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The Relationship Between Self-Perception, Spouse Evaluation, Attribution Styles, and Marital Adjustment in Married Individuals

Evli Bireylerde Benlik Algısı, Eş Değerlendirme ve Yükleme Tarzlarının Evlilik Uyumuyla İlişkisi

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Abstract

In recent years, changes in education, the economy, business world and social life have altered perspectives on marriage; these changes have affected the structure and quality of marital relationships, making it increasingly important to examine the individual and relational variables associated with marital adjustment. Accordingly, aim of this study is to examine the self-perceptions, spouse evaluation, attribution styles, and marital adjustment of married individuals. The study was conducted with 376 male and female individuals living in various provinces of Türkiye who had been married for at least one year. Demographic Form, Social Comparison, Birtchnell Spouse Evaluation, Attribution in Relationships and Marital Adjustment Scales were used as data collection tools. Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to determine the relationships between self-perception, spouse evaluation, attribution styles, and marital adjustment, while regression analysis examined whether these variables predicted marital adjustment. The results indicated that the attributional styles–responsibility sub-dimension was the strongest predictor of marital adjustment, while the spouse evaluation–disconnection and controlling sub-dimensions were strongly related to marital adjustment. Self-perception and spouse evaluation–trustworthiness were positively related to marital adjustment. In contrast, spouse evaluation–disconnection, controlling, and dependency, as well as attributional styles–responsibility and causality, were negatively related to marital adjustment.

Keywords: Self-perception, relationship attribution style, marital adjustment

Öz

Son yıllarda eğitim, ekonomi, iş dünyası ve sosyal yaşamda meydana gelen değişimler evliliğe yönelik bakış açılarını değiştirmiş; bu değişimler evlilik ilişkilerinin yapısını ve niteliğini etkileyerek evlilik uyumuyla ilişkili bireysel ve ilişkisel değişkenlerin incelenmesini önemli hâle getirmiştir. Bu doğrultuda, çalışmanın amacı evli bireylerin sahip olduğu benlik algılarını, eş değerlendirmelerini, yükleme tarzlarını ve evlilik uyumlarını incelemektir. Araştırma, Türkiye'nin çeşitli illerinde yaşayan ve en az bir yıldır evli olan 376 kadın ve erkek birey ile yürütülmüştür. Veri toplama araçları olarak Demografik Bilgi Formu, Sosyal Karşılaştırma Ölçeği, Birtchnell Eş Değerlendirme Ölçeği, İlişkilerde Yükleme Ölçeği ve Evlilik Uyumu Ölçeği kullanılmıştır. Benlik algısı, eş değerlendirme, yükleme tarzları ve evlilik uyumu arasındaki ilişkileri belirlemek amacıyla Pearson korelasyon analizi; bu değişkenlerin evlilik uyumunu yordayıp yordamadığını belirlemek amacıyla ise regresyon analizi yapılmıştır. Araştırma sonuçları, yükleme tarzları–sorumluluk alt boyutunun evlilik uyumunun en güçlü yordayıcısı olduğunu göstermiştir. Bunun yanı sıra, eş değerlendirme–kopukluk ve kontrolcülük alt boyutlarının evlilik uyumu ile yüksek düzeyde ilişkili olduğu bulunmuştur. Benlik algısı ve eş değerlendirme–güvenilebilirlik alt boyutu evlilik uyumu ile pozitif yönde ilişkiliyken; eş değerlendirme–kopukluk, kontrolcülük ve bağımlılık alt boyutları ile yükleme tarzları–sorumluluk ve nedensellik alt boyutlarının evlilik uyumu ile negatif yönde ilişkili olduğu bulunmuştur.

Anahtar kelimeler: Benlik algısı, yükleme tarzları, evlilik uyumu

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Introduction

Every marriage is unique, much like a fingerprint. This uniqueness reflects the differences between men and women who constitute the marital union (Tarhan, 2017). Although these differences may arise from various factors such as family structures, expectations regarding marriage, communication styles, conflict resolution strategies, habits, and lifestyles (Almasaranı, 2023), they fundamentally stem from the self. The self can be defined as the sum of all characteristics individuals acquire throughout their lives and the stance they develop toward events and situations based on these characteristics (James, 1963; Rosenberg, 1986). Accordingly, understanding the self-factor contributes to accurately defining oneself, one's spouse, and the experiences encountered during marriage (Gladding, 2015). The transfer of these accurate definitions into the marital union enables a more satisfying and harmonious relationship (Bradbury & Fincham, 1992). Therefore, defining oneself, one's spouse, and marital experiences highlights the importance of understanding the concepts of self, self-perception, perception toward the spouse, spouse evaluation, attribution styles within the relationship, and marital adjustment (Yıldırım, 2019).

Self-identity refers to the totality of characteristics that an individual perceives, thinks, and feels as belonging to oneself and defines as "I" (Rogers, 1961; Rosenberg, 1986; James, 1950, 1963). Self-perception, on the other hand, involves the positive or negative interpretations individuals develop about these characteristics following self-evaluation (Demoulin, 1999; Hamachek, 1981). The emergence of the self requires contact with the "other," that is, another person (Rogers, 1959, 1961). Although individuals are partially or largely aware of themselves, they cannot evaluate themselves in isolation and require interaction with other selves (Sayar, 2003). These other selves function as reference points in the evaluation of the self (Festinger, 1954). Within this process, known as social comparison, individuals gain opportunities to better understand themselves and complete missing aspects of their self-concept through feedback received from others (Festinger, 1957).

Self-perception, whether positive or negative, can significantly influence an individual's overall life functioning. Individuals with positive self-perception tend to possess higher self-esteem, trust themselves, and develop healthy trust in others. They are generally more capable of managing stress effectively and approaching events with a solution-oriented and understanding perspective. Such individuals are able to confront their shortcomings and make efforts toward self-improvement. Their openness to communication also facilitates the development of healthy relationships with themselves, their families, and their broader social environment (Eisenberg, 1979). Accordingly, individuals who are aware of their self and engaged in constructing a positive self-concept are expected to display healthier behaviors within marriage (Özbucak Tıraşoğlu & İpek, 2019; Yıldız & Baytemir, 2016). Therefore, recognizing both positive and negative aspects of oneself before marriage and maintaining this self-awareness throughout the marital process is essential for marital harmony and satisfaction (Cüceloğlu, 2017).

