



Relationship of Conflict Resolution Styles in Marriage with Marital Adjustment and Satisfaction

Evlilikte Çatışma Çözme Stillerinin Evlilik Uyumu ve Doyumu ile İlişkisi

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ABSTRACT

This review focuses on the relationship between spouses' conflict resolution styles and marital happiness, firstly the conceptualizations of marital satisfaction and marital adjustment were defined and their differences were discussed. Prior studies show that marital adjustment and satisfaction are two concepts related to marital happiness but need to be separated from each other. Then, the relationships between spouses' approaches to their marital conflicts and their marital happiness were considered in this review. Conflict is a natural part of all marriages but the couples' approaches to marital conflicts may lead to constructive or destructive outcomes for their relationships. One of the most important goals of many intervention programs developed for distressed couples is to provide spouses with the ability to resolve their conflicts constructively. Findings showed that constructive conflict resolution (considering conflict as a social problem that could be solved with cooperation, striving to satisfy the needs of both parties, and finding out solutions together) leads to an increase in marital satisfaction and marital adjustment. Destructive behaviors with hostile intentions focused on self-interest (physical and verbal aggression and oppression) seem to be negatively related to marital adjustment and satisfaction. Besides these negative coping behaviors, it will be beneficial for spouses to gain awareness of behaviors such as submission, protective buffering, and underestimating the coping capabilities of the partner with an overprotective attitude, which are not based on hostile intentions in dealing with problems but can have devastating consequences in the long term.

Keywords: Conflict, marital adjustment, satisfaction, marriage

ÖZ

Eşlerin çatışma çözme stillerinin evlilikte mutlulukla ilişkisinin incelendiği bu derlemede öncelikle evliliği değerlendirmede en sık kullanılan evlilik doyumu ve evlilik uyumu kavramları tanımlanmış ve aralarındaki farklar tartışılmıştır. Alanyazındaki çalışmalar uyum ve doyumun evlilikte mutlulukla ilgili ancak birbirinden ayrıştırılması gereken iki kavram olduğunu göstermektedir. Ardından eşlerin evliliklerinde yaşadıkları çatışmalara yaklaşımlarının ve çatışma çözme stillerinin evlilik uyumu ve evlilik doyumu ile ilişkisi ele alınmıştır. Çatışma tüm evliliklerde yaşanan doğal bir olgudur ancak eşlerin yaşadıkları çatışmalara ilişkin yaklaşımları evlilik ilişkisi için yapıcı ya da yıkıcı sonuçlara yol açabilmektedir. Eşlere çatışmalarını yapıcı bir biçimde çözme becerisi kazandırmak, danışman desteğine ihtiyaç duyan çiftlere yönelik olarak geliştirilen birçok müdahale programının en önemli hedefleri arasındadır. Araştırma bulguları, çatışmayı işbirliği yaparak çözülebilecek bir sorun olarak ele almak, ortak faydaya odaklanmak, birlikte çözüm yolları üretmek gibi aşamaları içeren yapıcı çatışma çözme yaklaşımının evlilik uyumu ve evlilik doyumunu artırdığını göstermektedir. Öte yandan fiziksel ve sözel saldırı ile baskı kurmayı içeren düşmanca niyete dayalı ve bireysel faydaya odaklı olumsuz çatışma çözme davranışlarının evlilik uyumu ve doyumunu ile olumsuz yönde ilişkili olduğu görülmektedir. Bu olumsuz baş etme davranışlarına ek olarak, sorunlarla baş etmede düşmanca niyete dayalı olmayan ancak uzun vadede ilişki için yıkıcı sonuçlar doğurabilecek olan boyun eğme, tampon görevi üstlenme, aşırı korumacı bir tutumla eşin baş etme becerilerini hafife alma gibi davranışlar konusunda eşlerin farkındalık kazanmalarının faydalı olacağı düşünülmektedir.

Anahtar sözcükler: Çatışma, çift uyumu, doyum, evlilik

Introduction

In marriage happiness has an important role on the lives of spouses and children. Studies in the literature has shown that marriage is related to psychological and physiological health (Prigerson et al. 1999) and that happy couples live longer

and healthier than divorced or distressed couples (Gottman and Silver 1999, 2013). Similarly, it is stated that happiness in marriage is positively related to self-esteem and negatively related to depressive symptoms (Fincham and Bradbury 1993). Moreover, it was found that marital happiness predicts general happiness better than many variables such as job

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satisfaction, income level, or friendship (Glenn and Weaver 1981).

