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HOW DO YOU DESCRIBE YOUR SPOUSE'S PERSONALITY? ASSOCIATIONS BETWEEN RELATIONSHIP SATISFACTION AND ACCURACY AND BIAS IN MARRIED COUPLES

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to demonstrate the effects of married individuals' accurate and biased estimates of each other's personality traits (actual similarity, assumed similarity, and directional bias) on marital satisfaction. In addition, the mediating roles of partners' tolerance levels in the relationship between personality traits and marital satisfaction were examined. The study used Truth and Bias (T&B) model, which is a direct application of the Actor-Partner Interdependence-Mediation Model (APIMeM), one of the dyadic analysis approaches that allows simultaneous assessment of tracking accuracy and mean-level bias with dyadic data. The sample consisted of 476 heterosexual married couples (*N*= 952 individuals). The Adjective Based Personality Scale (ABPT), the Married Life Satisfaction Scale, and the Tolerance Tendency Scale were used to collect the data. The path analysis showed that the female tolerance played a mediating role between the female biased estimates of the personality traits and the female marital satisfaction. Male partner tolerance played a mediating role between male partners' biased estimates of their wives' personality traits and female and male marital satisfaction. In addition, the female tolerance level was found to play a mediator role in the effect of the male assumed similarity of their wife's personality traits on the female marital satisfaction.

Keywords: Accuracy, bias, marital satisfaction, tolerance, actor–partner interdependence mediation model.

INTRODUCTION

Tuğçe looked at her husband and said she would not do what he asked and continued. "Because he is very manipulative and only wants me to do what he wants." Just as she said this, Mert interjected in a sad tone, "How can you think that I am like that?"

There is hardly a couples therapist who has not heard this kind of dialog between unhappy couples. During sessions, couples often make allusions to each other's character. Many of these innuendos are not accepted by the other partner. Mutual misunderstandings, accusations of not telling the truth or resentments that begin with the phrase "You never knew me" follow.

Do you think partners really lie about each other?
Or do they not really get to know their partner despite all the shared experiences and time spent together?
Or is it all just a misunderstanding?

Although the idea of maintaining the union of marriage is rooted in the long history of humanity, this premise is gradually faltering, and divorce is becoming more acceptable (GALLUP, 2017). According to Eurostat (2023), the statistical office of the European Union that provides data on a wide range of topics, including marriage and divorce statistics, the crude marriage rate in the EU has declined by more than 50% in relative terms since 1964 (8.0 in 1964, 3.2 in 2020), while the divorce rate has doubled (0.8 in 1964, 1.6 in 2020). According to data from the Turkish Statistical Institute (TurkStat, 2018), the crude divorce rate in Turkey was 1.62 in 2010 and 1.75 in 2018, indicating an increase.

As marital problems, unhappy marital experiences, and divorces are increasing couples are seeking psychological support to solve their problems, trying to maintain their marriages despite negative marital experiences and remarrying after divorces. This situation leads experts to believe that people want and need professional support to enhance the quality of their marriage. To provide this support, researchers earlier examined objective indicators such as educational attainment and income levels of spouses (e.g., the Canadian Index of Well-Being), but later focused on subjective indicators that influence marital satisfaction and individual happiness (e.g., Gottman's Sound Relationship House in Marriage Theory; Larson's Marriage Triangle) such as empathy, expectations, emotions, conflict resolution styles, cognitive conflict (Eckstein & Goldman, 2001; Estrada, 2009; Giblin, 2004; Gottman et al, 2002; Larson, 2003; Stanley, 2007).

Cognitive Attributions and Marriage

Cognitive-behavioral family therapy, one of the traditional approaches, considers the partners' cognitive structure, consisting of their thoughts, beliefs, and expectations, as one of the subjective indicators influencing couples' happiness. Previous studies have shown that misperceptions, dysfunctional beliefs, negative attributions, and unrealistic expectations created a conflictual environment between spouses (Ellis, 2003; Fincham, 2003; Gladding, 2015), while partners' positive logical cognitive factors led to a healthier marriage

(Sadeghi et al., 2014). Attribution theory, which examines the cognitive attribution processes people make for themselves and others to make sense of their experiences, assumes people have thoughts they create to explain their behavior. In addition, previous studies revealed that there were relationships between people's attributional styles and marital satisfaction and couple harmony (Ellison et al., 2016; Özer & Cihan-Güngör, 2012).

According to Emotion-Focused Couples Therapy, another approach that examines couples' perceptions of each other and the inferences behind their perceptions, unhappy couples do not hear, listen, or perceive each other accurately (Greenberg & Johnson, 2014). Imago therapy, one of the most influential theories of recent times, also pointed out the concept of unconscious marriage. The concept of unconscious marriage states that there is a pre-existing partner image (representation) in the partners' minds and that the couples' perception of each other is usually nothing more than an illusion far from reality (Hendrix, 2020). This means that the spouses cannot realistically assess each other's personality traits. In a study by Özdemir (2019), which examined the traits of happy couples using the method of pairwise comparative analysis, partners in happy relationships realistically perceived each other's personality (in parallel with the partner's expression), albeit negatively. Özdemir (2019) stated that happy couples described each other's characteristics more accurately, in contrast to what is observed in therapies with unhappy couples. Noting that the most important factor that directly and clearly affects marital satisfaction is couples' personality traits (Bradbury et al., 2000; Caughlin et al., 2000; Dyrenforth, 2010; Keizer & Komter, 2015; Li & Fung, 2011; McKeown et al., 2003), the following questions arise:

How much of partners' perceptions of each other's personalities are illusion, and how much is reality?
How can distorted reality harm or benefit the relationship?