Another concept considered important for marital adjustment is spouse evaluation. How individuals perceive themselves is as significant as how they perceive their spouses and their spouses' behaviors (Yıldırım, 2019). Moreover, self-perception and spouse evaluation are interrelated, as evaluations cannot be made independently of one's own perceptual framework. Such evaluations are directly and indirectly influenced by past experiences, emotional states, and conscious and unconscious processes. What becomes crucial in this context is whether individuals assess their partners' behaviors through a realistic and constructive lens (Erden, 2016).

Spouse evaluation can be defined as an individual's assessment of their partner across social, emotional, behavioral, and cognitive domains based on their own perceptual framework. These evaluations often result in attributing specific personality traits to the spouse. Birtchnell (1987) categorized these personality dimensions as trustworthiness, detachment, controlling, and dependency. Trustworthiness refers to perceiving the partner as accepting, supportive, and willing to share. Detachment describes the partner as emotionally inadequate, distant, or fearful of intimacy. Controlling refers to viewing the partner as domineering and dismissive of others, whereas dependency characterizes the partner as lacking self-confidence and requiring excessive attention and support. While perceptions of trustworthiness are associated with increased marital harmony, the other three dimensions are linked to decreased harmony (Birtchnell, 1987). Evaluation is a critical process because individuals' reactions to situations are shaped by the judgments they form during this evaluative process. Thus, marriages in which spouses evaluate each other's behaviors positively are likely to experience more positive outcomes (Canel, 2007).

In addition to self-perception and spouse evaluation, attribution is another concept associated with marital adjustment. Attribution refers to the attempt to explain behaviors by establishing cause-and-effect relationships (Baron & Byrne, 2000) and to derive information about the person displaying the behavior (Cüceloğlu, 2016). Individuals are naturally curious about their own and others' behaviors and seek consistency and predictability, which leads them to make attributions. However, they often attribute behaviors to internal personality characteristics while neglecting situational or external influences (Heider, 1958). This tendency may increase interpersonal conflict. Similar processes operate within marital relationships. Research indicates that couples who focus primarily on identifying who is responsible for a problem, rather than examining its underlying causes, experience more relationship difficulties (Curun, 2006; Fincham et al., 1987; Tutarel-Kışlak, 1997).

Research on attributional styles in romantic relationships began in the 1960s. One of the most comprehensive studies in this area was conducted by Bradbury and Fincham (1990), who examined couples' behaviors in a laboratory setting. Their findings revealed two primary attribution styles among married individuals: causality and responsibility. Causality attribution involves focusing on the cause of the behavior, its stability (whether similar reactions would recur in the future), and its generalizability (the extent to which it affects other areas of the marriage). Responsibility attribution involves evaluating whether the behavior was intentional, whether the partner deserves blame, and whether the behavior reflects selfish motives (Bradbury & Fincham, 1992). Given its emphasis on blame and intention, responsibility attribution may have more detrimental effects on marital relationships and adjustment than causality attribution (Curun, 2006; Fincham et al., 1987; Tutarel-Kışlak, 1997). However, the frequent use of either attribution style in a negative manner may contribute to marital disharmony (Ceyhan, 2022).

Although there is no single universally accepted definition of marital adjustment, a harmonious marriage generally refers to a relationship in which partners are satisfied with remaining together, being married, adapting to changes over time, and growing together throughout the marital process (Spanier, 1976). Numerous factors influence marital adjustment, leading to the development of various theoretical models. For example, Spanier and Lewis's (1980) Harmonious Marriage Model, Larson's (2002) Triangle Model of Marriage, Walster's (1978) Romantic Love Theory, and Miller and Steinberg's (1975) Social Cognition Theory of Interpersonal Communication offer different explanatory frameworks (cited in Ersanlı & Kalkan, 2008). According to Lewis and Spanier's (1980) model, marital adjustment is influenced by individual and social resources, mental and physical skills, health status, social status, lifestyle satisfaction, environmental support, effective communication skills, and gains

arising from spousal interaction. Larson's (2002) model emphasizes individual characteristics, couple dynamics, and environmental conditions such as family background, social context, extracurricular activities, and financial opportunities.

As reflected in the diversity of definitions and models, each marriage possesses unique dynamics. In this regard, it is essential for married couples to review various factors affecting marital adjustment and remain open to personal and relational change to enhance marital harmony (Canel, 2012). Consequently, identifying which factors are interrelated and determining the extent to which they influence marital adjustment remains an important area of investigation.

Marriage is a social system in which men and women come together to meet psychological, biological, and social needs; to have and raise children; to maintain a regular and healthy sexual life; to fulfill desires such as loving and being loved; to feel secure and supported; and to gain social belonging through a sense of unity (Canel, 2012). However, ensuring the effective functioning and long-term sustainability of this system can be challenging. Overcoming these challenges requires knowledge about how to establish and maintain a strong and successful marital relationship (Dölen, 2014). In light of increasing divorce rates worldwide, research on marital relationships has gained importance for both clinical applications and theoretical development.

Research indicates that individuals who make efforts to understand themselves and their spouses and who attempt to build a shared cognitive and emotional framework within the relationship tend to hold more positive perceptions of themselves, their partners, and their marriages. These individuals also report higher levels of marital adjustment (Tutarel-Kışlak & Çavuşoğlu, 2006). Conversely, maintaining a dissatisfied and incompatible marriage has been found to be negatively associated with overall happiness, life satisfaction, and general health (Bradbury & Karney, 2004; Hawkins & Booth, 2005). Moreover, not only unhappy marriages but also the experience of divorce can be psychologically exhausting and may negatively affect individual well-being as well as broader social health. In this context, individuals' negative marital experiences may shape the perceptions of others around them regarding marriage in an unfavorable manner (Tarhan, 2016).

These findings highlight the need for further research on marriage at both individual and societal levels. There is a growing necessity for studies aimed at promoting healthy and harmonious marital relationships as well as facilitating healthier divorce processes when dissolution becomes inevitable. Although the literature includes numerous studies examining marital satisfaction and marital adjustment from different perspectives, relatively few studies have addressed the predictors of marital adjustment by simultaneously examining self-perception, spouse evaluation, and attribution styles within a single framework. Accordingly, the present study focuses on how individuals perceive themselves and their spouses, how they interpret and respond to events within the relationship, and how these cognitive and perceptual processes influence marital adjustment.

