

RESEARCH

Examining actor–partner effects between social dominance, relationship power, sexism, and marital quality

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Abstract

Objective: This study aimed to investigate the actor–partner effects of attitudes toward group-based inequality as measured by social dominance orientation (SDO) and marital quality, and the indirect actor–partner effects of SDO on marital quality via ambivalent sexism and partners' perceptions of their own relationship power toward their partner.

Background: Previous research suggests that certain social attitudes play a role in relationship processes. However, it is unclear whether broader views on social inequality could have an effect on partners' marital quality.

Method: Ninety heterosexual married couples in Turkey ($N = 180$) responded via an online survey on SDO, marital quality, relationship power, and ambivalent sexism. Actor–partner interdependence model (APIM) and actor–partner interdependence model of mediation (APIMeM) were conducted to examine the direct and indirect actor–partner effects.

Results: For indirect effects, men's SDO was negatively associated with their marital quality through their relationship power and hostile sexism. No significant indirect effects were found for women. However, women's relationship power was positively and their benevolent sexism was negatively associated with their own and their partners' marital quality.

Author note: We have no known conflict of interest to disclose. Materials and analysis code for this study are available by emailing the corresponding author.

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Conclusion: Our findings help develop a more comprehensive understanding of how the political, social, and personal aspects of our lives are connected with one another.

Implications: Our study points to the importance of exploring the topic of men's and women's views toward social inequality and its effects on their close relationships in clinical practice and relational education.

KEYWORDS

dyadic analysis, marital quality, relationship power, sexism, social dominance orientation

Social inequality can be viewed as a common characteristic of many hierarchical societies (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). Societal issues and processes have been theorized to influence our lives as individuals, as well as couple or family units (Carter & McGoldrick, 1999). Previous research points to social attitudes (i.e., sexism) influencing such relationship processes as participants' perceptions of their partners and relationship expectations (Hammond & Overall, 2013a). Hence, it is important to try and understand if the sociopolitical context and our attitudes toward it may play a role in intimate relationship dynamics. However, attitudes toward group-based inequality as they relate to intimate relationship outcomes have not received adequate attention in the literature. In order to better understand the role that social inequality plays in intimate relationships, we examined social dominance orientation (SDO) in couples, which refers to the extent individuals support or reject group-based inequality and existing hierarchies (Pratto et al., 1994).

First, previous research has shown that views on and attitudes toward social inequality and hierarchies are related to various variables pertaining to close relationships. Findings suggest a link between social power differentials created within hierarchical social structures and SDO among individuals (Aiello et al., 2018). More extensive research done on the role of social and relationship power with couple dynamics highlights the importance of considering power within the couple or marital relationships as it has been linked to sexual desire (Brezsnyak & Whisman, 2004), emotional experiences (Langner & Keltner, 2008), relationship satisfaction (Lennon et al., 2013; Sprecher & Felmlee, 1997), and marital satisfaction (Schwarzwald et al., 2008; Zimler, 2012). These findings, together with the theoretical work from the field of couple and family therapy by Carter and McGoldrick (1999), suggest that couple relationship outcomes may be influenced by social views and attitudes through the measures of partners' perceived power.

Second, aside from perceptions of relationship power among partners, relationship quality may also be influenced by hierarchies within heterosexual relationships. SDO and sexism have a long-established relationship in the literature because sexism is a form of prejudice encompassed by the social dominance theory (Bareket et al., 2018; Russell & Trigg, 2004; Sibley et al., 2007; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). Sexism can be broadly defined as prejudice against women with sexist attitudes ranging from hostile to benevolent (Glick & Fiske, 1996, 2001). Moreover, sexism has also been linked to relationship outcomes such as relationship satisfaction (Casad et al., 2015; Hammond & Overall, 2013b) and relationship quality (Hammond & Overall, 2013a). In summary, SDO is connected to sexism, and sexism, in turn, is associated with relationship outcomes.

All in all, investigating the links between individuals' attitudes toward group-based inequality, the degree to which they can influence their romantic relationships, and how adjusted they are in their relationships can contribute to the way we view and understand couple relationships. Of particular interest is how people in couple relationships interact within

the relationship system and with the social system and how the two domains are related. This study aspired to highlight the importance of examining relationship processes in relation to sociopolitical attitudes and worldviews. Thus, the present study aimed to explore the association between each couple member's SDO on their own and their partner's marital quality, as well as the indirect role that relationship power and ambivalent sexism may play in explaining this association.

Theoretical framework of social dominance theory

Sidanius and Pratto (1999) observed that human societies were inclined to organize in hierarchical social groups defined by power and social status inequalities. Moreover, such a system entails the classification of social groups as dominant or subordinate with a dominant group or groups above the subordinate groups within the social hierarchy. They synthesized views and ideas across multiple theoretical approaches into social dominance theory, which is built upon three main assumptions. First, Sidanius and Pratto (1999) stated that although gender and age systems are likely to take part in the functioning of all societies, arbitrary-set systems will inevitably be formed within societies creating long-lasting economic overabundance. Second, Sidanius and Pratto (1999) posited that most types of oppression and intergroup conflict, such as nationalism, sexism, racism, or homophobia, can be explained as varying exhibitions of a tendency for people to form hierarchical social systems. And third, Sidanius and Pratto (1999) proposed that all hierarchical social systems are impacted by hierarchy-enhancing (supporting hierarchy) and hierarchy-attenuating (supporting equality) influences. In broad terms, the orientation toward the support of the group-based social hierarchy is what the authors refer to as SDO. Given the hierarchical dynamics of a heterosexual relationship, we aimed to examine how partners' views on group-based social hierarchy would interact with relationship outcomes and processes.