Actual Similarity, Assumed Similarity, and Directional Bias

There has long been a debate in the literature about whether accurate self-perception (e.g., Tuğçe's perception of Mert's personality parallels Mert's perception of his personality) or positively biased self-perception is more functional for the couple's relationship (Colvin et al., 1995; Taylor & Brown, 1988). Research has expanded to examine the roles of partner perception (one's perception of the partner), accuracy, and directional bias (positive illusion and negative illusion) in romantic relationships (Fletcher et al., 2006; Gagne & Lydon, 2004; Luo & Snider, 2009; Neff & Karney, 2005). Studies of positive illusions explained by positive self-evaluation and exaggerated optimism based on cognitive approaches claimed that couples who perceive their partners' behavior as unrealistically biased (positively biased) were happier and more satisfied with their relationship, were a predictor of marital relationship stability and that the relationship was supported by illusions as much as by real elements (Fletcher & Kerr, 2010; Hofmann et al., 2015; Le et al., 2010). These studies suggested that couples' directional biases tended to benefit their marital relationship (Murray et al., 2002; Sergin & Hanzal, 2009). However, other studies argued that maintaining accurate perceptions of one's partner was critical to both perceiver and perceived satisfaction (Lemay vd., 2006; Luo ve Snider, 2009; Koerner ve Fitzpatrick, 2006).

So, could there be another variable that alters the relationship between realistic or directional perceptions of the other's personality and marital satisfaction?

Acceptance of Differences and Tolerance

Ozdemir's (2009) found that partners in happy relationships realistically perceive each other's personalities, and what served them well was that they accepted the perceived characteristics as they were. Ozdemir argued that the accepting and tolerant attitude of the partners enables the creation of the personal space needed in marriage and allows the partners to bring their individual interests and goals into the marriage. He also stated that this makes the spouses feel unconditionally accepted and allows for differentiation in the marriage. Thus, the researcher emphasized the importance of the relationship between the partners' biased or realistic perception of each other's personality traits and their acceptance of differences. According to Bowen (1978), in marriages where members can see and accept personal differences, respect personal boundaries, and where partners can act autonomously, there is differentiation of the self. Many studies examining the relationship between acceptance of differences and marital satisfaction revealed a clear positive correlation between tolerance and marital satisfaction (Kavikondala et al., 2016; Miller et al., 2004; Skowron, 2000).

These two data prompted the researcher to ask the following questions:
Does directional bias or accuracy make people happy? Or is tolerance the secret?

Ozdemir (2019) suggested that the tolerance is an important factor in the effect of partners' biased or correct predictions of each other's personality traits on marital satisfaction. In line with the above data, this study aimed to test and generalize qualitative research findings. There are many studies in the literature examined the relationship between directional bias and accuracy and marital satisfaction (Luo & Snider, 2009; Murray et al., 2000; Murray et al., 2002; Priem et al., 2009; Segrin et al., 2009). However, in the studies, including the meta-analysis conducted by Fletcher and Kerr (2010), which examined similar studies with titles such as accuracy, similarity, positive illusion, negative illusion, and directional bias, no study included tolerance as a variable. Luo and Snider (2009) stated in the recommendations section of their article that it is important to conduct similar studies with samples of different ages and regions, as well as with other variables (e.g., perceived abilities). Accordingly, in the Turkish sample, the study examined the direct relationships between actual similarity of married couples (men and women separately), assumed similarity, and directional bias, as well as the mediating role of partners' tolerance level, which includes respect for differences and acceptance, in the relationship between marital satisfaction and perceptions of each other's personality traits (men and women separately; actual similarity, assumed similarity, and directional bias) using the Actor-Partner Interdependence Mediation Model (APIMeM). While previous studies examined personality traits (Watson et al., 2000), relationship satisfaction (Murray et al., 1999), conflict styles (Segrin et al., 2009), emotional support (Priem et al., 2009), attachment (Alaei et al, 2020), emotional expressions (Luo & Snider, 2009), authenticity in the relationship (Wickham & Bond, 2020) and different variables (e.g., Carson & Kouros, 2022; Kouros & Papp, 2019; LaBuda & Gere, 2021; Pusch et al., 2021), the current study would contribute to the literature by examining the level of

tolerance, which includes acceptance and respect, in terms of the effect of personality traits on marital satisfaction.

METHOD

Participants and Procedure

Participants were 476 heterosexual married couples (*N* = 952 individuals) recruited in 2021 through direct and online data collection from all regions of Turkey. The exclusion criterion was that the partner of a married individual did not participate in the study. Before the data collection, ethical approval was obtained from the Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Committee (no. 2021/271, dated 25.11.2021) of Duzce University. In addition, the participants received informed consent. The couples rated both themselves and their partners on the scales. The mean age of the women and men was reported as 34.84 (SD=8.87) and 38.07 (SD=9.54), respectively. Two hundred and fifteen (45.2%) of female participants had a college degree, 24 (5.1%) had a postgraduate degree, 138 (29.0%) had a high school diploma, and 99 (20.8%) had an elementary school diploma. The majority of male participants, 208 (43.7%), were undergraduates, 38 (8.0%) were postgraduates, 151 (31.7%) were high school graduates, and 79 (16.6%) were elementary school graduates. Participants covered the entire Duvall family life cycle (184 [38.6%] couples married 0-6 years, 134 [28.2%] married 6-15 years, 44 [9.2%] married 15-20 years, 114 [23.9%] married 20 years or more). The average number of children among the 373 couples who had children was 1.6. Most participants reported having a love marriage (17.0% arranged marriage, 82.1% love marriage).

Scales

The Adjective-Based Personality Test (ABPT). ABPT was developed by Bacanlı et al. (2009) based on the five-factor model. The ABPT consists of 40 items based on pairs of antithetic adjectives and scored on a 7-point Likert-like scale. Factor analysis revealed the following five factors: extraversion (e.g., "prefers to be alone/likes social gatherings"), agreeableness (e.g., "vindictive/forgiving"), conscientiousness (e.g., "regular/irregular"), neuroticism (e.g., "quiet/peaceful"), and openness to experience (e.g., "interested in art/not interested in art"). Higher scores reflected higher perceptions of the partner's extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness to experience. The emotional balance items were reverse-scored. Higher scores indicate that the spouse is more emotionally balanced. These five factors were found to explain 52.6% of the total variance of the scale. In the present sample, Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the dimensions of personality ranged from .83 to .84 for men and .83 to .85 for women. Permission to use this scale was obtained from the author.