1. Methodology

1.1. Study Design

In this study, the relationships among self-perception, spouse evaluation, attribution styles, and marital adjustment in married individuals were examined within the framework of a relational survey model. The relational survey model refers to a research design used to determine the relationships between two or more variables and to obtain clues regarding possible cause-and-effect associations (Büyüköztürk, 2017).

1.2. Participants

The study was conducted with 376 married individuals (men and women) who had been married for at least one year and were residing in different provinces of Türkiye. Participants were recruited using a convenience sampling method. In accordance with this sampling approach, married individuals who were accessible to the researcher and met the inclusion criteria were invited to participate in the study. Participants were reached through the researcher's personal and professional networks as well as through visits to schools. Data were collected through face-to-face administration of the research questionnaires. Before the administration, participants were informed about the purpose and scope of the study and were invited to participate voluntarily. The questionnaires were administered individually to participants who agreed to take part in the study. During the administration, the researcher was available to clarify the instructions and answer questions regarding the completion of the questionnaires when necessary. Confidentiality and voluntary participation were maintained throughout the data collection process. Participants completed a demographic information form, and the data considered relevant to the research questions were included in the analyses.

The participants' ages ranged from 19 to 61 years (M = 33.45, SD = 7.83). Of the participants, 177 (47.1%) were male and 199 (52.9%) were female. Regarding educational level, 8 (2.1%) had completed primary school, 8 (2.1%) middle school, 35 (9.3%) high school, 282 (75.0%) held a bachelor's degree, and 43 (11.4%) had a postgraduate degree. In terms of the meaning attributed to marriage, 202 participants (53.7%) defined marriage as a preference, 65 (17.3%) as a necessity, and 109 (29.0%) selected other. When asked, "Would you recommend getting married?", 263 participants (69.9%) responded "yes," 32 (8.5%) responded "no," and 81 (21.5%) indicated that they were undecided. Detailed information regarding the demographic characteristics included in the analyses is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Variable	Level	N	%
Place of Residence	Metropolitan	120	31.9
	Province	175	46.5
	District	60	1.6
	Town	5	1.3
	Villiage	16	4.3
Gender	Women	199	52.9
	Men	177	47.1
Educational Level	Primary School	8	2.1
	Middle School	8	2.1
	High School	35	9.3
	Undergraduate	282	75
	Postgraduate	43	11.4
Monthly Income	0-10000 TL	9	2.4
	10000-15000 TL	13	3.5
	20000-50000 TL	25	6.6
	50000-70000 TL	24	6.4
	70000+ TL	302	81.1
SES Perception Status	Low	76	20.2
	Medium	278	73.9
	High	22	5.9

Table 1. (continue)

Variable	Level	N	%
Having Children	Yes	248	66
	No	128	34
Meaning Attributed to Marriage	Need	65	17.3
	Preference	202	53.7
	Other	109	29
Proposal for Marriage	Yes	263	69.9
	No	32	8.5
	Undecided	81	21.5
Total		376	100.0

1.3. Data Collection Tools

In this study, the Demographic Information Form (DIF), Social Comparison Scale (SCS), Birtchnell Spouse Evaluation Scale (BSES), Attribution in Relationships Scale (ARS), and Marital Adjustment Scale (MAS) were used as data collection tools.

Demographic Information Form (DIF): The Demographic Information Form was developed by the researcher to collect background information about the participants. The form included questions regarding age, spouse's age, place of residence, gender, objective economic status, perceived economic status, educational level of both the participant and the spouse, duration of marriage, age at marriage, type of marriage, having children, presence of physical and psychological disorders, as well as perceptions and preferences regarding marriage.

Social Comparison Scale (SCS): The Social Comparison Scale (SCS), developed by Gilbert and Trent (1993), measures individuals' self-perceptions based on how they see and evaluate themselves in comparison with others. The scale was adapted into Turkish by Şahin et al. (1995). It consists of bipolar adjective pairs representing positive and negative traits (e.g., successful–unsuccessful, introverted–extroverted). The Turkish version consists of 18 items. The reported Cronbach's alpha coefficient is .89, and the internal consistency coefficient is .90 (Şahin, Durak, & Şahin, 1993), indicating high reliability.

Birtchnell Spouse Evaluation Scale (BSES) (Female and Male Forms): The Birtchnell Spouse Evaluation Scale, developed by Birtchnell (1988) and adapted into Turkish by Kabakçı et al. (1993), measures how spouses evaluate each other. The scale includes separate forms for women and men. Both forms contain common as well as gender-specific items, and all items relate to the same four dimensions. The sub-dimensions of the scale are reliability, disconnection, controlling, and dependency. The dimensions of disconnection, controlling, and dependency reflect negative characteristics. Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the subscales range between .80 and .90 for the female form and between .66 and .91 for the male form (Kabakçı et al., 1993). The internal consistency coefficients range between .72 and .78 for the female form and between .68 and .76 for the male form.

Attribution in Relationships Scale (ARS): The Attribution in Relationships Scale (ARS), developed by Fincham and Bradbury (1992), measures different attribution dimensions within close relationships. The scale consists of 24 items and includes two sub-dimensions: causality and responsibility. Scores corresponding to different attribution types are calculated separately, yielding subscale scores as well as a total attribution score. The Turkish adaptation of the scale was conducted by Tutarel-Kışlak (1999). Cronbach's alpha coefficients were reported as .88 for women and .84 for men. The internal consistency coefficients for the causality sub-dimension were .91 for women and .90 for men.

Marital Adjustment Scale (MAS): The Marital Adjustment Scale (MAS), developed by Locke and Wallace (1959), is designed to assess marital satisfaction and adjustment. The scale consists of 15 items and two sub-dimensions. The first sub-dimension comprises the first nine items, which assess general harmony, sexuality, emotional closeness, and agreement on social norms. The second sub-dimension includes the remaining six items and reflects relational processes such as conflict resolution, leisure activities, and trust. Higher total scores indicate higher levels of marital adjustment. The internal consistency coefficient (Cronbach's alpha) of the Turkish version of the scale was reported as .84 (Tutarel-Kışlak, 1999).