It is known that children, as well as adults, are affected by positive and negative experiences in the marriage. According to the Family Systems Theory (Minuchin 1974), there are different sub-systems, such as the parent sub-system and the siblings sub-system, which function as systems on their own within the family system. Each sub-system in the family system affects the other. Therefore, it is inevitable that a tension in the parent sub-system will affect the children sub-system, too. Supporting the theory research findings have shown that marital happiness is closely related to the psychological and physical health of both spouses (Fincham and Bradbury 1993, Prigerson et al. 1999, Gottman and Silver 1999, 2013) and the children (Gottman and Katz 1989). Since happy marriages provide a more stable and peaceful environment, spouses spend a healthier life and their children adapt to social life more easily. Therefore, it seems important to establish intervention programs that support marital happiness by identifying the characteristics distinguishing happy marriages from unhappy ones.

In this review, firstly, the concepts used to define marital happiness will be examined and the differences between these concepts will be discussed, then the relationship between these concepts and spouses' conflict resolution styles will be reviewed. Although many different concepts and terms are used in the literature to evaluate marriage, the most frequently used concepts are marital satisfaction and marital adjustment. Mostly, these two terms are used interchangeably. However, when the contents of the concepts of adjustment and satisfaction are examined, it is seen that the definitions of these two terms differ. It is stated that marital satisfaction is an individual's subjective assessment to what extent their marital needs are met by the spouse (Burr 1970, Rusbult et al. 1998, Liu and Fung 2001, Curun 2006), while marital adjustment is a relational quality that indicates the degree of agreement between partners in terms of values and interests (Spanier 1976, Erbek et al. 2005). Thus, it can be said that the concepts of adjustment and satisfaction are two terms related to marital happiness, but they need to be distinguished from each other.

Marital Satisfaction

Marital satisfaction is a mental state that reflects the individual's perception of the rewards received from marriage and the costs of marriage. The greater the rewards received from marriage and the lower the costs of marriage, the higher the satisfaction received from marriage (Baumeister and Vohs 2007). Rusbult et al. (1998) defined relationship satisfaction as fulfillment of the needs of individuals such as friendship, sexuality and intimacy by their partner. According to Burr (1970), marital satisfaction is the situation that individuals experience in many different areas of marriage, such as the management of the budget, the social activity of the couple, the fulfillment of the household chores, the friendship between the spouses, sexuality and relationship with children.

According to Social Exchange Theory by Thibaut and Kelley (1959), individuals rely on a standard called "comparison level" when evaluating their satisfaction in their relationship. The comparison level is the average of the outcomes obtained from the individual's past relationships and the current relationship. In other words, the comparison level reflects the individual's beliefs and expectations about which standards a relationship should have. If the outcome obtained by the relationship is above the level of comparison, that is, if the individual gets what he or she expects from the relationship or more, then the relationship is satisfactory for the individual. However, if the outcome obtained by the individual from the relationship is below the comparison level, that relationship is considered as unsatisfactory by the individual.

Even if individuals are not satisfied with their relationships, in some circumstances they may remain in the relationship. Thibaut and Kelley (1959) explain the persistence of such unsatisfactory relationships, with the absence of an alternative attractive relationship. With a criterion called "comparison level for alternatives", individuals evaluate how satisfying potential relationships would be. According to the theory, if the expectations of rewards from an alternative relationship are below the comparison level for the alternatives, individuals tend to remain in their current relationship. On contrary, if an alternative relationship is considered more profitable than the current relationship, individuals terminate their relationship. As it can be seen, the *comparison level* determines the relationship satisfaction, and the *comparison level for the alternatives* determines the commitment to the relationship. If the comparison level is high for the individual's own relationship and the comparison level for an alternative relationship (comparison level for options) is low, he or she is committed to the current relationship. However, in some cases even if individuals are not satisfied with their current relationship and evaluate the alternative relationships positively, they may maintain their current relationship. Rusbult (1980) explains this situation with the investment model. The investment model has added the concept of *investment amount* to the concepts of *comparison level* and *comparison level for alternatives* introduced by Thibaut and Kelley (1959) while explaining the relationship commitment. According to this, even though the current relationship is unsatisfactory and the alternative relationship is evaluated positively, individuals would prefer to stay in their current relationship if they believed that they invested too much in their relationship (eg, labor, time, money).