SDO and marital quality

In a nutshell, SDO encompasses the preference for ingroups dominating the outgroups (Pratto et al., 1994). SDO is associated with support for myths created to enhance existing hierarchies that justify group inequality and minimize intergroup conflict (Pratto et al., 1994; Sidanius et al., 1992; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). For example, studies have found associations between SDO and tolerance of sexual harassment (Russell & Trigg, 2004), decreased support for interracial dating (Lalonde et al., 2007), parenting practices such as promoting the pursuit of external goals (Duriez et al., 2007), intergenerational transmission of racism (Duriez & Soenens, 2009), and various types of narratives families construct, and views on morality (McAdams et al., 2008).

SDO as operationalized within the theoretical framework of social dominance theory (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999) has not yet been studied with regard to couple relationship outcome variables, but it has been examined from the interpersonal attachment perspective. In such a study, SDO was positively associated with avoidant attachment and SDO and avoidant attachment were indirectly related through the competitive jungle beliefs (Weber & Federico, 2007). Weber and Federico (2007) hypothesized that because avoidant attachment is distinguished by a lack of trust toward and a desire to control others, participants with an avoidant attachment style would tend to view the world as an uncaring competitive jungle and exert control by supporting values such as the ones encompassed by SDO. Although previous findings suggest that SDO indeed does play a role in interpersonal relationships, we have yet to explore how SDO may impact the outcomes of said relationships. This study attempted to understand the

role of SDO in couple relationships and the quality of the relationship. Therefore, we hypothesized that both partners' SDO would have a direct effect on their own as well as their partner's marital quality.

SDO and relationship power

On the whole, relationship power has been defined as having the potential to influence a change in the other partner's behavior or the likelihood of the other partner behaving in a certain way (Cromwell & Olson, 1975; Dunbar, 2000; French & Raven, 1959; Rollins & Bahr, 1976). This study adapted Cromwell and Olson's (1975) definition of power both in theory and measurement because it encompasses a more comprehensive view of power as a process rather than only an outcome. As pointed out by several researchers, power in personal relationships is dynamic, dyadic, and subject to change (Dunbar, 2000; Langner & Keltner, 2008; Rollins & Bahr, 1976). It is a characteristic of the relationship rather than of the individuals within the relationship (Dunbar, 2000; Rollins & Bahr, 1976). Cromwell and Olson's (1975) definition of power addresses power in terms of its bases (i.e., resources in the relationship), processes (i.e., interactions and communication patterns that occur between partners in making a decision and influencing one another), and outcomes (i.e., discussions and interactions the power processes result in), which factors in relational dynamics of power.

Although power has not been studied with SDO yet, we can attempt to make inferences based on the studies on SDO and variables that may also include power dynamics, such as the use of power tactics and tolerance of sexual harassment. Russell and Trigg (2004) found that SDO positively correlated with sexual harassment tolerance. Tolerance of sexual harassment together with sexism can be looked at from the perspective of intergroup and interpersonal power dynamics with groups that are more dominant reporting hierarchy-enhancing beliefs. Hence, it can be hypothesized that SDO is related to how much power individuals have in their couple relationships.

Furthermore, when considering relationships with a clearer hierarchical structure (i.e., supervisor and supervisee) harsh power tactics were found to be associated with increased SDO, whereas the opposite relationship was observed with soft power tactics (Aiello et al., 2018). Moreover, such an association was strongest for supervisors in the same study. Given this dearth in the literature examining SDO and relational power, the present research aims to examine whether a similar relationship between SDO and power can be found in relationships that are, perhaps, not so overtly hierarchical. Hence, we hypothesized that both partners' SDO would have a direct effect on their own and their partner's relationship power.

Relationship power and marital quality

When examined with relationship outcomes, power has been defined differently across various studies, which, ultimately, affected the direction of the relationship between power and relationship outcome variables. For instance, whereas Zimler (2012) found that relationship power was positively related to marital satisfaction, Lennon et al. (2013) discovered an opposite trend. As previously mentioned, the conceptualization of power could account for these conflicting findings. Zimler (2012) defined power in terms of how much influence partners have within the relationship and Lennon et al. (2013) conceptualized power in terms of how powerful individuals feel when displaying dominance or control over their partner.

Moreover, researchers took different approaches regarding the assessment of each partner's balance in relation to one another. Sprecher and Felmlee (1997) looked at power as a

continuum, with one of the partners having more power in the relationship at both ends, and found that equal power was associated with the highest levels of relationship satisfaction. Breznsnyak and Whisman (2004) examined the balance between desired and perceived power and found that increased congruence between the two was positively associated with marital satisfaction. In contrast, Langner and Keltner (2008) employed a dyadic operationalization of power examining the actor and partner effects. They found that exercising one's own power toward one's partner was associated with positive emotions (an actor effect). However, experiencing such power onto one's self elicited negative emotional experiences (Langner & Keltner, 2008). Furthermore, it is important to keep in mind that the association between power and relationship outcome variables such as marital quality or relationship or marital satisfaction may differ among non-WEIRD (Western, educated, industrialized, rich, and democratic) samples (Henrich et al., 2010), particularly among couples with partners holding more traditional gender role ideologies (Schwarzwald et al., 2008). In our study, we hypothesized that first, both partners' relationship power would have a direct effect on their own and their partner's marital quality. Second, we expected an indirect effect of partners' SDO on their own and their partner's marital quality through their own and their partner's relationship power.