1.4. Analysis of Data

The data collected in this study were analyzed using the SPSS statistical software package. The Mahalanobis distance was used to identify multivariate outliers, and the assumptions of normality were examined using skewness and kurtosis coefficients. Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationships among self-perception, spouse evaluation, attribution styles, and marital adjustment. Multiple regression analysis was performed to determine whether self-perception, spouse evaluation, and attribution styles significantly predict marital adjustment. Additionally, an independent samples t-test was conducted to examine whether self-perception, attribution styles, and marital adjustment differed according to participants' gender. One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was employed to investigate whether these variables differed according to the meaning participants attributed to marriage and their willingness to recommend marriage.

1.5. Ethical Procedures

This study was conducted with the permission obtained from the Van Yüzüncü Yıl University Social and Humanities Research and Publication Ethics Committee, decision dated 21/08/19, numbered 2019/06-01.

2. Findings

In this section, the findings obtained from the analysis of the collected data are presented. Firstly, the findings regarding the normality of the variables are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics Result Regarding Normality Distribution of Variables

Variables	N	Average	Ss	Min	Max	Skewness	Kurtosis
Self Perception	376	82.51	15.58	18.00	108.00	-1.16	-1.89
Spouse Evaluation							
Reliability	376	55.91	9.14	32.00	69.00	-.09	-1.03
Disconnection	376	20.54	5.10	12.00	44.00	2.08	5.21
Controlling	376	38.82	11.11	21.00	68.00	.20	-.81
Dependency	376	28.86	5.47	18.00	48.00	.05	-.26
Attribution Styles							
Causality	376	36.72	11.41	12.00	67.00	.16	-.29
Responsibility	376	30.94	13.22	12.00	69.00	.48	-.58
Marital Adjustment	376	42.49	9.04	15.00	58.00	.13	-.03

As seen in Table 2, all these values, except for the disconnection sub-dimension, indicate that the data are normally distributed. The skewness values of the sub-dimensions of spouse evaluation are between -1.16 and 0.48; the kurtosis values vary between -1.89 and -0.03 and do not exceed the range of +1.96 and -1.96. As state disconnection subdimension showed a deviation from normality. However, the interpretation of skewness and kurtosis should take sample size into consideration. For samples larger than 300, absolute skewness values greater than 2 and absolute kurtosis values greater than 7 have been suggested as reference points for

substantial departures from normality (Ghasemi & Zahediasl, 2012). In the present study (N = 376), the kurtosis value of the disconnection subdimension remained below this reference value, while its skewness value was only slightly above 2. Therefore, this deviation was taken into consideration when interpreting the findings, and the planned analyses were retained.

Table 3. Comparison of Variables by Gender

	Gender	N	$\overline{X}$	Ss	Sd	t	p
Self Perception	Woman	199	83.32	15.48	374	1.07	.29
	Man	177	81.60	15.69			
Spouse Evaluation Reliability	Woman	199	62.23	7.72	374	20.91	.00*
	Man	177	48.81	3.87			
Disconnection	Woman	199	22.41	6.13	374	8.19	.00*
	Man	177	18.43	2.19			
Controlling	Woman	199	31.28	8.68	374	-20.08	.00*
	Man	177	47.29	6.47			
Dependency	Woman	199	26.38	5.86	374	-10.62	.00*
	Man	177	31.65	3.22			
Attribution Styles Causality	Woman	199	37.54	11.55	374	1.47	.14
	Man	177	35.80	11.22			
Responsibility	Woman	199	32.00	13.80	374	1.65	.10
	Man	177	29.76	12.47			
Marital Adjustment	Woman	199	43.24	8.96	374	1.71	.09
	Man	177	41.64	9.08			

*p<.05

Table 3 presents the results of independent-samples t-tests examining whether self-perception, spouse evaluation, attribution styles, and marital adjustment differed according to gender. Statistically significant gender differences were found across all four spouse evaluation subdimensions. Female participants ($\bar{X}$= 62.23, sd = 7.72) scored significantly higher than male participants on reliability ($\bar{X}$= 48.81, sd = 3.87), t(374) = 20.91, p < .001. Similarly, females scored higher on disconnection ($\bar{X}$= 22.41, sd = 6.13) comared to males ($\bar{X}$= 18.43, sd = 2.19), t(374) = 8.19, p < .001. Male participants scored significantly higher than female participants on controlling ($\bar{X}$= 47.29, sd = 6.47 vs. $\bar{X}$= 31.28, sd = 8.68), t(374) = -20.08, p < .001, and dependency ($\bar{X}$= 31.65, sd = 3.22 vs. $\bar{X}$= 26.38, sd = 5.86), t(374) = -10.62, p < .001.

In contrast, no statistically significant gender differences were found in self-perception scores between male participants ($\bar{X}$= 81.60, sd = 15.69) and female participants ($\bar{X}$= 83.32, sd = 15.48), t(374) = 1.07, p = .29. Similarly, no statistically significant gender differences were found in causality scores between male participants ($\bar{X}$= 35.80, sd = 11.22) and female participants ($\bar{X}$= 37.54, sd = 11.55), t(374) = 1.47, p = .14. Responsibility scores also did not differ significantly between male participants ($\bar{X}$= 29.76, sd = 12.47) and female participants ($\bar{X}$= 32.00, sd = 13.80), t(374) = 1.65, p = .10. Likewise, marital adjustment scores did not differ significantly according to gender, with male participants reporting a mean of 41.64 (sd = 9.08) and female participants a mean of 43.24 (sd = 8.96), t(374) = 1.71, p = .09.