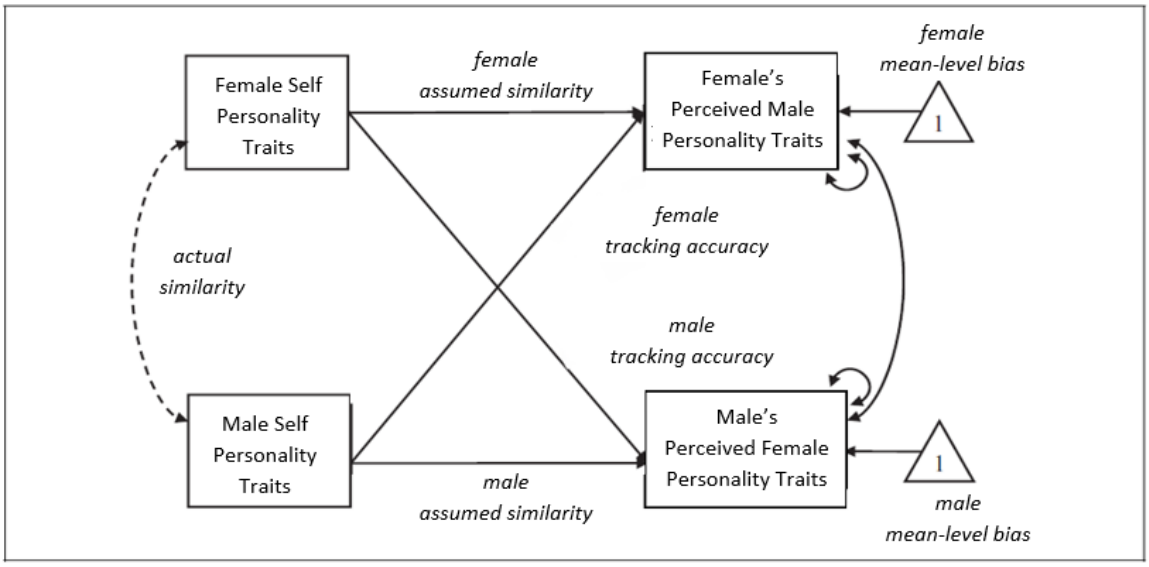
Marital Life Satisfaction Scale. Marital Life Satisfaction Scale was developed by Johnson et al. (2006) to measure satisfaction with married life among married individuals. Çelik (2014) adapted the scale into Turkish. The scale is a 7-point Likert scale and consists of 5 items and one factor. Higher scores reflect spouses' perception of higher satisfaction with married life. Exploratory factor analysis revealed a single-factor structure with 5 items as in the original version of the scale. The result of the confirmatory factor analysis showed that the chi-square was

significant (X^2 = 7.08 *DF*= 5, *p* = 0.21) and the fit indices (RMSEA = .03, AGFI = .97, NFI = .99, NNFI = 1.00, CFI = 1.00, IFI = 1.00, RFI = .99, GFI = .99 and SRMR = .01) were also acceptable (Çelik, 2014). The scale's internal consistency was reported to be .85. In the current sample, Cronbach's alpha satisfaction coefficients were .78 for men and .76 for women. Permission to use this scale was obtained from the author.

Tolerance Tendency Scale. Tolerance Tendency Scale was developed by Çalışkan and Çavuş (2020) to measure the tolerance tendencies of individuals. As a result of exploratory factor analysis, a two-dimensional structure labeled "respect for differences" and "acceptance" was obtained, consisting of ten items determining 55.53% of the total variance of the scale. In this sample, the "other" statements were changed to "partner" depending on the purpose of the study (e.g., "I accept people as they are," "I accept my partner as he/she is"). Confirmatory factor analysis was conducted with the author's permission. Acceptable results were consistent with the original scale (X^2/sd = 4.59, RMSEA = .08, CFI =.93, TLI=.90, and SRMR = .04 for women, X^2/sd = 4.11, RMSEA = .06, CFI =.95, TLI=.93 and SRMR = .03 for men). Total scores were used in the current sample. Cronbach's alpha tolerance tendency coefficients were .88 for women and .89 for men.

Statistical Analysis

The first step of the study examined the direct relationships between actual similarity, assumed similarity, and directional bias. To examine actual similarity, assumed similarity, and directional bias in personality traits, West & Kenny's (2011) Truth and Bias (T&B) model for distinguishable dyads was used, which allows for the simultaneous assessment of tracking accuracy and mean-level bias with dyadic data. The T&B model describes three effects that can be tested simultaneously. The path diagram for the standard T&B model is shown in Figure 1.



Note. *Actual similarity:* Female and male self-personality traits (i.e., Gonzalez & Griffin, 1999; Murray et al., 2002). Assumed similarity: Female self-personality trait and female-perceived male personality traits. Male self-personality traits and male-perceived female personality traits. [Partial correlation was used to detect egocentric values. (i.e., Murray et al., 2002)]. *Directional Bias:* Female-perceived male personality traits and male self-personality traits. Female-perceived male personality traits and male self-personality traits (Stern & West, 2018).

Figure 1. Standard T&B Model

A meta-analysis by Fletcher & Kerr (2010) showed that previous studies used Multilevel Modeling (MLM) to examine accuracy and bias in close relationships. This modeling allows for the examination of accuracy across the entire sample (referred to as the "nomothetic" approach) and also the calculation of accuracy scores for each individual (referred to as the "idiographic" approach). In this study, I followed the multilevel modeling (MLM) procedure used by Stern and West (2018), in which mean-level bias and correlative accuracy were calculated at both the sample and individual levels. In this study, the person making the judgment was called the perceiver. The self-ratings of the perceiving partner were accepted as accurate (Murray et al., 2002). Although not the total score of the personality scale, the total score was used in bias and accuracy studies (e.g. Luo % Snider, 2019).

