

Mechanisms and Strategies Involved in Marital Satisfaction Depending on Religion

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Abstract

Introduction. *The study brings an element of novelty with a practical applicability with regard to human adapting to the hardships of life by revealing the unconscious defence mechanisms and the coping strategies. In order to highlight the adjusting models, we have introduced couples with various degrees of marital satisfaction and of various religions in our research.*

Objectives. *The main objective of the research is to develop a comprehensive model for evaluating the mechanisms of couple members to adjust to the marital life, in order to create a map of marital satisfaction based on these considerations. This would allow us to make a comparative analysis founded on the religious criterion.*

Method. *The method we used was the psychosocial survey, which comprises a guided interview concerning the quality of marital life, supported by the observation of the non-verbal behaviour.*

Results. *We have evaluated the marital (dis)satisfaction, the defence mechanisms and the coping strategies on a lot of 176 subjects (88 couples), of various religions (Orthodox and Muslim). Thus, we obtained significant correlations between coping strategies focused on emotions and marital dissatisfaction and between coping strategies focused on action and marital satisfaction. We have revealed significant correlations between what we consider immature coping mechanisms and marital (dis)satisfaction. The maps we created for the two groups of subjects (Orthodox and Muslims) revealed differences consisting of: the use of a mature defence mechanism (intellectualisation) for the Orthodox - correlating with a high level of marital satisfaction - and the use of a reactive formation for the Muslims.*

Conclusions. *The research opens the path for a new holistic approach and the introduction in the study of religion as a moderating variable reveals interesting latent factors, which belong to the vast array of influences on marital (dis)satisfaction.*

Keywords: *defence, coping, religion, marital couple*

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1. Introduction

Human beings are the outcome of incessantly shaping and reshaping forces at the convergence of many factors. The value of this result is represented by the manner in which it manages to cope, in a balanced way, with the demands of its internal needs and the external demands.

A happy adjustment of human beings requires the use of a set of strategies designed to solve or at least improve life disrupting situations that might occur, without generating major imbalances on individual level and by extension on relational level. For some of us this can be easily done, by managing with minimal costs a sanogenous adaptation that is at the same time balancing for the individual and those around us.

Humans are the consequence of multiple influences. Starting with a genetic inheritance, they begin to be moulded by a multitude of factors. This onset of the human development seems to be closer to the inception. Recent research highlighted the significance of the factors affecting prenatal and perinatal life, thus providing the basis for defence mechanisms formation. Having acquired this foundation as a first safeguard, the born child enters (or not) a family universe that will shape his already outlined structure.

The plurality of occurrences suffered and the models offered by parents (or their substitutes) configure further on a specific human model. This specificity is reinforced by other factors, such as mass-media, kindergarten, school, groups of friends, social networks and so on. All these and many others mould the individual, determining him to adapt through a set of coping strategies that, according to some authors, arise from defence mechanisms and are refined by a multitude of factors.

Based on these ideas, we consider that this study brings an element of novelty with a practical applicability on the adaptation of marital couple partners to conjugal life adversities. In this respect, the dynamics of the research envisage to reveal the unconscious defence mechanisms and their conscious counterparts – coping strategies, in a group of Orthodox and Muslim marital couples with varying degrees of marital (dis)satisfaction.

The achievement of the main objective of the research, done by taking into consideration the partners' defence mechanisms and coping strategies, will allow us to develop a set of models (maps) for the evaluation of the mechanisms used for adjusting to marital life. It is assumed that, the earlier the defence

mechanisms develop (i.e. the period of time when the individual was threatened), the more significant will their role in the future be. Therefore, we believe that the psychotherapeutic approach must take into consideration the depth of the defence mechanisms and their behavioural adjustment counterparts that may be mediated by moderating variables such as religion, gender, age, marriage duration, number of children etc.

Therefore, in order to achieve the main objective of this research, the main assumptions that will be tested aim to outline the differences between Orthodox and Muslim subjects in regard to partners' adjustment to marital life.

II. Methods

The following batteries of tests were applied: LIS Questionnaire (Life Index Style – Plutchik, Kellerman and Conte, 1995) adapted by N.I. Sava, 2011 to Romanian population in order to assess defence mechanisms; COPE Questionnaire (Carver, Scheier and Weintraub, 1989) in order to assess coping strategies and Couple Adaptation Scale - Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS – Graham B. Spanier) adapted by Ligiana Petre and Dragoş Iliescu, 2009.