Table 4. Comparison of Variables According to the Meaning Attributed to Marriage

	Source of Variance	Sum of Squares	sd	Mean Squares	*F*	P
Self Perception	Between groups	590.34	2	295.17	1.22	.30
	Within groups	90445.62	373	242.48		
	Total	91035.96	375			
Spouse Evaluation						
Reliability	Between groups	502.42	2	251.21	3.043	.05
	Within groups	30794.51	373	82.56		
	Total	31296.93	375			
Disconnection	Between groups	14.91	2	7.46	0.29	.75
	Within groups	9756.57	373	26.16		
	Total	9771.48	375			
Controlling	Between groups	884.10	2	442.05	3.63	.03*
	Within groups	45411.60	373	121.75		
	Total	46295.70	375			
Dependency	Between groups	67.64	2	33.82	1.13	.32
	Within groups	11151.17	373	29.90		
	Total	11218.81	375			
Attribution Styles						
Causality	Between groups	322.24	2	161.12	1.24	.29
	Within groups	48537.44	373	130.13		
	Total	48859.68	375			
Responsibility	Between groups	508.56	2	254.28	1.46	.23
	Within groups	65063.27	373	174.43		
	Total	65571.83	375			
Marital Adjustment	Between groups	19.19	2	9.59	0.12	.89
	Within groups	30640.75	373	82.15		
	Total	30659.94	375			

*p<.05

A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to examine whether self-perception, spouse evaluation, attribution styles, and marital adjustment differed according to the meaning attributed to marriage (i.e., marriage as a need, a preference, or other). As shown in Table 4, no statistically significant differences were found in self-perception, $F(2, 373) = 1.22$, $p = .30$; reliability, $F(2, 373) = 3.04$, $p = .05$; disconnection, $F(2, 373) = 0.29$, $p = .75$; dependency, $F(2, 373) = 1.13$, $p = .32$; causality, $F(2, 373) = 1.24$, $p = .29$; responsibility, $F(2, 373) = 1.46$, $p = .23$; or marital adjustment, $F(2, 373) = 0.12$, $p = .89$, according to whether participants perceived marriage as a need, a preference, or another form.

In contrast, a statistically significant difference was found in controlling scores, $F(2, 373) = 3.63$, $p = .03$. Scheffé post-hoc comparisons indicated that participants who perceived marriage as a preference had significantly higher controlling scores than those who perceived marriage as a need ($Md = 4.29$, $p = .005$). No significant differences were found between the need and other groups ($p = .065$) or between the preference and other groups ($p = .720$).

Table 5. Comparison of Variables According to Recommending Marriage to Other People

	Source of Variance	Sum of Squares	sd	Mean Squares	*F*	P
Self Perception	Between groups	2294.52	2	1147.26	4.82	.01*
	Within groups	88741.44	373	237.91		
	Total	91035.96	375			
Spouse Evaluation Reliability	Between groups	5130.96	2	2565.48	36.57	.00*
	Within groups	26165.97	373	70.15		
	Total	31296.93	375			
Disconnection	Between groups	272.76	2	136.38	5.36	.01*
	Within groups	9498.72	373	25.47		
	Total	9771.48	375			
Controlling	Between groups	8208.23	2	4104.11	40.19	.00*
	Within groups	38087.48	373	102.11		
	Total	46295.70	375			
Dependency	Between groups	493.72	2	246.86	8.59	.00*
	Within groups	10725.09	373	28.75		
	Total	11218.81	375			
Attribution Styles Causality	Betweengroups	9263.32	2	4631.66	43.63	.00*
	Within groups	39596.36	373	106.16		
	Total	48859.68	375			
Responsibility	Between groups	8632.45	2	4316.22	28.28	.00*
	Within groups	56969.38	373	152.65		
	Total	65571.83	375			
Marital Adjustment	Between groups	11225.91	2	5612.96	107.73	.00*
	Within groups	19434.02	373	52.10		
	Total	30659.93	375			

*p<.05

One-way analysis of variance was conducted to determine whether the variables differed according to whether they would recommend marriage to others, would not recommend marriage to others, or were undecided whether to recommend marriage to others. As shown in Table 5, statistically significant differences were found in self-perception, $F(2, 373) = 4.82$, $p = .01$; reliability, $F(2, 373) = 36.57$, $p < .001$; disconnection, $F(2, 373) = 5.36$, $p = .01$; controlling, $F(2, 373) = 40.19$, $p < .001$; dependency, $F(2, 373) = 8.59$, $p < .001$; causality, $F(2, 373) = 43.63$, $p < .001$; responsibility, $F(2, 373) = 28.28$, $p < .001$; and marital adjustment, $F(2, 373) = 107.73$, $p < .001$. Scheffé post-hoc comparisons were subsequently conducted to identify the specific group differences (see Table 6).

Table 6. Group Comparisons According to Recommendations Regarding Marriage

Variables	**Recommendation**	***Means***	***Sd***	**Scheffé *MD***
Marital Adjustment	Recommend (1)	45.76	6.66	8.32 (1–2)
	Undecided (2)	37.43	8.59	9.03 (2–3)
	Do not recommend (3)	28.41	7.84	17.35 (1–3)
Self-Perception	Recommend (1)	83.97	15.17	3.65 (1–2);
	Undecided (2)	80.32	14.23	4.29 (2–3)
	Do not recommend (3)	76.03	19.87	7.94 (1–3)

Table 6. (continue)

Causality	Recommend (1)	34.00	10.15	5.91 (2–1);
	Undecided (2)	39.91	11.13	11.06 (3–2)
	Do not recommend (3)	50.97	10.24	16.96 (3–1)
Responsibility	Recommend (1)	28.08	11.36	7.25 (2–1)
	Undecided (2)	35.33	14.87	8.01 (3–2)
	Do not recommend (3)	43.34	13.22	15.26 (3–1)
Reliability	Recommend (1)	58.81	8.40	5.58 (1–2);
	Undecided (2)	53.23	8.54	6.19 (2–3)
	Do not recommend (3)	46.34	7.71	11.77 (1–3)
Disconnection	Recommend (1)	19.99	3.72	-1.56 (1–2)
	Undecided (2)	21.56	6.54	-0.85 (2–3)
	Do not recommend (3)	22.41	8.87	-2.41 (1–3)
Controlling	Recommend (1)	35.95	9.88	-7.64 (1–2);
	Undecided (2)	43.59	10.38	-6.69 (2–3)
	Do not recommend (3)	50.28	11.20	-14.33 (1–3)
Dependency	Recommend (1)	28.14	5.26	-1.96 (1–2);
	Undecided (2)	30.11	5.59	-1.45 (2-3)
	Do not recommend (3)	31.55	5.59	-3.41 (1–3)

According to the Scheffe test results, it was found that the self-perception scores of the participants who recommended marriage were significantly higher than the scores of those who did not recommend marriage ($_{Md}$ =7.94, *sd* =2.89). It was observed that the self-perception scores of the participants who recommended marriage, and were undecided ($_{Md}$ =3.65, *SD* =1.96) and the participants who did not recommend marriage and were undecided ($_{Md}$ =-4.29, *SD* =3.22) did not differ. Based on this finding, it can be said that participants with more positive self-perception recommend marriage more.

