on their marital satisfaction.

The study has also demonstrated that positive illusions have an intermediary effect on the relationship between the justification of the marriage system and marital satisfaction, a result that applies both to women and men. It is not the justification of the marriage system by spouses that directly increases their marital satisfaction; the positive illusions thus generated towards their spouses and conjugal relationship lead to such an effect. This pattern is remarkable especially for men. As explained in the findings section, no relationship was found between the justification of the marriage system by men and their marital satisfaction. If, however, the intermediary effect of positive illusions is taken into account, a significant relationship emerges between the justification of the marriage system by men and their marital satisfaction. It would not be wrong to say that people in our country tend to idealize the marriage system both due to social pressures, and certain cultural and ethical values. Men, who justify and dignify the marriage system on one hand, think, on the other hand, that a conjugal relationship would have a restrictive effect on their freedom and social life, a fact that leads them, in all likelihood, to a cognitive dilemma. As a result of this, while the percep-

tion of the marriage system by men as justified and necessary has no effect on their marital satisfaction, it probably increases their satisfaction through the intermediary effect of the positive illusions they have towards their married life. Put in other words, it seems that men use positive illusions to avoid the cognitive dilemma they might experience in their married life. At the same time, the finding of the present study that, compared with women, men entertain more positive illusions in their relationships, is an indicator that expresses the power of positive illusions on the marital satisfaction of men.

As explained above, positive illusions do also have an intermediary effect on the relationship between the justification of the marriage system by women and their marital satisfaction. Unlike the condition of men, this situation can be attributed to the disadvantaged condition of women in the gender system (Dökmen, 2004; Glick and Fiske, 2001; Sakallı and Curun, 2001). The traditional gender-specific roles and the stereotypes associated with single individuals (DePaulo and Morris, 2005), which especially predominate the social life in Turkey, may be challenging for women in comparison to men. The perception of the marriage system by women as a necessary and useful institution may lead them, despite probable difficulties they experience in the system, to draw a more positive picture, as a result of which a positive effect is generated on their marital satisfaction. As no previous research is available investigating the variables mentioned in an integrated manner, we believe that future studies addressing the matter can provide new insights through alternative explanations.

As regards the partner effects, we see that only one intermediary effect is significant, a finding in accordance with which positive illusions of women have an intermediary effect on the relationship between their justification of the marriage system and their marital satisfaction. In other words, the positive illusions of women increase parallel to the level of their justification of the marriage system, a fact which leads to more marital satisfaction in their spouses. Considering the marriage system as justified and necessary, women can turn to cognitive distortions and positive illusions in a greater degree to be able to benefit from the palliative effects they need in the system. Such positive evaluations towards their spouses and relationships might, in turn, have an increasing effect on marital satisfaction of their spouses. The results of the present study, which show that positive illusions women have in their married life have an increasing effect both on their marital satisfaction and on that of their spouses, and that such illusions also have an intermediary effect on the relationship between the justification of the marriage system by women and the marital satisfaction of their spouses, indicate the importance of positive illusions in conjugal life.