SDO, ambivalent sexism, and marital quality

Sexism, like other forms of prejudice, is said to have changed over time with researchers attempting to distinguish between old-fashioned and contemporary forms of prejudice, namely modern sexism, neosexism, and ambivalent sexism (Becker & Sibley, 2016; Swim et al., 1995; Tougas et al., 1995). Becker and Sibley (2016) pointed out that old-fashioned sexist beliefs and attitudes mainly included endorsing negative stereotypes about women (i.e., regarding women as less competent), support for traditional gender roles (e.g., motherhood as women's main purpose in life), and discriminatory treatment based on gender. In contrast, Swim et al.'s (1995) modern sexism and Tougas et al.'s (1995) neosexism are characterized by tendencies to consider discrimination against women a problem of the past, oppose women's demands, and oppose policies aimed at supporting women in the spheres of education and career (i.e., discontent against such "special favors"). Taking these arguments into account, in this study we examined sexism from Glick and Fiske's (1996, 2001) theoretical perspective, which defines sexism as a form of prejudice distinguished by ambivalence toward women and not solely by antipathy. They argued that although sexism has traditionally been considered an expression of hostility toward women, it is, in fact, more of a multidimensional concept (Glick & Fiske, 1996, 2001; Sakalli-Uğurlu et al., 2010). Glick and Fiske's (1996, 2001) conceptualization of ambivalent sexism includes two types of sexist attitudes: hostile and benevolent. Hostile sexism is mainly defined by sexist antipathy whereas benevolent sexism is defined by positive stereotypes about women and constraining a woman's role to the home environment.

As previously mentioned, Sidanius and Pratto (1999) posited that sexism is one of the forms of group-based inequalities that are included in the theoretical perspective of SDO. As such, several studies have found a positive relationship between sexism and SDO (Bareket et al., 2018; Pratto et al., 1994; Russell & Trigg, 2004; Sibley et al., 2007). Furthermore, sexism has been associated with relationship outcome variables such as satisfaction and quality. For example, Casad et al. (2015) found that married women's benevolent sexism predicted their lower marital satisfaction and relationship confidence. Casad et al. (2015) posited that endorsement of benevolent sexism promotes the unrealistic expectation that women are to be revered, which may lead to lower marital satisfaction if those expectations are not met by the partner.

Similarly, Hammond and Overall (2013b) found that endorsement of benevolent sexism by women was related to sharper declines in their relationship satisfaction when they experienced relationship difficulties and that these effects were increased with long-term relationships.

Hammond and Overall (2013b) also suggested that these patterns could be explained by the expectations proposed by benevolent sexism not being fulfilled. When it comes to hostile sexism, Hammond and Overall (2013a) reported that men's endorsement of hostile sexism was associated with lower relationship quality and more negative perceptions of their partners' behavior as well as feelings of being manipulated by their partner. Hammond and Overall (2013a) suggested that men who endorse hostile sexism may behave more negatively toward women in close relationships, and therefore, be less satisfied in the relationships precisely because their antipathetic attitudes toward women affect their perceptions of their partners. And last, men who highly endorsed hostile sexism were less likely to be open to their partner's perspective and influence and more likely to engage in hostile communication (Overall et al., 2011). Taken together, all these findings seem to suggest that attitudes toward social outgroups and group-based hierarchies are, indeed, related to relationship processes and outcomes. As such, the current research attempted to understand the role of SDO in couples' marital quality through ambivalent sexism. We hypothesized that (a) both partners' SDO would have a direct effect on their own and their partner's ambivalent sexism, and (b) both partners' ambivalent sexism would have a direct effect on their own and their partner's marital quality. Moreover, we expected an indirect effect of partners' SDO on their own and their partner's marital quality through their own and their partner's ambivalent sexism.

The current study

This study aimed to investigate the association between attitudes toward group-based inequality measured by SDO and marital quality among heterosexual married couples. The indirect links between SDO and marital quality were examined through measures of ambivalent sexism and partners' perceptions of their own relationship power toward their partner. Researchers addressing similar research topics suggested examining variables from social and personal relationship contexts on a dyadic basis to better understand the perspective and influences of both partners (Casad et al., 2015; Chen et al., 2009). The current research aimed to explore (a) direct actor and partner effects of SDO on marital quality, (b) indirect actor and partner effects of SDO on marital quality through relationship power, and (c) indirect actor and partner effects of SDO on marital quality through ambivalent sexism.