As mentioned above, evaluating the current relationship more positively than alternative relationships, investing in the relationship and high satisfaction from the relationship determine the continuity of a relationship. In short, the concept of satisfaction is considered as a dimension of *marital stability*, which is a concept related to the continuity of the relationship, and it refers to individual's sense of fulfillment on the basis of evaluation of their expectations. However, current studies in the literature draw attention to the fact that the expectations of individuals regarding marriage have changed in history

(Suffocation model; Finkel et al. 2015). According to a model arguing that individuals' expectations of marriage have transformed parallel with the welfare of the society improved, expectations of partner's support on fulfillment of the economical needs was important for the individuals who used to live in agricultural society. However, once the level of social welfare increased, the expectations has changed, and firstly the need for belonging which refers to expressions of love among spouses, and then secondly the fulfillment of the needs of self-actualization in relationship have become more important. The model suggests that due to the changes in expectations regarding with marriages, an average marriage at the present time is less satisfying than it was before while a good marriage is more satisfying at the present time than it was before because it adresses higher needs in the hierarchy of needs such as need for self-actualization. Dynamic Goal Theory of Marital Satisfaction (Li and Fung 2011) suggests that individuals' expectations regarding marriage may change in parallel with the lifelong developmental stages and that the harmony in spouses' expectations plays a key role for marital satisfaction. It is stated that the marital goals can be classified into three categories; personal development goals (self-actualization), companionship goals, and instrumental goals. *The personal development goal* includes the expectations of being supported for the fulfillment of the need for self-actualization. It refers to the support given by the individual to their spouse in reaching the partner's ideal self. *Instrumental goal* includes the expectations to derive pragmatic values from the institution of marriage. It refers to being supported by partner in matters such as managing family finance, division of the household labor, taking care of the children. *The companionship goal*, on the other hand, corresponds to the expectations of fulfillment of the needs for belonging, such as intimacy and love. The aforementioned needs are fully consistent with the needs stated in the former model proposed by Finkel et al. (2015), but the Dynamic Goals Theory of Marriage has examined the concept of marital satisfaction in the context of the relationship's own developmental process, not in the historical context. Among the aforementioned goals, the goal of getting support from marriage for personal development are especially prioritized in young adulthood period when productivity is experienced; instrumental goals gain importance in middle adulthood when work and household responsibilities are at its highest level in individuals' lives, and finally companionship goal is said to be more important for individuals in late adulthood when the need for meaningful close relationships is prioritized. The conceptual model explains the individuals' general tendency in their expectations of a marriage and it suggests that the type of the prioritized goals affects individuals' marital satisfaction. It argues that being in harmony with partner in terms of expectations regarding marriage will improve the individual's marital satisfaction.

In summary, marital satisfaction, in regarding literature, refers to what extent individuals' expectations of marriage are fulfilled. Therefore, the term of marital satisfaction refers to individual's subjective judgement regarding what extent to which their current marriage fulfills their expectations. In this respect, it

is seen that the concept of marital satisfaction differs from the concept of dyadic adjustment.

Marital Adjustment

Marital adjustment, considered as another indicator in evaluating the success of a marriage, covers the agreement of the couple on issues such as coping with financial issues, getting along with the spouse's siblings, similarity in interests and values, being in harmony in expression of intimacy and self-disclosure, and having little or no complaints about marriage (Burgess et al. 1963). A well-adjusted marriage is defined as the marriage of couples who interact with each other, reach consensus on common issues related to marriage, solve their problems in a constructive way, and are satisfied with their marriage (Erbek et al. 2005). According to another definition, marital adjustment is explained as the spouses' high satisfaction from their relationships, the predominance of positive attitudes towards their partners, and the almost non-existence of hostile and negative behaviors (Robles et al. 2014). The adjustment level of spouses can be measured by either getting information from the individual by having them to evaluate their relationship in various dimensions on a self-report questionnaire, or observing the conversational interactions of spouses on a particular topic in their marriage. For example, in a study (Planalp et al. 2019), spouses were asked to talk about the birth of their children, and marital adjustment was scored to what extent the interaction between spouses included elements such as showing interest in the subject, cooperation, balance, support, and quality of communication. As it can be seen from various definitions in the literature, marital adjustment, unlike the concept of relationship satisfaction, is characterized as a quality of the relationship dynamic between spouses, a feature of the interaction between two people. Therefore, the concept of marital adjustment provides information about the nature of the relationship between spouses.