- ✓ To what extent are the individuals in the sample (men and women) similar overall (similarity)?
- ✓ Overall, to what extent do individuals in the sample (men and women) perceive their spouses to be close to them? (assumed similarity)[1]
- ✓ To what extent do the individuals in the sample (women and men) accurately predict the overall personality traits of their spouses (directional bias).

To analyze the responses to these questions, mean level bias and correlational accuracy were used at the sample level, as per the T&B model (West & Kenn, 2011), as shown in Table 1 (Gonzalez ve Griffin, 1999; Murray et al., 2002). To test the relationship between actual similarity, assumed similarity, and directional bias with marital satisfaction and the mediating role model of tolerance, mean-level bias scores were calculated for each person in the sample, thus creating the required idiographic indices. For the assumed similarity indices, the distance value (e.g., absolute value) was calculated; for directional bias, the underestimate (e.g., negative) or overestimate (e.g., positive) of this value was calculated. The individual-level approach was used because it allows the researcher to use mean-level bias scores in mediation models or to estimate structural models. (Bauer, vd., 2006; Carson & Kouros, 2022; Murray et al., 2002; Luo and Snider, 2009; Wickham & Bond, 2020).

For idiographic indices, a smaller distance value for the assumed similarity implied a greater assumed similarity. For directional bias, values from negative to positive resulted in a scaling from negative bias to positive bias. In the second step, the answer to the research question of whether tolerance toward the partner mediates the relationship between actual similarity, assumed similarity, directional bias, and marital satisfaction were tested using the proposed model. The result of the multiple correlation of the pre-test indices of the model with marital satisfaction and the degree of tolerance is shown in Table 3. The proposed model then showed the unique contributions of actual and assumed actor-partner similarity, directional bias to marital satisfaction, and the mediating effect of tolerance. All five predictors, including the two mediators, were allowed to be correlated, and two error estimates were allowed to be correlated.

[1] Projection is another form of bias that occurs when people project their own experiences or characteristics onto their partner, also referred to as assumed similarity (Fletcher & Kerr, 2010; West & Kenny, 2011).

The path analysis was conducted to test the hypotheses using Mplus software version 7 (Muthén & Muthén, 1998-2012) with 5,000 bootstrapping iterations to test both models. The diagram is shown in Figure 2.

FINDINGS

Preliminary Analysis

In the first phase, the means, standard deviations, significance of differences between means, and correlation values were analyzed at the sample level in accordance with the T&B model (West & Kenny, 2011).

Table 1. Means, Standard Deviations, T-Tests for Independent Groups and Correlations Between Personality Trait Subscales in Relation to the T&B Model

Personality Trait	Actual Similarity			Directional Bias						Assumed Similarity (Egocentric)					
	Male self Female self			Male self Female's perceived male			Female self Male's perceived female			Male self Male's perceived female			Female self Female's perceived male		
	Mean (SD)	*(t)*	(*r*)	Mean (SD)	*(t)*	(*r*)	Mean (SD)	*(t)*	*(r)*	Mean (SD)	*(t)*	*(r)*	Mean (SD)	*(t)*	*(r)*
E	46.23 (9.88) 48.33 (9.25)	3.38**	.03	46.23 (9.88) 45.80 (9.56)	.69	.54**	48.33 (9.25) 47.64 (8.80)	1.18	.57**	46.23 (9.88) 47.64 (8.80)	-2.32*	.25**	48.33 (9.25) 45.80 (9.56)	.413***	.08
A	51.51 (9.17) 51.25 (8.94)	-.44	.10*	51.51 (9.17) 49.99 (9.22)	2.55*	.54**	51.25 (8.94) 50.27 (9.39)	1.65	.55**	51.51 (9.17) 50.27 (9.39)	2.07*	.26**	51.25 (8.94) 49.99 (9.22)	2.13*	.17***
C	39.25 (6.99) 40.93 (6.39)	3.87***	.15**	39.25 (6.99) 38.09 (7.43)	2.49*	.53**	40.93 (6.39) 40.05 (6.75)	2.07*	.45**	39.25 (6.99) 40.05 (6.75)	-1.79	.22**	40.93 (6.39) 38.09 (7.43)	6.33***	.13**
ES	32.13 (7.99) 29.59 (8.27)	-4.83***	.09*	32.13 (7.99) 31.51 (8.45)	1.17	.54**	29.59 (8.27) 30.27 (7.71)	-1.33	.44**	32.13 (7.99) 30.27 (7.71)	3.65***	.22 **	29.59 (8.27) 31.51 (8.45)	-3.54***	.13**
O	38.88 (8.43) 41.68 (7.44)	5.43***	.21**	38.88 (8.43) 37.58 (8.99)	2.29*	.56**	41.68 (7.44) 39.42 (8.03)	4.49***	.56**	38.88 (8.43) 39.42 (8.03)	-1.03	.30**	41.68 (7.44) 37.58 (8.99)	7.66***	.15**
Total	208.01 (29.13) 211.78 (25.57)	2.12*	.24**	208.01 (29.12) 202.97 (29.27)	2.66**	.55**	211.78 (25.57) 207.66 (28.47)	2.35*	.49**	208.01 (25.57) 207.66 (28.47)	.19	.41**	211.78 (29.12) 202.97 (29.27)	4.94***	.34***

Note: **p*<.05, ***p*< .01, ****p*< .001

E: Extraversion, A: Agreeableness, C: Conscientiousness, ES: Emotional Stability, O: Openness

In examining the relationships concerning the similarity effect in the ratings of partners depending on their directional bias scores in Table 1, a relationship at the .01 level was found in all personality dimensions between the ratings perceivers gave to their partners and the ratings that partners gave themselves. For some of the personality dimensions, there was a significant difference at a lower level of .05. For the Openness dimension, there was a significant difference (*p*<.001) in the ratings given by women. These results indicates that, overall, individuals in the sample (men and women) predicted their partners' personality traits with a high degree of accuracy (tracking accuracy) and perceived a small significant difference (directional bias). When analyzing the relationship between the scores given by the partners to their own personalities in the table, overall, they were

similar (men and women), but the lowest correlation ratio was observed in the actual similarity compared to the others. There were also significant differences between the mean scores at a high level (p<.001).