METHOD

Participants

The sample of the study was comprised of 90 married couples from Turkey. The inclusion criteria were as follows: being married for at least 2 years, having children older than the age of 2 (if the couple had children), and having both partners participate in the study because the purpose of the study required dyadic matched data. These inclusion criteria had been set because our study aimed to examine long-term relationships and not relationships in their initial stages, as well as partners who have not newly become parents because couples go through an adjustment stage during such periods of transition. This could influence the measured variables considering, for instance, that partners who newly became parents tend to rate their perceptions on household-related variables differently (Perales et al., 2015). Participants' ages ranged from 24 to 72 with an average age of 41.08 ($SD = 9.95$). On average, couples were married for 15 years ($SD = 9.71$) and had 1.66 children ($SD = 0.76$). For more detailed demographic information see Table 1.

TABLE 1 Demographic information

| | Women | | Men | | All participants | |
|-------------------------------|----------|-----------|----------|-----------|------------------|-----------|
| | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> |
| Age | 39.1 | 9.16 | 43.1 | 10.39 | 41.1 | 9.95 |
| Marriage duration (years) | 15.1 | 9.91 | 14.9 | 9.56 | 15.0 | 9.71 |
| Cohabitation duration (years) | 15.2 | 9.83 | 15.4 | 10.13 | 15.3 | 9.95 |
| Education level (years) | 13 | 4.53 | 13.9 | 4.61 | 13.5 | 4.59 |
| Age of children | | | | | | |
| 1st child | 14.8 | 9.63 | 15.3 | 10.24 | 15.1 | 9.91 |
| 2nd child | 13.4 | 9.25 | 14.1 | 9.68 | 13.8 | 9.42 |
| 3rd child | 8.5 | 9.15 | 9 | 9.61 | 8.7 | 9.08 |
| 4th child | 5.5 | 0.71 | 5.5 | 0.71 | 5.5 | .58 |
| | <i>f</i> | % | <i>f</i> | % | <i>f</i> | % |
| Cohabiting with spouse | | | | | | |
| Yes | 88 | 97.8 | 88 | 97.8 | 176 | 97.8 |
| No | 2 | 2.2 | 2 | 2.2 | 4 | 2.2 |
| Number of children | | | | | | |
| 1 child | 39 | 43.3 | 37 | 41.1 | 76 | 42.2 |
| 2 children | 30 | 33.3 | 33 | 36.7 | 63 | 35 |
| 3 children | 8 | 8.9 | 7 | 7.8 | 15 | 8.3 |
| 4 children | 2 | 2.2 | 2 | 2.2 | 4 | 2.2 |

Procedure

Participants were recruited through the snowball sampling method and announcements were distributed digitally. The study was approved by the Ozyegin University's Human Research Ethics Board. The data were collected between the dates of October 2019 to March 2020. The online survey started with the informed consent form. Participants were provided with an option to give consent and proceed with the survey of their own volition. Participants were asked to provide some personal information such as age and sex, but names were not taken. Participant responses have been matched in pairs with their spouse. To provide anonymity and confidentiality, participants were asked to enter a pseudonym consisting of a word and a three-digit number (e.g., istanbul253) that would be used by both spouses. Last, participants were given the option to participate in a gift card prize draw as compensation in this study.

Measures

SDO scale

SDO was assessed using the 16-item SDO scale developed by Pratto et al. (1994). Participants were asked to rate how strongly they agree or disagree with the items, such as "It's OK if some groups have more of a chance in life than others" and "Group equality should be our ideal," on a scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). The higher scores on the SDO scale indicated a higher SDO whereas the lower scores indicated a lower SDO. The scale has been adapted to Turkish by Karacanta (2002). The reliability analysis conducted in this study showed Cronbach's coefficient alpha of .90 for women and .85 for men.

Couple Power Scale

Relationship power was assessed using the Couple Power Scale (CPS) developed by Day et al. (as cited in Kaynak-Malatyali, 2014) as part of the Flourishing Families Project at Brigham Young University and adapted to Turkish by Kaynak-Malatyali (2014). The scale has been constructed based on existing scales measuring couple relationship power. The participants' responses vary from 1 (*strongly agree*) to 5 (*strongly disagree*) on a 5-point Likert scale. The scale consists of 15 items in total. Higher scores on the scale indicated higher perceived power of individuals toward their partner or spouse. The power processes subscale consists of such items as "My partner does not listen to me." The power outcomes subscale consists of such items as "When it comes to money, my partner's opinion usually wins out." In this study, Cronbach's coefficient alpha of the total scale was .92 and .88 for the power processes subscale for both men and women. For the power outcomes subscale, Cronbach's coefficient alpha was .86 for women and .85 for men.

Marital quality

Marital quality was assessed using the Revised Dyadic Adjustment Scale (RDAS; Busby et al., 1995). The Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS) was originally developed by Spanier (1976) as a 32-item scale to measure the dyadic adjustment of romantic partners. Busby et al. (1995) revised the DAS, reducing it to 14 items. The RDAS contains three of the original four subscales. The dyadic consensus subscale assesses consensus on such matters as "sex relations" and "making major decisions." The dyadic cohesion subscale includes such items as "How often do you have a stimulating exchange of ideas?" and "How often do you work together on a project?" The dyadic satisfaction subscale includes items such as "How often do you discuss terminating your relationship?" or "Do you ever regret that you married?" The RDAS was adapted to Turkish by Gündoğdu (2007). In this study, Cronbach's coefficient alpha for the total scale was .89 for women and .88 for men. Moreover, Cronbach's coefficient alpha values for the dyadic consensus, dyadic satisfaction, and dyadic cohesion subscales were .86, .79, and .78 for women and .83, .80, and .80 for men, respectively.