The study included 88 couples (36 Orthodox and 52 Muslim couples) from different backgrounds, with secondary and tertiary education levels, residents of Constanta, Mangalia, Medgidia, Murfatlar, Ovidiu, Valu lui Traian and Agigea, towns with important Muslim communities (Tartar ethnics). The sampling method is non-randomized, using available couples.

The variables, subjected to correlation and comparison, are: defence mechanisms, coping strategies and marital satisfaction. Religion is the variable to be tested in regard to its moderation strength. Single variable descriptive analysis shows that defence mechanisms and coping strategies distributions do not comply with the requisites of normality. Consequently, we will use nonparametric procedures (Spearman ranks correlation coefficient) after transforming the distributions into variables with order ranking values.

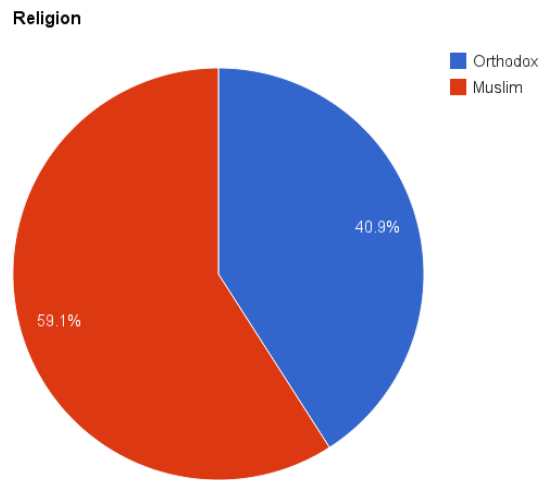


Figure 1. Religious Affiliation Distribution Chart

Testing the First Hypothesis

The Orthodox Group:

The assumption that emotion-oriented coping strategies correlate with marital dissatisfaction shows that low scores in marital satisfaction tend to correspond with high scores in **behavioural disengagement** ($r_s = -0.25, p < .05$);

The assumption that action-oriented coping strategies correlate with marital satisfaction shows that high scores in marital satisfaction tend to correspond with high scores in **positive reinterpretation** ($r_s = 0.25, p < .05$).

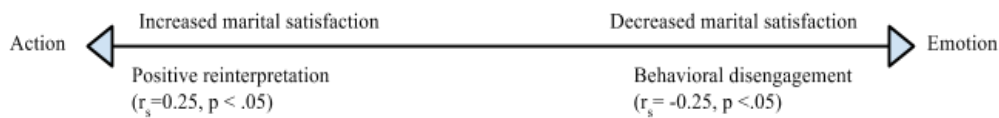


Figure 2. Marital satisfaction depending on coping strategies in Orthodox subjects

The Muslim Group:

The assumption that emotion-oriented coping strategies correlate with marital dissatisfaction shows that low scores in marital satisfaction tend to correspond with high scores in the following emotion-oriented coping strategies: behavioural disengagement ($r_s = -0.38, p < .001$); mental disengagement ($r_s = -0.41, p < .001$); denial ($r_s = -0.31, p < .01$); substance use ($r_s = -0.31, p < .01$);

focus on and venting of emotions ($r_s = -0.20, p < .05$).

The assumption that action-oriented coping strategies correlate with marital satisfaction shows that high scores in marital satisfaction tend to correspond with high scores in the following action-oriented coping strategies: active coping ($r_s = 0.38, p < .001$); positive reinterpretation ($r_s = 0.35, p < .001$) and planning ($r_s = 0.31, p < .01$).

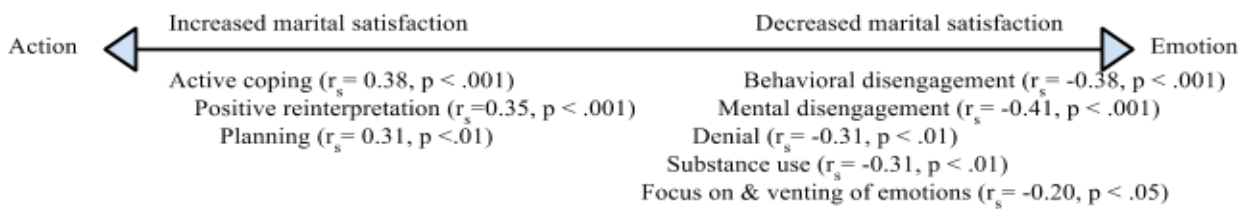


Figure 3. Marital satisfaction depending on coping strategies in Muslim subjects

Testing the Second Hypothesis

The Orthodox Group:

The assumption that defence mechanisms, which are regarded as immature, correlate with marital dissatisfaction shows that low scores in marital satisfaction tend to correspond with high scores in the following defence mechanisms: displacement (r_s

$= -0.49, p < .001$); regression ($r_s = -0.29, p < .05$) and reaction formation ($r_s = -0.23, p < .05$).