The actual similarity rate (partial correlations) was excluded from the assumed similarity rate of the sample group, revealing the degree of egocentric similarity of the partners. These scores are important because they indicate egocentric values even if they are low. The results of the analysis showed that the trait extraversion had a non-significant relationship with partners' egocentric similarity when actual similarity was excluded (r= .08, p> .05). In other words, when there is no actual similarity between partners, partners do not perceive egocentric similarity with respect to this trait. This result means that if one partner is not extroverted, the other partner will not perceive him or her as egocentrically extroverted. There was also a correlation between the ratings respondents gave for themselves and the ratings they gave for their partners. In addition, the high difference between the means for women (p<.001) suggested that women's perceptions of egocentric similarity were low. When the perceptions of men were examined, the emotional balance scores were found to differ highly significantly in favor of men (p<.001).

Model Fit for the Proposed Model

The study's dependent variables were defined as the marital satisfaction of the wife and husband. The mediating variables were men's and women's tolerance levels, and the independent variables were actual similarity, assumed similarity, and directional bias. The proposed structural models were tested to examine the mediating role of partners' tolerance level on the relationship between partners' biased estimates and marital satisfaction using the MPLUS package program. The evaluation of the goodness of fit indices of the tested models was shown in Table 2 (Çokluk et al., 2016; Hu and Bentler, 1999). The relationships between the variables were shown in Table 3.

Table 2. Structural Model Fit Indices

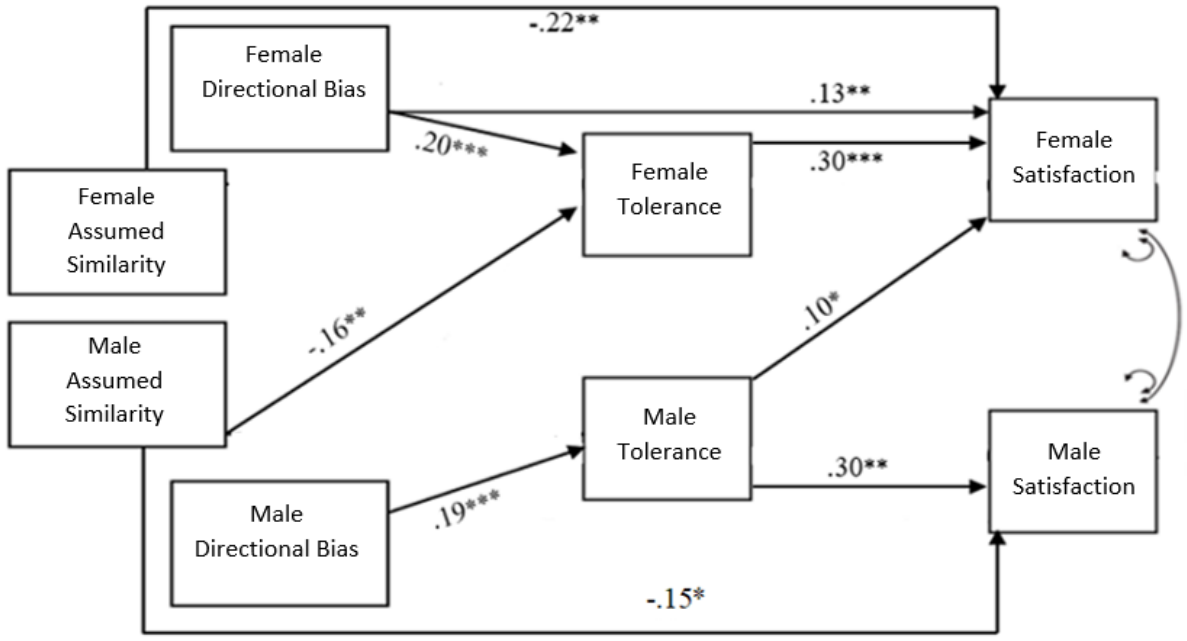
Examined Fit Indices	Perfect Fit	Acceptable Indices
x^2/sd	x^2/sd≤2	4≤x^2/sd≤5
CFI	CFI≥.95	CFI ≥.90
TLI	TLI≥.95	TLI ≥.90
RMSEA	RMSEA≤.06	.00≤RMSEA≤.09
SRMR	SRMR≤.08	.00≤SRMR≤.10

Table 3. Correlations Among the Variables

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Female Satisfaction	-							
2. Male Satisfaction	.33**	-						
3. Female Tolerance	.43**	.19**	-					
4. Male Tolerance	.25**	.33**	.41**	-				
5. Female Directional Bias	.24**	.06	.21**	-.02	-			
6. Male Directional Bias	.06	.15**	.13	.21**	-.20**	-		
7. Female Assumed Similarity	-.36**	-.10*	-.26**	-.12**	-.38**	-.07	-	
8. Male Assumed Similarity	-.20**	-20**	-.24**	-.18**	.03	-.31**	.46**	-
9. Similarity	-.19**	-.07	-.20**	-.11*	.04	-.08	.62**	.61**

Note: *p<.05, **p< .01, ***p< .001

The proposed structural models were tested, including the mediating role of partners' tolerance levels on the relationship between actual similarity, assumed similarity, and directional bias and partners' marital satisfaction. First, the theoretical model was tested. The results showed the following fit indices of the hypothesized model: $\chi 2/df$ = 108.93, p<.05, CFI = .00, TLI = -6.06, RMSEA = .47 and SRMR = .12 Some of the model fit indices were not acceptable, so the model was revised. More specifically, I removed the insignificant direct paths from the model. The fit indices of the selected model were $\chi 2/df$ = .19, p>.05, CFI = 1.000, TLI = 1.000, RMSEA = .000 and SRMR = .005 The selected model fits the data perfectly. The model explained 27% of the variance for female satisfaction and 13% for male satisfaction. The amount of variance explained for the mediator variables of female tolerance and male tolerance was .12 and .06, respectively.