Ambivalent sexism inventory

Sexist attitudes toward women were assessed using the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (ASI) developed by Glick and Fiske (1996). The scale measures two sets of sexist attitudes that together compose ambivalent sexism: hostile sexism and benevolent sexism. The ASI consists of 22 items total with 11-item hostile sexism and benevolent sexism subscales. Participants rate how strongly they agree or disagree with the items such as "Women should be cherished and protected by men" and "Feminists are making unreasonable demands of men" on a scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 6 (*strongly agree*). Higher scores on the ASI scale indicated higher levels of ambivalent sexism and the scale contained no reverse-coded items. The 22-item scale had been adapted to Turkish by Sakallı-Uğurlu (2002). In this study, Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficients for the hostile sexism subscale, benevolent sexism subscale, and the total scale, respectively, were .81, .91, and .88 for women and .91, .90, and .90 for men.

Demographic information form

Participants were asked to indicate their age, sex, duration of their marriage, duration of cohabitation if they are cohabitating, education level, family income level, individual income level,

the city they currently live in, occupation, employment status, number of children if they have children, age of each child, whether the couple lives together, and whether they live with any other people.

Data analysis

The current study aimed to examine the actor and partner effects in the association between SDO and marital quality. In other words, the interdependence between the scores of a pair of individuals, in which a person's attitudes, behavior, cognition, and/or emotions can affect their own (actor effect) or their partner's (partner effect) behavior, emotions, cognition, or attitudes (Cook & Kenny, 2005). Hence, as the first step, the saturated actor–partner interdependence model (APIM; Kashy & Kenny, 2000), a model for analyzing dyadic or matched data, was estimated using observed variables. In addition to studying the direct association between SDO and marital quality, we investigated the indirect actor and partner effects in this association via relationship power and ambivalent sexism. The actor–partner interdependence model of mediation (APIMeM; Ledermann et al., 2011) is a model used to assess mediation in dyadic data analyses. APIMeM analyses with relationship power, benevolent sexism, and hostile sexism were identified as indirect effect terms.

The preliminary analyses were conducted on IBM SPSS 23.0. Two couples were excluded because extensive amounts of data were missing from one of the partners' responses with response rates of 2% and 18% for each couple excluded. In total, 2.5% of all values were missing in the final sample. No one variable was missing more than 3.3% of all data entries. APIM and APIMeM analyses were conducted using the Mplus 7.0 software and path analysis (Cook & Kenny, 2005; Fitzpatrick et al., 2016; Muthén & Muthén, 2017).

RESULTS

Paired samples *t* tests were conducted to examine differences in SDO, relationship power, marital quality, and ambivalent sexism between men and women. The difference between men and women on SDO was not statistically significant. Similarly, no statistically significant difference was found between women's and men's relationship power scores. No statistically significant difference was found between women's and men's marital quality. However, a statistically significant difference was found when ambivalent sexism scores were compared, $t(88) = -2.557$, $p = .012$, $d = 0.28$, with men scoring higher ($M = 3.85$, $SD = 0.86$) than women ($M = 3.61$, $SD = 0.86$).

Furthermore, because APIM mediation models were to be run separately for hostile and benevolent sexism subscales of ambivalent sexism, the differences between husbands and wives on these two subscales were examined as well. The results revealed a statistically significant difference for hostile sexism, $t(88) = -4.935$, $p = .000$, $d = 0.55$, with men ($M = 3.71$, $SD = 1.11$) scoring higher than women ($M = 3.15$, $SD = 0.90$). However, the paired samples *t* test for benevolent sexism did not reveal a statistically significant difference with women and men scoring similarly. Nonindependence of observations of the main variables was assessed using the Pearson product–moment correlation. See Table 2 for the correlation coefficients of men's and women's scores on the studied variables.

APIM: Examining the dyadic relations in SDO and marital quality

Men's actor effect of their own SDO on their own marital quality was significant ($\beta = -.26$, $p = .014$).¹ Hence, men's own SDO was negatively related to their own marital quality.

Women’s actor effect and men’s partner effect as well as women’s partner effect were not significant. The standardized effect estimates for this model can be viewed in Figure 1a.

APIMeM with relationship power as an indirect effect term

Several statistically significant direct effects were found in this model. Actor effects of SDO were significantly related to relationship power for both women and men ($\beta = -.28, p = .006$; $\beta = -.23, p = .045$, respectively). Women’s own relationship power was positively related to their own marital quality ($\beta = .61, p < .001$). Similarly, men’s own relationship power was positively related to their own marital quality ($\beta = .53, p < .001$). Furthermore, women’s own relationship power was positively related to their partners’ marital quality ($\beta = .35, p < .001$). Men’s own relationship power was also related to their partners’ marital quality ($\beta = .28, p = .007$). Finally, women’s own SDO was positively related to their partners’ marital quality ($\beta = .22, p = .003$). Figure 1b contains the standardized direct estimates for the current model.

Because the results of basic APIM revealed only one significant effect (men’s actor effect), the indirect effects for the remaining paths (men’s partner effect, women’s actor and partner effects) were not estimated. Within the estimated path, the indirect actor–actor effect of men’s own SDO on their own marital quality through their own relationship power was significant ($\beta = -.12, p = .031$, 95% confidence interval [CI] [-0.154, -0.008]). However, the indirect partner–partner effect of men’s own SDO on their own marital quality through their wives’ relationship power was not significant.