It was found that the reliability scores of those who recommended marriage were significantly higher than the scores of both those who did not recommend marriage ($_{Md}$ =11.77, *sd* =1.57) and those who were undecided ($_{Md}$ =5.58, *sd* =1.06). The reliability scores of the undecided participants were significantly higher than the scores of those who did not recommend marriage ($_{Md}$ =6.18, *sd* =1.75). The disconnection scores of those who recommended marriage were significantly lower than the scores of those who did not recommend marriage ($_{Md}$ =-2.41, *sd* =.94). There was no significant difference between the other groups. It was observed that the controlling scores of those who recommended marriage were significantly lower than the scores of those who did not recommend marriage ($_{Md}$ =--14.33, *sd* =1.89) and those who were undecided ($_{Md}$ =-7.64, *sd* =1.28). Similarly, it was observed that the controlling scores of the undecided participants were significantly lower than the scores of those who did not recommend marriage ($_{Md}$ =-6.69, *sd* =2.11). It was observed that the dependency scores of those who recommended marriage were significantly lower than the scores of those who did not recommend marriage ($_{Md}$ =--3.41, *sd* =1.00) and those who were undecided ($_{Md}$ =-1.96, *sd* =.68). It was determined that the dependency scores of the participants who were undecided were significantly lower than the scores of those who did not recommend marriage ($_{Md}$ =-1.45, *sd* =1.12).

The causality attribution scores of those who did not recommend marriage were significantly higher than the scores of both participants who recommended marriage (*Md* =16.96, *sd* =1.93) and participants who were undecided (*Md* =11.06, *sd* =2.15). It was determined that the causality attribution scores of those who were undecided about whether to recommend marriage or not were significantly higher than the scores of those who recommended marriage (*Md* =5.91, *sd* =1.31). The responsibility attribution scores of those who did not recommend marriage were significantly higher than the scores of both those who recommended marriage (*Md* =15.26, *sd* =2.31) and those who were undecided (*Md* =8.01, *sd* =2.58). Similarly, it was observed that the responsibility attribution scores of the participants who were undecided on this issue were significantly higher than the scores of those who recommended marriage (*Md* =7.25, *sd* =1.57).

It was observed that the marital adjustment scores of those who recommended marriage were significantly higher than the scores of both those who were undecided (*Md* =8.32, *sd* =.92) and those who did not recommend marriage (*Md* =17.35, *SD* =1.35). It was found that the marital adjustment scores of the participants who were undecided whether to propose marriage or not were significantly higher than the marital adjustment scores of those who did not propose marriage (*Md* =9.03, *sd* =1.51).

Table 7. Correlation Table Showing the Relationship Between Marital Adjustment and Predictor Variables

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Marital Adjustment	1							
2. Self Perception	.29**	1						
3. Reliability	.46**	.17**	1					
4. Disconnection	-.37**	-.13**	-.15**	1				
5. Controlling	-.51**	-.17**	-.83**	.03	1			
6. Dependency	-37.**	.07	-.62**	.25**	.65**	1		
7. Causality	-57.**	-.20**	-.28**	.38**	.33**	.23**	1	
8. Responsibility	-.61**	-.19**	-.27**	36**	.33**	.23**	.80**	1

**p < .01, *P < .05

As seen in Table 7, the correlation values between predictor variables and dependent variables ranged between -.61 and .29. All predictor variables were significantly associated with marital adjustment. The strongest association was observed between the responsibility attribution subdimension and marital adjustment (r = -.61), indicating a negative relationship between responsibility attribution and marital adjustment.

Table 8. Regression Analysis Results for Marital Adjustment and Predictor Variables

Variables	*β*	*SE B*	*B*	*T*	sr^2	R^2	*F*
Self Perception	.07	.01	.12	3.32	.01*	.54	61.38*
Reliability	.03	.07	.03	.39	.00		
Disconnection	-.33	.07	-.19	-4.47	.02*		
Controlling	-.28	.06	-.34	-4.64	.03*		
Dependency	.03	.08	.02	.37	.00		
Causality	-.10	.05	-.12	-2.01	.01*		
Responsibility	-.21	.04	-.31	-5.14	.03*		

*P < .05

A standard multiple linear regression analysis was conducted to examine whether self-perception, spouse evaluation, and attribution styles significantly predicted marital adjustment. As shown in Table 8, the overall regression model was statistically significant, F(7, 368) = 61.38, p < .001, and explained 54% of the variance in marital adjustment (R^2 = .54). Self-

perception was a significant positive predictor of marital adjustment ($\beta = .07$, $t = 3.32$, $p < .05$, $sr^2 = .01$). Among the spouse evaluation dimensions, disconnection ($\beta = -.33$, $t = -4.47$, $p < .05$, $sr^2 = .02$) and controlling ($\beta = -.28$, $t = -4.64$, $p < .05$, $sr^2 = .03$) were significant negative predictors of marital adjustment. Reliability ($\beta = .03$, $t = .39$, $p > .05$, $sr^2 = .00$) and dependency ($\beta = .03$, $t = .37$, $p > .05$, $sr^2 = .00$) were not significant predictors. Regarding attribution styles, causality ($\beta = -.10$, $t = -2.01$, $p < .05$, $sr^2 = .01$) and responsibility ($\beta = -.21$, $t = -5.14$, $p < .05$, $sr^2 = .03$) were significant negative predictors of marital adjustment.

Overall, higher self-perception was associated with higher marital adjustment, whereas higher disconnection, controlling, causality attribution, and responsibility attribution were associated with lower marital adjustment when the other predictors were statistically controlled. Although reliability and dependency were significantly correlated with marital adjustment at the bivariate level, neither emerged as a significant unique predictor in the regression model.