In literature, it is seen that there are some discussions about marital adjustment on two axis; the dimensional construct of marital adjustment and its stability over time. Discussions on dimensional construct of marital adjustment have focused on which dimensions regarding marital happiness fall under marital adjustment. On the other hand, discussions on the axis of stability focused on the stability/ mutability of marital adjustment over time. According to Johnson et al. (1986), marital adjustment consists of five dimensions named divorce proneness, marital problems, marital happiness, spousal interaction and conflicts. The divorce proneness includes thoughts that the marriage is going badly, and behavioral components such as talking to friends or the spouse about the possibility of divorce and filing a petition. Marital problems arise when some characteristics of one of the spouses negatively affect the marriage (eg, getting easily angry, being easily hurt, being jealous, spending money extravagantly, having an extramarital affair, etc.). Marital happiness is defined as the feeling of satisfaction people get from their marriage. Spousal interaction, which is another dimension of marital adjustment, is defined as common activities such as going shopping, or eating the main meal together. It is stated that the last dimension

called disagreements about marriage, is a collective feature of marriage and includes physical or verbal conflict in the current relationship. Allendorf (2012) made a detailed examination of the studies on marriage in the Western countries and stated that marital adjustment consists of seven dimensions. These dimensions are happiness, love, understanding, communication, conflict, interest in joint activities, and stability. According to Allendorf's model, the first three dimensions "happiness", "love" and "understanding" are the internal dimensions that form the emotional core of a marriage. "Communication", "conflict" and "interest in common activities" constitute the external and interactional dimension of marriage. The seventh dimension, "stability", is a concept related to whether the marriage will continue or not.

It is seen that the conceptual structure proposed by Spanier (1976) is frequently used in subsequent research in evaluating marital adjustment. According to Spanier the marital adjustment of couples consists of four dimensions: these are a) consensus on important issues for the dyadic functioning, b) satisfaction of the couple, c) cohesion of the couple, and d) affectional expression. Although the scale developed by Spanier (1976) to evaluate the marital adjustment was frequently used by researchers, due to the difficulties encountered in applying and scoring the scale it was simplified by Busby et al. (1995) keeping the same conceptual structure. The scale developed by Busby et al. (1995) for marital adjustment consists of three dimensions: *dyadic satisfaction*, *dyadic cohesion*, and *dyadic consensus on important issues*.

Another controversial issue in marital adjustment literature is whether couples' adjustment changes over time. While some researchers consider marital adjustment as a qualitative evaluation of a state, others see it as a process. It is stated that if marital adjustment is to be viewed as a changing process rather than a situation, this process can best be investigated with longitudinal design. On the other hand, if marital adjustment is to be viewed as a "state", the evaluation of adjustment will be determining the position of marriage on a line extending from maladjusted marriage to well-adjusted marriage at a certain point in time. Considering marital adjustment as a state in point, it becomes easier to study this concept, as the researcher is concerned only with the quality of the participants' relationships at the time they reach the spouses. For this reason, although it is accepted that marital adjustment is a process rather than an instable construct, it was emphasized that evaluating adjustment at a certain point in time will facilitate the measurement procedure (Spanier 1976). This instant measurement of marital adjustment like taking snapshot is called marital quality. Therefore, the terms "marital adjustment" and "marital quality" are often used interchangeably in the literature.

Emphasizing the dynamic and variable nature of marital adjustment, Lively (1969) has defined adjustment as the continuous development of the relationship between spouses. According to Spanier (1976), as well as being a dynamic process, marital adjustment can also be studied in the cross-sectional procedure. According to Spanier's definition, marital adjustment

is a changing process that has the quality of being evaluated on a continuum ranging from "maladjusted" to "well-adjusted" at a certain moment in time, and is determined by the problem causing differences between spouses, interpersonal tensions and intensity of personal concerns, and also couples' degree of consensus on common issues in order to maintain their cohesion, harmony and functionality. On the other hand, Locke and Wallace (1959), who argue that marital adjustment is a static situation, define marital adjustment as the agreement of spouses with each other at a certain time. This definition was supported by a longitudinal study in which married couples were examined three times over an eight-year period (Johnson et al. 1992). In the aforementioned study, it was found that marital adjustment is a condition that does not change over time, just like personality traits. This finding indicates that once the relationship is formed, the adjustment between spouses will not show sudden fluctuations. However, other longitudinal studies (eg White and Booth 1985) have shown that there may be decreases in marital adjustment over time.

Empirical studies in recent years have focused on the interactions between the subsystems in a family in parallel with the Family Systems Approach. Considering that the family consists of various subsystems, it can be said that well-adjusted marriages serve as a buffer for the problems that may arise in other subsystems. Studies in the literature have shown that adjustment between spouses brings agreement in parenting practices (i.e. Young et al. 2017). Studies on this subject reveal two different hypotheses that explain the question of how the quality of the relationship between spouses affects the quality of the parent-child relationship: according to the *spillover hypothesis* marital adjustment is positively correlated with the quality of the parent-child relationship, whereas according to the *compensatory hypothesis* when individuals become dissatisfied with their spouses in their marriages they tend to compensate this situation with trying to set improved relationship with their children (Erel and Burman 1995). Some studies have found gender-based differences in the spouse system and the parent-child system relation. Although there are findings that the spillover effect is stronger in men compared to women (Kouros et al. 2014, Planalp et al. 2019) whereas the compensatory effect is stronger in women (Kouros et al. 2014), new research is needed on this subject. Future studies that will reveal gender-based differences in understanding the nature of the relationship between marital quality of spouses and the quality of the parent-child relationship will contribute to the literature.