Note: *p<.05, **p< .01, ***p< .001
Standardized values.

Figure 2. The Model of Mediating Role of Partners' Tolerance Level on the Relationship Between Biased Estimates and Partners' Marital Satisfaction

The total effect of the female bias on the female marital satisfaction (β= .19; p <.001) was significant. The effect of the female bias on the female marital satisfaction was partically indirect (β= .06; p <.001) through the female tolerance and partially direct (β= .13; p <.01). In this case, the female tolerance partially mediated the relationship between the female bias and female marital satisfaction. The results also showed that the partner's bias had a significant positive effect on the female tolerance level (β=.20, p<.001) and the female tolerance had a significant positive effect on the female marital satisfaction (β=.30, p<.001). The total effect of male bias on female marital satisfaction (β=.04; p <.05) was significant through male tolerance level (β= .02; p <.05). This indicates the full mediating role of the male tolerance level on the relationship between male bias and female

marital satisfaction. Male bias significantly predicted male tolerance level (*β*= .19; *p* <.000) and male tolerance level significantly predicted female marital satisfaction (*β*= .10; *p* <.05).

The total effect of the male bias on the male marital satisfaction (*β*= .11; *p* <.05) was significant, and the effect of the male bias was totally indirect through male tolerance (*β*= .06; *p* <.01). The male bias did not have a direct significant effect on the male marital satisfaction (*β*= .05; *p*>.05), which showed the full mediating role of the male tolerance. The results revealed that the male bias had a significant positive effect on the male tolerance level (*β*=.19, *p* <.001) and the male tolerance had a significant positive effect on the male marital satisfaction (*β*=.30, *p* <.001).

The total effect of female assumed similarity on female marital satisfaction (*β*= -.25; *p* <.000) was significant. The effect of female assumed similarity on female marital satisfaction was totally direct (*β*= -.22; *p* <.000). Female and male tolerance did not significantly mediate. The female assumed similarity did not have a significant effect on female tolerance (*β*= -.08, *p* >.05), and the female tolerance had a significant positive effect on the female marital satisfaction (*β*=.30, *p* <.000).

The total effect of the male assumed similarity on the female marital satisfaction (*β*= -.05; *p* <.05) was significant. The effect of the male assumed similarity on the female marital satisfaction was totally indirect through female tolerance level (*β*= -.04; *p* <.05). In addition, the male assumed similarity had a significant positive effect on the female tolerance (*β*= -.16, *p* <.05). The total effect of male assumed similarity on male marital satisfaction *(β*= -.17; *p* <.05) was significant. The effect of male assumed similarity on male marital satisfaction was totally direct (*β*=.-15; *p* <.05). Female and male tolerance had no mediating roles (*p* >.05).

CONCLUSION and DISCUSSION

Actual Similarity and Assumed Similarity

One of the most striking results was the actual similarity of the results. The difference between the ratings that the partners reported for themselves on the personality dimensions of conscientiousness, emotional stability, and openness to experience was quite large. While this difference continued in the assumed similarity scores for women (favoring women), it was observed for men only in the dimension of emotional balance. Comparing the tracking accuracy and directional bias of the actual similarity and assumed similarity data at the sample level, it appeared that men perceived themselves as more agreeable and emotionally balanced, whereas their female counterparts were more responsible, open to experience, and extraverted. Apart from agreeableness, a large difference was found in favor of women on the traits of being responsible, openness to experience, and extraversion, while a large difference was found in favor of men on the trait of being emotionally balanced. Interestingly, women and men agreed that men tended to be moderate and calm (emotionally stable), while women tended to be extroverted, responsible, and open to experience. Similar results were observed in a similar study conducted by Jan Gerris et al. (2010).

When tracking accuracy was analyzed, women and men were similar at a weak relational level according to the actual similarity results, while the same similarity was perceived as more relational through the women's window and the men's window (assumed similarity). The study also examined egocentric similarity with partial correlation since it is theoretically known that there is actual similarity within assumed similarity. Consistent with the resulting data, partners perceived each other as more egocentrically similar than they actually were.

The striking difference here was the result of the Extraversion dimension. The results showed that extraversion was not significantly related to the assumed egocentric similarity of the partners *(r*= .8, *p* >.05) when actual similarity was excluded. In other words, when there is no actual similarity, women do not show egocentric similarity with respect to this trait. Similarly, Jan Gerris et al. (2010) found that partners were more successful only in predicting each other's extraversion traits (tracking), i.e., they did not find similar to themselves. Watson et al. (2000) also found that partners did not resemble their spouses on the conscientiousness trait.

The results are consistent with findings in the interpersonal perception literature, which states that individuals use their own attitudes toward the same trait as a reference point when rating the same trait in others (Gange & Lydon, 2004; Kenny & Acitelli, 2001). This demonstrates the influence of one's own personal dynamics when rating one's partner, as in imago therapy, emotion-focused therapy, and internal family systems approaches (Greenberg & Johnson, 2010). Murray et al. (2002) found that people in satisfying relationships perceived similarities that did not exist in reality, and they resembled their partners to themselves. Other studies also showed that perceptions of partner's unwillingness to be unfaithful (Wickham & Bond, 2020), judgments of partners' boredom (Dobston et al., 2020), love and sex lives (Dobston, 2016), and appraisals of depressive symptoms (Carson & Kouros, 2022) were strongly influenced by assumed similarity.