APIMeM with benevolent sexism as an indirect effect term

Several statistically significant direct effects were found in the model estimation. Women’s own SDO was positively related to their own benevolent sexism ($\beta = .31, p = .003$). Moreover, women’s own benevolent sexism was significantly negatively related to their own marital quality ($\beta = -.24, p = .019$), as well as their husbands’ marital quality ($\beta = -.35, p = .001$). Finally,

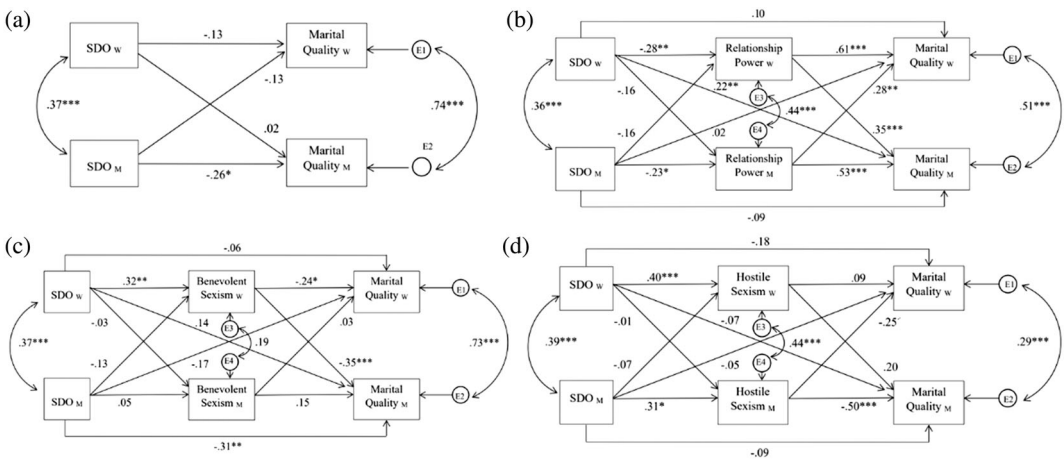


FIGURE 1 Estimated actor–partner interdependence model of mediation models *Note.* SDO = social dominance orientation. Subscript W refers to women, subscript M refers to men * $p < .05$, two-tailed. ** $p < .01$, two-tailed. *** $p < .001$, two-tailed.

men's own SDO was negatively related to their own marital quality ($\beta = -.31, p = .009$). Men's actor–actor and partner–partner effects were not significant. See Figure 1c for standardized direct effect estimates in this model.

APIMeM with hostile sexism as an indirect effect term

In this model estimation, several statistically significant direct effects were found. Women's own SDO was positively related to their own hostile sexism ($\beta = .40, p < .001$). Similarly, men's own SDO was positively related to their own hostile sexism ($\beta = .31, p = .021$). Moreover, men's own hostile sexism was negatively related to their own marital quality ($\beta = -.50, p < .001$). For the standardized direct effect estimates, see Figure 1d.

Although men's partner–partner effect was not significant, men's actor–actor indirect effect was significant ($\beta = -.16, p = .05, 95\% \text{ CI } [-0.350, -0.030]$). In other words, men's own SDO was negatively indirectly related to men's own marital quality through their own hostile sexism.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study further highlight the importance of the social and political contexts when examining the dynamics of personal relationships. They help develop a more comprehensive picture of how various systems (political, social, familial, and personal) interact with one another. This study demonstrated a link between the family unit (e.g., spouses) and the stressors in larger society system (e.g., group-based inequality) by looking into the association between marital quality of spouses, their relationship power, attitudes toward sexism, and group-based inequality (Carter & McGoldrick, 1999). Carter and McGoldrick (1999) pointed out that vertical stressors in the larger society, such as classism, racism, homophobia, ageism, and sexism may have an impact on the functioning of the smaller systems like family units and individuals. We assessed the impact of stressors within the larger society (measured by SDO) on marital quality (measured by dyadic adjustment; Carter & McGoldrick, 1999). For men in Turkey, their own SDO appeared to be a stressor because it negatively influenced their own marital quality through their own hostile sexism as well as their own relationship power. This could mean that for men in Turkey, supporting hierarchy-enhancing attitudes is associated with decreased quality of their marital relationship, which will be further discussed.

As previously mentioned, SDO has not been studied in relation to marital quality or relationship satisfaction. However, perhaps some insight into the role of SDO in couples' marital quality can be gained from studies that focused on ambivalent sexism instead. Sexism is incorporated into the social dominance theory framework and has been positively linked to SDO in several studies (Bareket et al., 2018; Russell & Trigg, 2004; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). Researchers studying sexism in relation to marital quality or relationship satisfaction found that they were negatively related to traditionally masculine gender norms for men (Burn & Ward, 2005; Campbell & Snow, 1992). With these findings in mind, men's own support of group-based hierarchies being related to lower marital adjustment in this study draws a parallel with findings on gender role conflict and conformity to masculine norms (Burn & Ward, 2005; Campbell & Snow, 1992). If we assume that heterosexual marriage is a system that supports traditional patriarchal hierarchy, then for men in Turkey, supporting such hierarchical norms may restrict their role in their marital relationships to more traditionally masculine, and therefore, decrease the quality of their marriage.