The assumption that defence mechanisms, which are regarded as mature, correlate with marital satisfaction shows that high scores in marital satisfaction tend to correspond with high scores in **intellectualisation** ($r_s = 0.25, p < .05$).

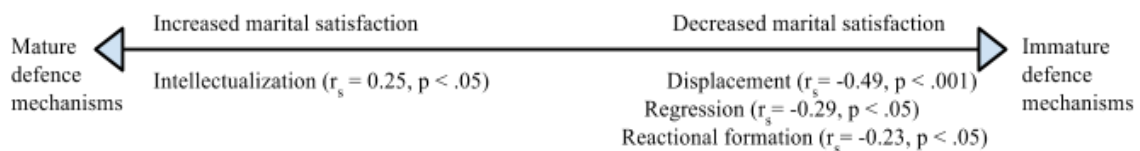


Figure 4. Marital satisfaction against defence mechanisms in Orthodox subjects

The Muslim Group

The assumption that defence mechanisms, which are regarded as immature, correlate with marital dissatisfaction shows that low scores in marital satisfaction tend to correspond with high scores in the following defence mechanisms: displacement ($r_s = -0.39, p < .001$); regression ($r_s = -$

$0.38, p < .001$) and repression ($r_s = -0.25, p < .01$);

The assumption that defence mechanisms, which are regarded as mature, correlate with marital satisfaction shows no significant correlation.

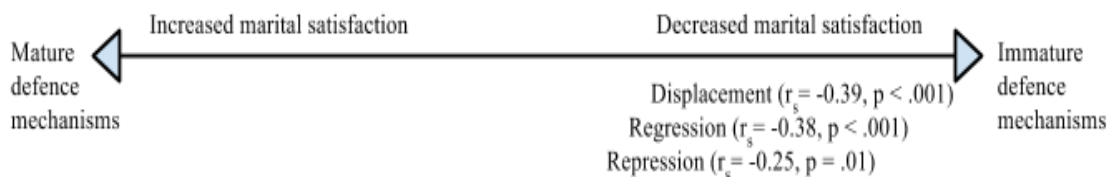


Figure 5. Marital satisfaction depending on defence mechanisms in Muslim subjects

By connecting the attained information, it is possible to build a guiding map, which illustrates marital satisfaction on both action-emotion and mature-immature directions, in correlation with the religion criterion. Consequently, the group of Orthodox marital couples reveals significant correlations between: the

positive reinterpretation coping strategy, the **intellectualisation** defence mechanism and marital satisfaction; coping strategies such as **behavioural disengagement, displacement, regression** and **reaction formation** defence mechanisms and low marital satisfaction.