Directional Bias

One of the most important analyses of research was directional bias. The question, "Overall, to what extent do individuals in the sample (men and women) correctly estimate the personal traits of their spouses?" examined the negativity and positivity of men's and women's ratings of each other. In other words, if Tuğçe considered Mert compatible at a value of 4, while Mert considered himself compatible at a value of 6, this would refer to "Tuğçe has a negative bias toward Mert in the dimension of Mert's compatibility." A wide range of literature on marriage, family, and relationships was used to label the values given to the scales with the concept of negative and positive bias. When examining the acceptable traits in marriage, the traits of mildness, responsibility, extroversion, and especially emotional stability had a positive relationship with happy, harmonious, and quality marriages (Akram & Malik, 2011; Barelds, 2005; Brogan et al, 2010; Dyrenforth, 2010; Dwyer, 2005; Erişti, 2010; Harris et al., 2008; Li & Fung, 2011; McKeown et al, 2003; Veldorale; Watson et al, 2004; Zoby, 2005). This scientific evidence showed that high levels of related traits contribute positively to the marital relationship. While introversion is detrimental to a couple identity, openness to experience is controversial (Akram & Malik, 2011; Watson et al., 2004).

When the correlations of women's and men's directional bias scores and the differences between their means (tracking and mean level bias) were analyzed by personality trait, the first striking result was that they predicted each other so correctly that there was no significant difference with respect to the trait extraversion. The study by Jan Gerris et al. (2010) also showed a parallel result. When analyzing the difference between the mean scores, the men perceived themselves as more mild-mannered than their wives perceived them. Concerning the trait responsibility, the striking result was that each perceiving partner perceived their perceived partner as less responsible than they perceived themselves. Concerning emotional stability, the partners correctly predicted each other, and no significant difference was found between the mean scores. When the scores for openness to experience were analyzed, women saw themselves as more open to experience and had high levels of negative bias, while men had low levels of openness to experience. When analyzing partner bias scores at the sample level, both partners were very good at tracing each other's personality traits, but both partners had higher levels of negative bias.

Previous studies' findings are consistent with this study. Watson & Humrichouse (2006) found that perceivers' ratings generally paralleled their partner's self-ratings. In another study by Watson et al. (2000), bias levels were examined among married couples, friends, and lovers. Similarly, the results of this study were found to accurately trace in all dimensions of personality traits of married people. Looking at the analysis results of the current study in detail, the differences between the mean bias scores of men and women were in the dimensions of emotional stability and extraversion. In addition, men only had positive bias toward their spouse in emotional stability. Luo and Snider's (2009) study of newlyweds showed that women tended to rate men more accurately and positively biased than husbands on personality traits.

Actor-Partner Interdependence Mediation Model (APIMeM)

Directional Bias

In the second step, the research question of whether tolerance toward the partner mediates the relationship between actual similarity, assumed similarity, and directional bias and marital satisfaction was tested using the proposed model. The analysis revealed that women's biased estimate had an effect on women's marital satisfaction both directly and through tolerance level, and women's tolerance level was found to play a partial mediating role in the relationship between women's biased estimate and women's marital satisfaction. As indicated by the results of this analysis, women's marital satisfaction increased as their positive bias increases. In addition, women's tolerance level, i.e., women's characteristics such as accepting their spouses as they are, understanding their faults, and respecting their spouses' different opinions, affected their own marital satisfaction both directly and indirectly. Interestingly, the model found no relationship between women's tolerance levels and men's marital satisfaction. Therefore, tolerance provides relationship satisfaction for only the person himself/herself. Moreover, tolerance levels increased significantly as women's positive bias increased, which suggests that positive illusions also positively influence individuals' tolerance levels. Similarly, in qualitative

study, Ozdemir (2019) found that individuals with positive illusions displayed an accepting attitude toward their spouses' personal differences and respected their boundaries.

The male partner's biased estimates were found to significantly predict the male partner's tolerance level, and the male partner's tolerance level was found to significantly predict the female partner's marital satisfaction. The total effect of the male partner's biased estimate on the female partner's marital satisfaction became significant through the male partner's tolerance level. This points out the full mediating role of male partner's tolerance level. As the results revealed, women's marital satisfaction did not directly increase when men's positive biases increased, but positive biases increased men's tolerance. Men's tolerance for women also led women to be more satisfied with their relationships.

It was understood that the male partner's bias had no direct effect on the male partner's marital satisfaction; the indirect effect of the male partner's bias on the male partner's marital satisfaction was through the male partner's tolerance level. This result drew attention to the full mediating role of the male partner's tolerance level. It appeared that men's positive or negative bias level had no effect on women's satisfaction or on themselves, but a high tolerance level increased marital satisfaction. In other words, men's tolerance level is more important for marital satisfaction than whether their prejudice is positive or negative. The male partner's tolerance level was found to have a direct effect on both the female partner's satisfaction and his own satisfaction. The man's tolerance increased both his female partner's satisfaction and his own relationship satisfaction.

The literature and previous studies on marriage and family are consistent with these findings. The literature suggests a relationship between individual attribution style, marital satisfaction, and couple harmony (Özer & Cihan-Güngör, 2012). Negative attributions of responsibility that lead to criticism and blame (negative bias) were found to decrease emotional intimacy between spouses and increase conflict (Ellison et al., 2016). On the other hand, less negative attributions that do not attribute responsibility to the partner for his/her negative behavior and are based on environmental conditions (e.g., he/she did not do it because I asked him/her at the last minute and did not give him/her enough time) are effective in coping and improve the relationship (Fincham et al., 2000). The literature suggested that couples who perceive their spouse's behavior unrealistically positively are happier and more satisfied with their relationship and have less conflict and doubt. This illusion was reflected in reality in the later stages of marriage, and they began to live in idealized relationships (Murray et al., 1996). Similarly, the positive illusion experienced between spouses is a predictor of marital relationship stability (Le et al., 2010), love between spouses is supported by illusions as much as the real elements of the relationship (Fletcher & Kerr, 2010), and positive illusions are motivating factors in marriage (Hofmann et al., 2015). It is understood that spouses with positive bias prefer to see small improvements in their lives rather than remain stuck in negativity. Research also argued that a positive outlook and perception in marriage positively influenced marital satisfaction (Kirby, 2005; Sacco & Phares, 2001). Wessels et al. (2020) found stronger goal love associated with lower discriminative and normative accuracy but stronger positive bias.