To expand upon the direct effect of SDO on marital quality, let us examine the indirect effects of men's SDO on their own marital quality through their own relationship power and hostile sexism. In the relationship power model, direct actor and partner effects of relationship

power on marital quality were positive and statistically significant for both men and women. The positive actor effects go in line with some of the findings in the literature (Brezsnyak & Whisman, 2004; Langner & Keltner, 2008; Zimble, 2012). A contradictory finding was reported by Lennon et al. (2013), where power was negatively associated with relationship satisfaction and commitment. This particular inconsistency can be explained by the operationalization of the measure of power. When power was conceptualized in terms of influence within the relationship, similarly to the conceptualization of power in this study, the association between power and relationship satisfaction was in the positive direction (Brezsnyak & Whisman, 2004; Langner & Keltner, 2008; Zimble, 2012). However, when defined in terms of interpersonal or interactional dominance, power was negatively related to relationship satisfaction (Lennon et al., 2013). The positive partner effects of relationship power on marital quality can be discussed in terms of Gottman et al.'s (1998) concept of accepting their partner's influence. As in our study, Gottman et al. (1998) examined relationship power in terms of the extent of power toward one's partner as perceived by individuals. In other words, a person rated how much they felt their partner accepted their input in relationship processes or outcomes. According to Gottman et al.'s (1998) findings for men, refusing to accept their wives' influence predicted divorce. The results of our study revealed a statistically significant indirect actor-actor effect of men's own SDO on their own marital quality through their own relationship power. Together with Gottman et al.'s (1998) finding, this suggests that men who are more willing to accept influence from their wives are more likely to be in more stable and, perhaps, happy marriages. Keeping Gottman et al.'s (1998) findings in mind, it can be assumed that Turkish men are more adjusted in their marriage when their wives perceive that they (husbands) are more open to their wives' influence. Additionally, statistically significant direct links were found between SDO and relationship power as well as relationship power and marital quality. For both men and women in Turkey, direct actor effects were found, in which SDO was negatively associated with relationship power. Because SDO and power in close relationships have not yet been examined in relation to one another, we attempted to draw inferences from similar findings relating to interpersonal power between supervisors and supervisees (Aiello et al., 2018). Our study aimed to explore whether a similar association would be observed between SDO and power in relationships that are, perhaps, not so overtly hierarchical. And inferring from Gottman et al.'s (1998) work, we can state that for both spouses having a higher SDO goes along with their influences in the relationship being less accepted by their spouse, and for men in Turkey, this may lead to reporting lower quality in their marriage.

In the benevolent sexism indirect effect model, women's own SDO was positively associated with their own benevolent sexism (direct actor effect). Similarly, in the hostile sexism model, positive direct actor effects of SDO on hostile sexism were found for both men and women. These findings are not surprising when considering the findings in the literature. As previously mentioned, several researchers have established a positive relationship between SDO and sexism (Bareket et al., 2018; Russell & Trigg, 2004; Sibley et al., 2007; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). When it comes to the relationship between ambivalent sexism and marital quality, all significant effects are in the negative direction for both benevolent and hostile sexism models. For instance, women's benevolent sexism negatively predicted not only their own but also their husbands' marital quality. Findings in the literature seem to support our findings on the association between ambivalent sexism and marital quality for women, with this association appearing more pronounced with increased relationship duration (Casad et al., 2015; Hammond & Overall, 2013b). This suggests that women in Turkey who are in longer-term relationships and highly endorse the benevolent sexist notions such as reverence for women and valuing women based on qualities like warmth and sensitivity, place more importance on having their expectations (proposed by benevolent sexist notions) met and are, therefore, more dissatisfied at times when they are not (Glick & Fiske, 1996; Hammond & Overall, 2013b).

Although women's hostile sexism was not associated with their husbands' marital quality, men's own hostile sexism predicted their own marital quality negatively and in line with findings in the literature (Hammond & Overall, 2013a; Overall et al., 2011). Moreover, men's endorsement of hostile sexism was also associated with being less open to their partner's influence, more likely to engage in hostile communication, and feeling manipulated by their partner (Hammond & Overall, 2013a; Overall et al., 2011). These findings coincide with the conceptualization of hostile sexism as a concern that women seek to gain power over men and may attempt to manipulate men using their sexuality (Glick & Fiske, 1996). According to Sibley et al. (2007), hostile sexism is motivated by group-based dominance and given that within the patriarchal system, for men—women are the outgroup—the belief that men are supposed to overpower women may stem from the group-based dominance encompassed by SDO. Together, these findings help make sense of the indirect effect of men's SDO on their own marital quality through their own endorsement of hostile sexism. It seems that for men in Turkey, endorsement of group-based hierarchies is related to endorsement of hostile sexism. Because hostile sexism is characterized by mistrust toward women due to the assumption that they have the intention to manipulate and overpower men using intimate relationships and sexuality, it would not be entirely surprising to assume that for men in Turkey, endorsing SDO and hostile sexism would contribute to difficulties in men's adjustment in marriage or close relationships.