3. Results and Discussion

In this section, the results regarding whether self-perception, spouse evaluation, attribution styles, and marital adjustment in married individuals differ according to gender, the meaning attributed to marriage, and the decision to propose, not propose, or remain undecided are presented. In addition, the relationships between the predictor variables and marital adjustment are reported. The findings are discussed within the context of the literature, and suggestions for future research are provided.

According to the research findings, the only variable showing a significant difference based on gender was spouse evaluation. Women's scores on spouse evaluation sub-dimensions of reliability and disconnection were higher than men's, whereas men's scores on controlling and dependency were higher than women's. In other words, women perceived their spouses as more trustworthy but also more disconnected, while men perceived their spouses as more dependent and more controlling. A recent study by Egozi et al. (2024) examining couples' perceptions of closeness and distance found that women perceived their partners as more distant than men did, whereas men perceived their partners as closer. The researchers interpreted this difference within the framework of a relational dynamic in which partners' needs for closeness and distance mutually influence one another. This recent finding is consistent with the present study, in which women obtained higher scores than men on the distance dimension of spouse evaluation. However, the finding that women perceived their spouses as more dependable, whereas men perceived their spouses as more dependent and controlling, suggests that gender differences may emerge across different dimensions of spouse evaluation.

This finding aligns with Caner (2009), who reported that women evaluated their spouses as more reliable, while men evaluated their spouses as more controlling, disconnected, and more dependent. Caner suggested that women experience more anxiety regarding maintaining their marriages compared to men, and therefore invest more effort in their relationships. As a result, women aim to trust their spouses more and tend to focus less on negative aspects of their partners. However, these efforts to maintain the marriage may sometimes lead women to adopt dysfunctional relational behaviors, which can in turn lead men to evaluate them negatively.

Similarly, Uyar (1999), in a study on divorced women and men, found that divorced women perceived their ex-spouses as disconnected, while men perceived their ex-spouses as overly controlling. Uyar argued that due to women's emotional and possessive nature, they engage in both parental and spousal roles in their marriages, which can lead them to feel controlled by their spouses. Men, in contrast, tend to maintain their autonomy while fulfilling marital responsibilities, which may result in women perceiving their husbands as trustworthy yet emotionally distant.

According to the 2025 data from the Turkish Statistical Institute (TurkStat), the number of marriages in Türkiye has been decreasing, whereas the number of divorces has been increasing. The number of couples who married decreased from 568,395 in 2024 to 552,237 in 2025, while the number of couples who divorced increased from 187,343 in 2024 to 193,793 in 2025. Accordingly, compared with the previous year, the number of marriages decreased by approximately 2.8%, whereas the number of divorces increased by approximately 3.4%. In 2025, the crude marriage rate was 6.43 per thousand, while the crude divorce rate was 2.26 per thousand. When longer-term changes are considered, the number of couples who married decreased from 602,982 in 2015 to 552,237 in 2025, whereas the number of couples who divorced increased from 131,830 to 193,793 during the same period. Thus, over the past decade, the number of marriages decreased by approximately 8.4%, while the number of divorces increased by approximately 47.0%. Despite these trends, the continued high number of marriages in Türkiye indicates that marriage remains an important institution in individuals' lives. Accordingly, the continued prevalence of marriage, together with the increase in divorce rates, raises the question, "Why do people get married?" and highlights the importance of examining individuals' meanings attributed to marriage, expectations regarding marriage, and decisions to marry.

Within the scope of this research, participants were asked whether marriage is a need, a personal choice, or something else. Fifty-three percent of the participants reported that marriage is a matter of personal preference. However, no significant differences were found between self-perception, spouse evaluation, attribution styles, or marital adjustment based on whether participants viewed marriage as a preference, a need, or otherwise. This finding was unexpected.

According to the definitions of need and preference, need refers to a phenomenon that generates a desire for fulfillment, is often perceived as obligatory, provides short-term satisfaction when met, and causes discomfort when unmet. Preference, on the other hand, occurs voluntarily after needs are met, is not obligatory, and typically enhances satisfaction without causing psychological, social, biological, or economic distress if unmet (İnanç & Yerlikaya, 2014). Based on these definitions, it could be expected that individuals who view marriage as a preference—having fulfilled their essential needs and consciously choosing how to spend their lives—would differ in self-perception and related variables compared to others. The lack of significant differences suggests that people may place greater importance on how marriage is conducted rather than on the motivations behind getting married.

Individuals often seek information about marriage through reading and research. However, experiential learning is considered the most permanent form of learning (Saltık, 2012). Marriage, as a life experience, carries risks and potential costs, making direct learning potentially challenging (Cüceloğlu, 2017). According to social learning theory, indirect experiences can serve as a reliable way of learning, particularly in situations where direct experience entails risks, negative consequences, or requires substantial time (İnanç & Yerlikaya, 2014). Observing the positive and negative outcomes of others' marriages may help individuals make more informed decisions regarding marriage. Therefore, this study included the question "Would you recommend marriage?" to assess whether participants' perceptions of their own marriages align with the advice they would give to others.

The results revealed that participants who recommended marriage had significantly higher self-perception scores compared to those who did not recommend marriage. Their spouse evaluation-reliability scores were also significantly higher, while disconnection, controlling, and dependency scores were significantly lower compared to those who did not recommend marriage or were undecided. Furthermore, participants who proposed marriage or

were undecided about this issue had significantly lower scores on causality and responsibility attribution styles than participants who did not propose marriage. Marital adjustment scores were also significantly higher among participants who recommended marriage.

These findings indicate that individuals with more positive self-perceptions, who perceive their spouses as more reliable and less controlling, disconnected, or dependent, and who exhibit fewer imposition tendencies in their relationships, are more likely to recommend marriage. The finding that individuals with positive attitudes toward their marriages are more likely to recommend marriage was expected. Moreover, the high mean marital adjustment score (84.88%) and the fact that 69.9% of participants recommended marriage suggest that the responses reflect participants' genuine perceptions. Therefore, these results provide valuable insights for researchers and readers interested in marital dynamics.