The opinions on the definitions of marital satisfaction and marital adjustment in the literature are given above. As it can be seen in their definitions, these two terms, which are often used interchangeably, refer to different constructs. While marital satisfaction is a subjective experience depending on the degree of fulfillment of their marital goals or desires and experienced individually (Burr 1970, Curun 2006); marital adjustment is a relational situation related to the quality of the marriage (Erbek et al. 2005). While the extent to which the spouse meets the subjective needs such as intimacy, sexuality and sharing personal

informations is essential in marital satisfaction, the degree to which the couple can agree on certain issues is important in marital adjustment. Studies in the literature argue that these two concepts should be differentiated (i.e. Erbek et al. 2005, Yılmaz 2001). However, although they are two different concepts, both have highly important consequences for spouses and children. Therefore, it seems important to determine the factors that increase or decrease marital adjustment and satisfaction of spouses. One of these factors is marital conflict experienced among spouses.

Conflict Resolution in Marriage

How spouses approach to their conflicts is closely related to their marital adjustment and satisfaction. Smith (1966) has defined the concept of conflict as “a situation in which the conditions, practices, or goals for the different participants are inherently incompatible.”. Similarly, Crawford and Bodine (1996) have defined conflict as the incompatibility of individuals’ wishes, needs, beliefs or values. As in all close relationships, conflict is a natural and inevitable part of marital relationships. Therefore, the determinant of marital adjustment and satisfaction is not the presence or absence of conflict, but how the spouses deal with their marital conflict. Conflict between spouses may have destructive consequences for marriage, depending on the way they handle the problem, as well as helping spouses acquire skills and improve the relationship. There are many different classifications and explanations regarding the conflict resolution styles of spouses in the close relationship literature.

According to Deutsch (2006), spouses approach to the conflict occurred in their marriage in either competitive ways or cooperative ways. These two approaches have different effects on marital happiness. Believing that one party’s gain is the other’s loss leads spouses to approach to their conflict in competitive ways, whereas focusing on the common goods and believing that one party’s gain is the common gain leads them to approach their conflict in cooperative ways. Spouses approaching to their conflict in competitive ways use the tactics such as oppression, threats and deception, and it leads to poor communication, suspicious and hostile attitudes, underestimating the similarities and exaggerating the differences. On the other hand, approaching to the marital conflict in cooperative ways leads them to focus on similarities in beliefs and attitudes, be open to the communication, trust to each other, have positive attitudes and prioritize the mutual benefit. While the cooperative approach to conflicts is more effective and have constructive consequences for both sides; the competitive approach escalate the conflict and transform the conflict resolution process into accept the demand of the only one party which has more power in the relationship.

Crawford and Bodine (1996), on the other hand, have divided the responses to conflict into three categories: soft responses, hard responses and principled responses. Soft responses are responses such as ignoring, withdrawing and subordination. Harsh responses refer to verbal or physical violence, threatening and oppression. Principled responses refers to cooperation

between the parties in solving the problem, expressing demands and feelings in constructive ways, trying to understand the partner’s feeling, defining the problem and generating ideas for the resolution of the problem. Soft and hard responses cause one side to win while the other side loses or both sides lose, whereas with principled responses both sides win.

According to an observational research by Knudson et al. (1980) conflict resolution styles of couples can be classified into two categories, people either engage or avoid the issue. Couples classified as having avoided the issue in less extreme cases typically avoid either the issue or the interaction, while in extreme cases one spouse terminate the conversation abruptly by leaving the room or slamming the door. In this atmosphere, one or both of the couples fail to make their position clear or persistently repeat their own views without paying attention to what their spouse says. If there is no progress in the resolution of the conflict, hurt feelings arising from the conflict occur in couples displaying an avoidant approach. On the other hand, couples who try to resolve the conflict by engaging with issue, typically express themselves openly and listen to their partner’s explanations and take their partners’ feelings into account. Even if there is no progress in resolving the conflict in such relationships, couples strive to re-establish some closeness and try to resolve the feelings of anger, resentment, and hurt generated by the conflict.