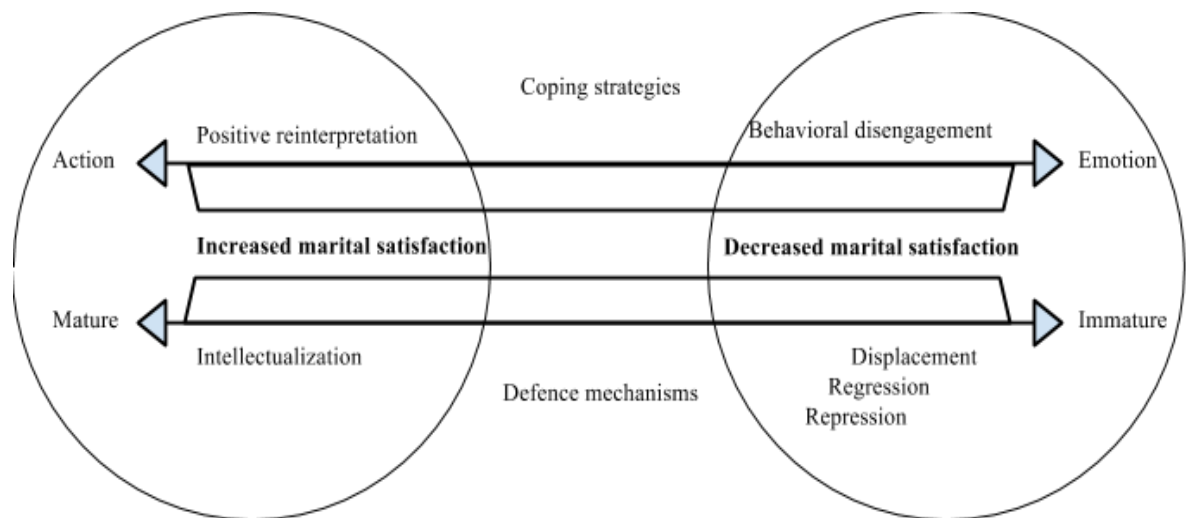


Figure 6. Guide map of marital satisfaction in correlation with defence mechanisms and coping strategies in Orthodox couples

For Muslim subjects, the guiding map reveals that: action-oriented coping strategies such as active coping, positive reinterpretation and planning are consistent with marital satisfaction; emotion-oriented coping strategies such as behavioural disengagement, mental disengagement, denial and substance use, focus

on and venting of emotions and defence mechanisms such as displacement, regression and repression are consistent with low marital satisfaction. It should be noted that the Muslim group does not indicate any correlation between defence mechanisms that are regarded as mature within marital satisfaction

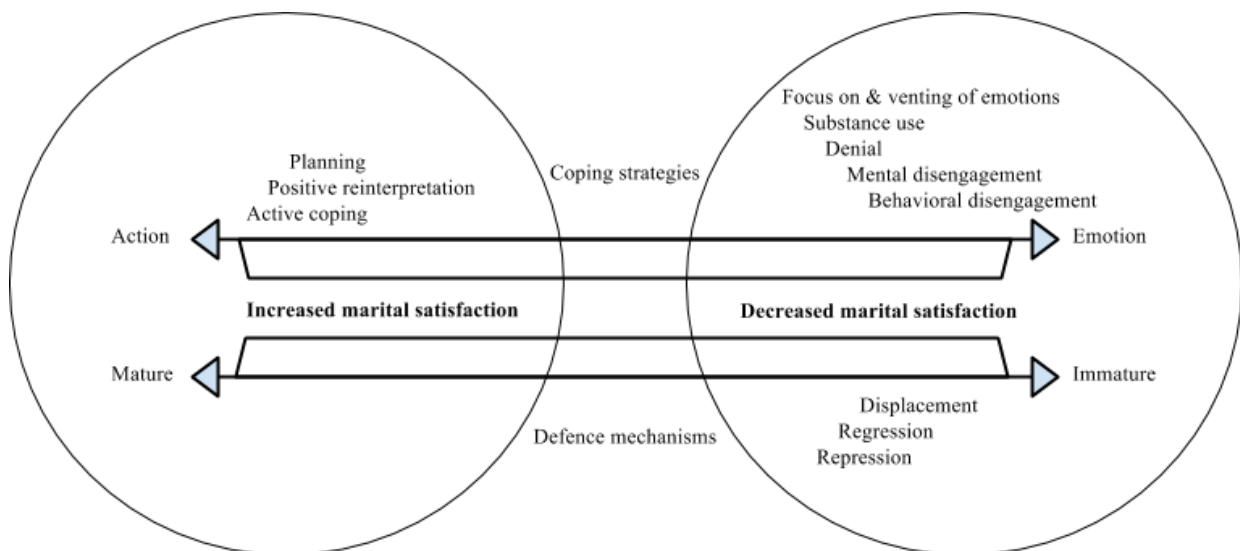


Figure 7. Guiding map of marital satisfaction in correlation with defence mechanisms and coping strategies in Muslim couples

III. Conclusions

The assessment of marital satisfaction for couples by means of this psycho-diagnostic model may be situated at the crossroads of two tendencies, which consider the convergence or the divergence of defence mechanisms and coping strategies adopted by partners in a couple. The acquired information might be used not only to create a diagnosis map for the couple that will identify the convergence or divergence of the adapting mechanisms in order to explain given manifestations and behaviours **within** the couple, but also to outline a direction for intervention and to identify the potential risks at the level of the couple, the individual resources of the couple as a whole and last but not least the functioning adapting methods for the

couple. An intuitive image on how the marital couple adapts may be created by using these maps, which contain a large volume of helpful information that can be used to compose the adjustment profile of the marital couple by using different colours to outline the information elements for each partner of the couple.

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