The analyses examining whether the study's predictor variables—self-perception, perceived spouse behaviors, and attribution styles—predict marital adjustment revealed that all predictor variables were significant. Specifically, self-perception positively predicted marital adjustment, whereas the controlling and disconnection dimensions of spouse evaluation predicted marital adjustment negatively. The responsibility dimension of attribution style also negatively predicted marital adjustment.

Although the dependence and reliability dimensions of spouse evaluation were not statistically significant predictors, dependence was negatively related and reliability was positively related to marital adjustment. Similarly, the causality dimension of attribution style did not significantly predict marital adjustment, but a negative relationship was observed between the responsibility attribution and marital adjustment. These findings are consistent with previous research in the literature.

Research on self-perception and marital adjustment indicates that individuals with positive self-perception tend to have higher marital adjustment (Sharpley & Khan, 1982; Tutarel-Kışlak & Çavuşoğlu, 2016). These individuals are generally more loyal, participatory, and skilled in maintaining healthy relationships (Çanakçı, 2000). They also report greater marital satisfaction (Schafer & Keith, 1992; Taylor & Brown, 1988). Conversely, individuals with negative self-perception tend to use conflict as a primary coping strategy in marital problems, ignore praise and positive evaluations from their spouses, and consequently have lower marital adjustment (Çelenoğlu, 2011; Murray et al., 2000). Individuals with positive self-perception are more harmonious and constructive in both marital and social relationships and are often perceived as reliable due to their adoption of positive interpersonal styles (Gülaydın & Semerci, 2018). These findings underscore the importance of focusing on positive self-perception in interventions aimed at enhancing marital adjustment.

Recent research also supports these findings. In terms of self-perception, a recent study conducted by Jiang et al. (2024) with couples found that individuals' self-esteem was positively associated with relationship satisfaction, and that relationship satisfaction was related not only to individuals' own self-evaluations but also to their partners' self-esteem. Regarding the perception of partners' behaviors within the relationship, İyiaydın & Sümer (2023), in a sample of married individuals in Türkiye, demonstrated that perceiving one's partner as more controlling was associated with lower marital adjustment. Similarly, Dwire & Acklin (2024) found that spouses' perceptions of themselves and each other were associated with dyadic adjustment, highlighting the importance of considering individuals' self-evaluations together with their perceptions of their partners when assessing marital relationships. Taken together, these findings suggest that more positive self-evaluations and perceiving one's partner in terms of more positive relationship characteristics may be associated with a more positive evaluation of the marital relationship.

Regarding spouse evaluation, studies show that perceiving one's spouse as controlling (Erden, 2016; Uyar, 1999) or disconnected (Taycan & Kuruoğlu, 2014) is associated with lower marital adjustment. High dependency scores are also linked to lower marital satisfaction (Tümöz, 2018). Individuals with high disconnection scores tend to avoid sharing, prefer solitude, and fear intimacy, which can manifest as emotional distance in the relationship. Controlling individuals often restrict their spouses' social activities, manipulate them during conflicts, induce guilt, disregard boundaries, and frequently criticize or find fault. Those with dependency traits may be overly attentive, unable to respect their spouse's need for autonomy, or exhibit low self-confidence, expecting excessive attention (Butcher, 2013). If unaddressed, these negative traits inevitably damage marital quality and adjustment (Fincham & Bradbury, 1987). Therefore, strengthening skills such as respect, tolerance, patience, effective communication, shared activities, motivation, emotional support, understanding, engagement, responsibility, and social relationship management is expected to enhance spouse evaluation and marital adjustment.

Studies on attributional styles in marital relationships indicate a negative relationship between marital adjustment and the frequent use of attributions (Ceyhan, 2022; Günay, 2007; Işısu-Halat, 2009; Tutarel-Kışlak, 1995). Tutarel-Kışlak (1995) also found that women tend to use more attributions than men, mostly causality attributions, reflecting the belief that problems are stable and unlikely to change over time. In the present study, responsibility attributions—which involve assigning blame to the spouse, assuming selfish or intentional motives—were more frequently observed. This suggests a strong link between negative self-perception and the use of attributional styles. Individuals with negative self-concept often experience emotions such as unlovability, worthlessness, guilt, and anxiety, which shape their communication patterns and are reflected in interactions with others (Kaplan, 1986). Consequently, individuals with negative self-perception may externalize problems and exhibit greater imposition in their marriages due to passive or inadequate problem-solving strategies.

In this study, the responsibility-imposition style was found to be the strongest predictor of marital adjustment, which was a particularly notable finding for the researchers. The responsibility-attribution style refers to the tendency to perceive a spouse's behavior as intentional and selfish, blaming the spouse for behaviors perceived as unchanging. The fact that this style negatively impacts marital adjustment and is the strongest predictor suggests that married individuals may focus more on the negative aspects of their spouse and the relationship than on positive aspects or events. Consequently, they are more influenced by negative situations than positive ones. The observation that the strongest predictors of marital adjustment are not positive self-perception, positive spouse evaluation, or causality-attribution style supports this interpretation.

This result indicates that focusing on the recognition of negative situations in marriage may be particularly useful for identifying factors affecting marital adjustment and enhancing marital harmony. For instance, future studies could examine the impact of negative self-perception, negative evaluations of the spouse or situations, and their reflection on marital quality. Within this context, the relationships between the variables investigated in this study and marital adjustment are considered significant and meaningful.

4. Recommendations

The effects of demographic variables such as age, socioeconomic status, educational level, and having children could not be examined in this study due to insufficient data. These factors are likely to influence marital adjustment, particularly self-perception. Therefore, it is recommended that future research investigate the effects of demographic variables on self-

perception, spouse evaluation, attribution styles, and marital adjustment. The main focus of this study is identifying factors that can enhance marital harmony.

Despite these limitations, examining the relationships between marital adjustment, self-perception, spouse evaluation, and attribution styles together contributes originality to the literature. Further exploration and expansion of these variables are expected to make a valuable contribution to the field of marital studies.

Değerlendirme/*Evaluation***:** Çift Taraflı Kör Hakemlik Sistemi

Double Blind Refereeing System

Ethics Committee Approval Permission / *Etik Kurul İzin Belgesi*: This study was conducted with the permission obtained from the Van Yüzüncü Yıl University Social and Humanities Research and Publication Ethics Committee, decision dated 21/08/19, numbered 2019/06-01.

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