According to Rahim (1983), dividing the conflict resolution styles into five categories, there are two factors that determine how a person will behave toward the other during a conflict; concern for their own needs and concern for the needs of the other. When an individual focus on their own interest, it refers to have concern for their own needs while resolving the conflict. On the other hand, when an individual focus on their partner’s interest, it refers to terminate the conflict by and satisfying the needs of other. According to Rahim, five different conflict resolution styles can be distinguished depending on whether individuals have a high or low interest in their own or the other’s needs. These are given as below: *The dominating style*, with high concern for one’s own needs and low concern for the other’s needs. *The obliging style* with low concern for one’s own needs and high concern for the other’s needs, *the integrating style* with high concern for one’s own and the other’s needs, *the avoiding style* with low concern for one’s own and the other’s needs, and *the compromising style* with the concern for satisfying some of the needs of both one’s own and the other. Individuals who handle their conflict with the dominating style ignore the needs of others to protect their own interests. Contrary to the dominating style, individuals who handle their conflict with the obliging style give priority to the needs of the other person than their own. Individuals who handle their conflict with the avoiding style exhibit behaviors such as avoiding to play an active role in the resolution of the conflict, ignoring the issue, and being reluctant to satisfy the needs of both parts. Those who handle their conflict with the integrating style try to integrate their own view with the view of the other party, and strive to find a common resolution that satisfy the needs of the both parties. In the compromising style, on the other hand, individuals try to find a solution that is somehow

acceptable for oneself and the other by mutually bargaining on the conflict-creating issue and to meet in the middle. Since the compromising style includes bargaining, it can be seen as a viable style in conflicts in the business environment, but it does not seem suitable for the nature of close relationships and marriage.

Gottman et al. (2015) stated that in a conflict, constructive behaviors can be distinguished into two categories: *cognitive problem solving* (defining the problem, making promises to change, meeting in the middle with logic and rationality) and *affective problem solving* (self-disclosure, taking responsibility, empathizing, acknowledgment that the relationship is in good standing by saying “we are fine”). In their studies they showed that re-establishing the emotional intimacy by the use of the affective problem solving instead of the cognitive repairs by the use of logic was more effective in the conflict resolution.

Gottman and Krokoff (1989) observed the interaction of couples and classified positive and negative interactions. While constructive problem solving and compliance are classified as positive interaction type; defensiveness, stubbornness, criticism, and withdrawal from interaction (avoidance) were evaluated as negative interactions. Based on Gottman and Krokoff's classification, Kurdek (1994) found that spouses' responses to conflict include positive problem solving (finding satisfactory solutions for both parties), compliance (unwillingness to defend one's own position), withdrawal (being reluctant to talk about the conflicting issue), and conflict engagement (physical or verbal attack). This classification is also frequently used in the studies conducted on couples in Turkey (eg Özen 2006, Soylu and Kağnıcı 2015).

Discussion

Marital conflicts and the way these conflicts are resolved are closely related to marital adjustment and marital satisfaction. Polat (2006), who considers the conflict tendency as a personal characteristic, found that as individuals' conflict tendencies decrease, their marital adjustment increases. Şendil and Korkut (2008), who consider marital conflicts as a relational state, also found that marital conflict predicts the decrease in marital adjustment of couples. As can be seen, the frequency of conflict in marriage is important for the couples' marital adjustment, but the conflict itself should not be evaluated as positive or negative on its own. Grych and Fincham (1990) underlined that considering marital satisfaction and marital conflict as two opposite concepts can be misleading. There might no open conflict in distressed marriages, whereas couples who are highly satisfied with their marriage may frequently have conflict. It is the reactions of the parties to the conflict that make the conflict positive or negative. Conflict may turn into a destructive competition depending on the reactions of individuals to the conflict situation, or on the contrary, it may lead to the formation of a cooperation that enables the improvement of the relationship (Crawford and Bodine 1996). In other words, how the conflict-creating problem is resolved rather than the frequency of the conflict affects marital satisfaction and adjustment (Erbek et al. 2005). When

the conflict is resolved in a constructive way, beneficial changes occur for the relationship, but if it is handled in a destructive way, it damages the closeness of the spouses and activates the never-ending cycle of tension and conflict (Anderson and Sabatelli 2007). Hence, it is seen that training the skills of the constructive conflict resolution has a key role in many intervention programs aimed at strengthening the resilience of marriage (Jakubowski et al. 2004). As mentioned above, although there are different theoretical classifications for spouses' conflict resolution behaviors in the literature, these approaches generally identify several behaviors exhibited during conflict as either positive or negative resolution style. In intervention programs aimed to improve the marital functioning, spouses are trained to handle their conflict with positive resolution style. For instance, in an intervention program called the Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program (Stanley et al. 1999) it takes an important place to strengthen the spouses' skills at communication and conflict resolution, in addition to another goals such as training spouses to evaluate and share their own expectations regarding the marriage with each other, helping them to develop a common understanding for preferring the option that reflects commitment and strengthening their positive bond. Similarly, another intervention program called the Relationship Enhancement Program (Accordino and Guernsey 2003), which has been defined as an effective intervention program in many studies, aims improvements of the skills for conflict resolution as well as for self-expression, discussion, facilitation (guiding the partner) and being flexible. Some researchers (eg Bodenman et al. 2009) state that marital problem-solving skills have more important consequences on marital satisfaction than the daily communication skills do.