Limitations and future research

First and foremost, when interpreting the findings in this study causal claims cannot be made due to the correlational nature of the findings. Although this study did find direct and indirect links between SDO and marital quality, conclusions as to which variable causes a change in which variable cannot be made definitively. Therefore, future research should look into the longitudinal relationship between the main variables in this study.

Second, these findings may not be generalizable to populations outside of Turkey. Chen et al. (2009) attest that gender-role and sexist attitudes may differ from country to country and from culture to culture. In their study examining power-related gender-role ideology and ambivalent sexism, differences in both variables were identified among participants from the United States and China. Our study was conducted with a sample of heterosexual married couples, and the implications of the findings are, therefore, limited to this demographic unless studied with more diverse populations in the future. Third, social desirability bias may come into play considering the personal nature of the questions about relationship processes and social and political views of individuals. Finally, the effects of variables related to outgroup prejudice may be underestimated because discrepancies between individuals' expressed views and their behavior may take place (Fiske, 2004, in Chen et al., 2009).

Interestingly, the results of this study indicated significant indirect effects of men's SDO on their own marital quality, and the same was not the case for women. Although SDO did not predict women's marital quality, sexism and relationship power did. This suggests that even if SDO is not a contributing factor in women's marital quality, the factors of the social system still play a role in women's close relationships. A qualitative study may be conducted to better understand the association between social views and personal relationship processes. Particularly interesting would be the examination of sociopolitical attitudes in women's close relationships.

Finally, the sample size in this study may be considered relatively small, even though studies that tackled similar research questions with dyadic data conducted their analyses with a similar sample size (Lennon et al., 2013; Overall et al., 2011; Schwarzwald et al., 2008). However, a study addressing these links with a larger sample size may shed light on the magnitude of the effects and provide more power.

Implications for practice

Our findings contribute to the process of couples therapy and clinical practice in Turkey. They may be used to help couples and married individuals when exploring the factors contributing to relationship distress. For instance, men's socially dominant attitudes and whether these attitudes are related to how accepted they feel their input or influence is by their partner may be discussed. Moreover, hostile sexist views and attitudes can be examined with men to see if these views are characterized by mistrust toward women based on the assumption that women seek to gain power over men through sexuality and intimate relationships. Men's feelings can be explored within the sociocultural and political context.

Power dynamics in couple and family relationships have been one of the main focal points in feminist family therapy (Brooks, 2003). Brooks (2003) described the therapeutic process of helping men reexamine traditional masculinity and the "dark side of masculinity" in particular, which includes sexism, substance misuse, violence, emotional withdrawal, and so forth. Feminist family therapy helps men view themselves within the social context of their upbringing and gender socialization, which, in turn, helps men become more receptive to the limitations placed upon women through the same socialization process (Brooks, 2003). Although Brooks (2003) focused on challenging traditional gender role ideology with men, the findings in our study suggest that reexamining women's traditional gender role ideology dictated by benevolent sexist attitudes may also prove beneficial to overall marital quality.

Furthermore, McGoldrick et al. (2005) discussed the influences in men's roles as partners and husbands, stating that patriarchal norms (i.e., masculinity) often restrict men in developing relationship skills such as expressing vulnerable emotions or attachment needs and self-disclosing. As previously mentioned, Burn and Ward (2005) also found that men's relationship quality decreased with their own ratings of conformity to masculine norms. It seems that our findings also suggest that socially dominant and hostile sexist attitudes may restrict Turkish men's role in their marriage and subsequently the quality of their marriage.

Although SDO has not yet been studied in relation to close relationship dynamics or the therapeutic process, researchers explored the significance of SDO in prejudice-prevention interventions and multicultural counseling competence training (Adelman, 2013; Lantz et al., 2020; Perez-Arche & Miller, 2021). Perez-Arche and Miller (2021) recommend helping clients overcome their internalized prejudice and build a constructive dialogue with families and loved ones challenging their prejudice in therapy by exploring the underlying causes of the prejudice through the lens of social dominance theory (Perez-Arche & Miller, 2021). Similarly, relational educators and therapists in Turkey may utilize the findings in our study when addressing the underlying mechanisms of relationship expectations and individuals' or clients' perceptions of their partners, particularly how SDO and ambivalent sexist attitudes may bring these about.

Conclusion

The findings in this study indicate that at least for men in Turkey, attitudes toward group-based dominance (SDO) may play an important, and perhaps not a beneficial, role in their marital relationships. The results indicate the significance of considering the influences of the larger society in the form of sociopolitical attitudes and worldviews in marital outcomes. This study provides comprehensive clues for couple and family therapy practitioners when assessing the relationship dynamics of a married heterosexual couple. In short, these findings help tie the social and political with the personal. Moreover, these links were studied on an interactional, circular, or dyadic basis, which adds to the existing understanding of how partners influence one another in close relationships.

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ENDNOTE

¹ We controlled the potential effect of socioeconomic status levels of couples on marital quality in our APIM estimations and we obtained a similar pattern with our initial model. Thus, we decided not to control the effect of socioeconomic status in APIMeM estimations to avoid nonconvergence problems due to the small sample size.

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How to cite this article: Ymamgulyyeva, A., Kafescioğlu, N., & Harma, M. (2023). Examining actor–partner effects between social dominance, relationship power, sexism, and marital quality. *Family Relations, 1–18*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/fare.12881>