Assumed Similarity

The assumed similarity of the female partner was found to have direct effects on the female partner's marital satisfaction. In fact, it can be concluded that women's finding their spouses similar to themselves makes them more satisfied with their relationship. In the effect of assumed male-partner similarity on female-partner marital satisfaction, the full mediating role of female partner tolerance level was noteworthy. For better or worse, when men rate their female partners as similar to themselves, women are more tolerant and more satisfied in these relationships. The point, however, is that men's self-similarity does not directly increase women's satisfaction; women's tolerance levels are the main source of change here. Assumed male partner similarity was found to have a direct effect on male partner marital satisfaction, and tolerance was not found to play a mediating role. This result suggests that men are more satisfied in a relationship when their spouses are similar to them in terms of personality traits.

These findings have drawn attention to studies examining the relationship between personality similarity and marital satisfaction. Luo and Snider (2009) examined the relationships between accuracy, assumed similarity, directional bias, and marital satisfaction. The results showed that accuracy and assumed similarity appeared to be important for both one's own and spouse's marital satisfaction, whereas positive bias was important for one's own marital satisfaction but not for spouse's marital satisfaction. Comparing the present results with Luo and Snider's (2009) study, the analyses showed a parallel result regarding the hypothesized similarity effect. Moreover, in contrast to the previous findings, the results of the present study showed that men's directional bias affected not only men's marital satisfaction but also women's marital satisfaction through tolerance. Murray et al. (2002) examined the relationship between egocentricity and marital satisfaction and found that people in satisfying and stable relationships adapt their partners to themselves by perceiving similarities that are not evident in reality. In other words, in support of the findings of this study, those who perceive their partner as similar to themselves were concluded to have high relationship satisfaction. Like this study, Murray et al. (2002) examined the mediating effect of feeling understood. Egocentrism (assumed similarity) was found to predict greater feelings of being understood, and feelings of being understood mediated the relationship between egocentrism and marital satisfaction. Based on all of these data, an examination of the literature revealed that it is challenging for couples' perceptions of each other to represent a normative truth. Some theoretical approaches supported by experimental research accept that perceptual judgments enter the relationship uncontrollably and that their role in relationship satisfaction is more important (e.g., Emotion-Focused Couples Therapy, Imago Therapy).

Tolerance

The most unique finding of this study was the fully mediating and partially mediating role of tolerance level. In line with the findings, several studies in the literature indicates that relationships are healthier in marriages where spouses accept their personal differences and respect personal boundaries (Kilpatrick et al., 2002;

Lavalekar et al., 2007). Dion (2005) emphasized the importance of developing empathy in marriages to increase emotional closeness in marriages, better manage conflict, and understand spouses' beliefs, feelings, needs, and desires. In addition, empathy between couples was related to couples' communication, problem-solving skills (Litzinger & Gordon, 2005), partners' responsibilities (Van Baardewijk et al., 2009), and levels of forgiveness (Fincham et al., 2002; McNulty, 2008). Larned (2006) examined the effects of empathy on marital satisfaction and found that empathy had a positive effect on marital satisfaction. Like this study, Murray et al. (2002) examined the mediating effect of felt understanding. Egocentrism was found to predict a greater sense of being understood, and felt understanding mediated the relationship between egocentrism and marital satisfaction.

SUGGESTIONS

One of the striking finding of the study was that while the male partner's level of tolerance affected the female partner's increase in marital satisfaction, the female partner's level of tolerance only increased their marital satisfaction. When men tolerate, something changes in their behavior toward women, while women's tolerance only affects their own happiness. This result led the researcher to think there is a big difference between the male partner's tolerance and intolerance in how it reflects to women. In other words, when men are not tolerant, they may exhibit more unaccepting, critical, and accusatory behaviors. Women's intolerance may lead to more introverted unhappiness. This finding presents a new research question for future researchers. What happens when men do not tolerate? What happens when women do not tolerate? How does tolerance affect the relationship in comparison? It can be investigated whether there are variables such as the decreased control behavior, the impact of the conflict, and the support between the man's tolerance level and the increase in the woman's marital satisfaction. Another noteworthy finding was the direct effect of assumed similarity on marital satisfaction. It suggests that men in particular feel more satisfaction in the relationship when they find their partners similar to themselves in terms of personality traits. The researcher argues that the self-representation and the object representation in the theory of intrapsychic mechanisms of Masterson therapy can explain this result. The familiar attachment object, a part of the self, is projected onto the partner, which may result in the partner being likable, perceiving the relationship as more secure, and feeling satisfaction with the relationship (Masterson & Lieberman, 2003). Researchers investigation of this finding with a qualitative study within the context of Masterson therapy is recommended. One of the important findings was that both men and women agreed that men were more moderate and calmer (emotionally stable). This issue can be further explored with qualitative research regarding neuroticism. In addition, examining directional bias and assumed bias associated with different dimensions of personality traits by creating a separate model with marital satisfaction could lead to more detailed results. These results are clinically very important. They can provide initial information about which traits are beneficial and which are detrimental to the relationship in terms of the new objective window that needs to be opened in a therapy setting for partners to get to know each other. In this way, clinicians can keep in mind that the similarity and directional bias on which some relationships are thought to be based should be preserved, consistent with the theory of postmodern therapies (e.g., solution-focused therapy; see: Touching if it works). Moreover, revealing the importance of tolerance, which refers to mental attitudes such as accepting

and respecting one's partner as he or she is in the relationship, sheds light on the fact that the theses of third-wave therapies (e.g., acceptance and commitment therapy, mindfulness therapy) may also have implications for relationships. Apart from all this, it should be considered as a limitation that the study was conducted with 952 subjects who consented to the data collection and the accuracy of the information they provided.

ETHICAL TEXT

"In this article, journal writing rules, publication principles, research and publication ethics rules, journal ethics rules were followed. The author is responsible for any violations that may arise in relation to the article." Ethical approval was obtained from the Duzce University Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Committee with the decision number 2021/271, dated 25.11.2021.

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