In the literature, there are many empirical studies showing the relationship between marital adjustment and satisfaction and ability to resolve conflicts in marriage. Individuals who strive for the happiness of their spouses and want to improve their relationship tend to resolve the conflict in positive ways (Kaur and Sokhey 2010). The fact that individuals resolve conflicts in positive or negative ways seems to be related to the marital satisfaction of both themselves and their spouses. For example, in one study (Greeff and Bruyne 2000), it was found that the ‘collaborating style’, which is based on the individuals' collaborating with their spouses to find constructively resolutions for the conflict-creating problem, is positively related to both their own marital satisfaction and their partners' marital satisfaction. In other words, when individuals have “us against the problem” approach by cooperating in the resolution of the problem, their marital satisfaction increases. On the other hand, according to the findings of this research, the satisfaction level of individuals using the ‘competitive style’ was the lowest. In other words, as individuals try to solve the problem in the direction of their own demands by ignoring the needs of their spouses, their marital satisfaction decreases. In a study conducted with Mexican couples (Wheeler et al. 2017), it was observed that the couples' solution-oriented approach to conflict was associated with high marital satisfaction. In a study conducted in Turkey by Zara

and Yücel (2017), positive conflict resolution styles of spouses were positively correlated to marital satisfaction, while negative conflict resolution styles were found to be negatively correlated.

In a study conducted by Uğurlu (2003) in Turkey, negative problem-solving style and marital adjustment were negatively correlated. Similarly, Soyulu and Kağnıcı (2015) found that marital adjustment was negatively correlated to destructive behaviors such as raising one's voice during conflict and revealing the spouse's weaknesses. In addition, researchers found that complying with the demands of the spouse during conflict had a positive relationship with marital adjustment, explained this finding with the teaching of obedience to individuals as a valuable virtue in Turkish culture.

It is not possible for the individuals in close relationships to be independent of each other in terms of feelings, thoughts and behaviors. According to the Actor-Partner Interdependence Model (Kenny et al. 2006), the feelings, thoughts and behaviors of people in interdependent relationships can be affected by both their own (actor effect) and their partner's (partner effect) variables regarding their marriage. Thus, the Actor Partner Interdependence Model argues that while trying to understand the behavior of married individuals in the context of marriage, the variables of their spouse should also be taken into account. While investigating the variables that determine the satisfaction of married individuals with their relationships; not only the individuals' own (actor effect) but also their spouse's (partner effect) feelings, thoughts and behaviors were examined in recent years. In a study examining the relationship between marital adjustment and conflict resolution styles of married couples in Turkey (Özen 2006), it was found that there were gender-based differences in terms of actor and partner effects. In this study, it was found that the partner's conflict resolution style predicted marital adjustment of wives, while it found to be not predicted marital adjustment of husbands. In the context of conflict resolution behaviors, the fact that the partner effect was found to be significant on women's marital adjustment but not on men's marital adjustment was explained by the fact that women were raised more relationship-oriented than men in accordance with the traditional gender roles. According to Gilligan (1982), it is taught by socialization processes that men are individualistic and women are relationship-oriented. The members of the society expect boys to reveal their individual differences by distinguishing themselves from their mother during the development process whereas girls are supposed to reveal their similarities with their mother by taking their mother as a role-model. Therefore, it can be concluded that in cultures where traditional gender roles are widely approved, men's individuation and women's need for intimacy is more reinforced. On the other hand, in another study conducted with couples in Turkey (Ünal and Akgün 2020), it was shown that women's self-reported conflict resolution styles did not predict their husbands' marital adjustment, but *women's perception of their husbands' conflict resolution style* did. Accordingly, one can infer that both individuals' and their partners' perceptions regarding their marital conflict determine their marital happiness, regardless of gender. Similarly, in a meta-

analytic study (Falconier et al. 2015) it was found that the conflict resolution behaviors and marital satisfaction were closely related regardless of the context and these relationship was not affected by moderator variables such as age, gender, nationality and the duration of the relationship. The ability to resolve conflict constructively appears to be important for all marriages.

In the meta-analytic study mentioned above (Falconier et al. 2015), which was conducted to provide a holistic explanation of the effect of problem-solving behaviors on marital satisfaction, various behaviors exhibited by individuals to cope with stress derived from a problem in their individual life or in their marital relationship were examined. In the study, *stress communication*, *supportive dyadic coping*, *delegated dyadic coping* and *collaborative&common dyadic coping* are categorized into positive conflict resolution skills. *Stress communication* is defined as the ability of the individuals affected by stress to communicate their negative experience to the other partner and to reveal their own situation. *Stress communication* is considered as a necessary skill for spouses to inform their problem to the other partner and ask for help. *Supportive dyadic coping* is described as emotion-focused or problem-focused support offered to the partner affected by stress. *Delegated dyadic coping* is considered as supporting the stressed partner by taking over their tasks and responsibilities and relieving the partner's stress. *Collaborative&common dyadic coping* refers to conjoint efforts and attempts by both partners to cope with problem. On the other hand *controlling*, *hostile/ambivalent*, *overprotection*, *buffering* and *uninvolved* dyadic coping styles were categorized into negative dyadic coping. *Controlling* refer to behaviors based on domination, such as one partner telling the other what to do. *Hostile dyadic coping* refers to blaming the partner for failing to cope with the problem. *Overprotection* includes individual's attempt to help the other partner even when it is not necessary by underestimating the partner's coping skills. *Buffering* is described as hiding concerns and worries from her partner and yielding to the partner to avoid disagreement. Although *overprotection* and *buffering* coping styles are considered as negative problem-solving behaviors, these two types of negative problem-solving behaviors differ from *hostile dyadic coping* because they have the intention to consider the well-being of the partner. *Uninvolved coping* refers to not noticing the stress of the other partner and being indifferent to the the situation. The meta-analytic study, which consists of the data of 57 research examining the effect of the mentioned coping behaviors on marital satisfaction, showed that positive dyadic coping predicted marital satisfaction better than negative dyadic coping. When the effects of the each individual coping style were examined the best predictors of marital satisfaction are as given: *collaborative&common coping* based on the efforts of both spouses to solve the problem jointly and *supportive coping* based on the attempts to support the other partner in an emotion-focused or problem-focused approach to alleviate his/her stress are the best positive predictors, while the *hostile coping*, which includes blaming the partner for not being able to solve the problem is the best negative predictor. Marital satisfaction increases as spouses cooperate in the resolution of problems, provide support

to the stressed other and avoid hostile attitudes. It was found in this mentioned study that overprotection is the weakest predictor of marital satisfaction among dyadic coping styles. One can infer from this finding that overprotection increase marital satisfaction in some circumstances because it contains the good intentions while it decrease marital satisfaction in other circumstances because it contains underestimation of the partners' coping skills.

Conclusion

In this study, in which the relationship between the conflict resolution styles of the spouses and the marital happiness was examined, the conceptualization studies in the literature of the terms of marital satisfaction and marital adjustment, which are used to evaluate marital happiness, was reviewed. It was emphasized that marital satisfaction is conceptualized as an individual evaluation made depending on the needs while marital adjustment is conceptualized as a interactional quality of the relationship of spouses which has a dynamic nature. Then, the consequences of conflict resolution, which is one of the important factors affecting the adjustment and satisfaction of the spouses in the context of marriage, on the relationship of the couples were summarized. Later, in this review, theories and explanations in the literature that emphasize the importance of how couples deal with the problem causing the conflict and how they communicate with each other during the conflict, not the presence or absence of conflict, were summarized, The common point of these theories is that they define constructive conflict resolution as focusing on the common good by moving away from individual gain-oriented behaviors. It is seen that trying to solve their conflicts by the spouses with the approach of "us against the problem" rather than the "us against each other" approach has a positive effect on marital satisfaction and marital adjustment. In addition, the theoretical explanations that negative behaviors during conflict activate the negative interaction pattern and impair the quality of the relationship between spouses through negative reciprocity processes are supported by empirical studies showing that negative conflict resolution styles cause a decrease in marital satisfaction. Therefore, it seems important to increase the awareness of spouses about various ways to cope with conflict that have constructive and destructive consequences for the relationship and to facilitate them to gain the necessary skills to resolve their conflicts with cooperation.

Authors Contributions: *The authors attest that they have made an important scientific contribution to the study and have assisted with the drafting or revising of the manuscript.*

Peer-review: *Externally peer-reviewed.*

Conflict of Interest: *No conflict of interest was declared by the authors.*

Financial Disclosure: *The authors declared that this study has received no financial support.*

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