Satisfaction in Arranged and Love-based Marriages

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Abstract

Arranged and love-based marriages are two of the most common forms of marriage, yet little research has examined how marital satisfaction differs between the two forms. This study will investigate how satisfaction differs by studying three different populations – Indians in arranged marriages, Indian-Americans in arranged marriages, and Americans in love-based marriages – and analyze how relationship length and spousal choice involvement affects satisfaction. Six-hundred participants will be gathered in total, half of which will be newlyweds and half of which will have been married for at least 10 years. All participants will complete questionnaires regarding their marital satisfaction, length of relationship, and level of involvement in their spousal choice. The expected results are that newlywed couples in love-based marriages will have the highest rates of marital satisfaction, but established couples in arranged marriages who had a high degree of involvement in spouse choice will have a similar, if not higher, level of satisfaction. The proposed study will greatly contribute to the understanding of how satisfaction differs between arranged and love-based marriages, how different factors affect satisfaction, and provide a broader understanding of how cultural differences impact marital satisfaction.

Satisfaction in Arranged and Love-based Marriages

Marriage is one of the most important events of an individual's life, marking a chosen, long-lasting commitment between two individuals who love each other and want to share their lives together (Madathil & Benschoff, 2008). While this is a normal definition of marriage for those living in the Western world, this is not how nearly 55% of the world views marriage (Gaille, 2017). A majority of marriages in the world, particularly in Eastern countries like India, are arranged, whereby the individual's family selects their potential partner based on social and economic factors. Additionally, the individual may or may not have input in their partner or have the ability to refuse them (Epstein, Pandit, & Thakar, 2013; Regan, Lakhanpal, & Anguiano, 2012). Despite the differences between love-based and arranged marriages, marital satisfaction is an important component that keeps a couple happy and committed in their relationship (Madathil & Benschoff, 2008). As humans are social beings, greater relationship quality and satisfaction is associated with greater personal well-being, particularly greater physical and mental health (Allendorf & Ghimire, 2013; Bowman & Dollahite, 2013). While an important component in all marriages, satisfaction throughout the relationship differs between these two types of marriages in very important ways.

Most research concerning marriage is conducted among love-based marriages in Western countries, such as the United States, England, and Canada. These individualistic cultures value autonomy and choice, meaning that compatibility among partners and the love couples share for one another is the basis, and in fact a requirement, for marriage (Epstein et al., 2013; Madathil & Benschoff, 2008; Regan et al., 2012). Thus, one of the most consistent findings concerning marital research is an obvious one, that newlyweds have high levels of initial marital satisfaction (Lavner, Weiss, & Miller, 2017). For happy couples, the months leading up to and after the

marriage are associated with greater love and commitment, as the new couple is experiencing the initial novelty of being married. Love is further strengthened as the couple engages in self-disclosure, accommodation, and experiences physical arousal (Epstein et al., 2013). However, the other consistent finding among love-based marriages is that as time passes, marital satisfaction decreases (Bradbury & Karney, 2014; Lavner et al., 2017). Decline in satisfaction is generally attributed to day-to-day stress, the gradual decrease of novelty in the relationship, and general life transitions. As noted by Allendorf and Ghimire (2013) and Bradbury and Karney (2014), the transition to parenthood is marked by a steep decline in satisfaction, especially in comparison to married couples without children, which is largely due to the stress of raising a child and children's disruption of intimacy. Likewise, Lavner et al. (2017) showed that the Big 5 personality traits change over time in a marriage, finding that newlyweds' agreeableness significantly declined over the first 18 months of marriage. They also found the typical "honeymoon-then-years-of-blandness" pattern as demonstrated by Aaron et al. (2002), where high initial satisfaction declines over time (as cited in Lavner et al., 2017). This is consistent with other research demonstrating that with the passage of time, married couples experience and reciprocate more negative behavior, display less positive behavior like signs of affection, and experience declines in frequency of sex, all of which negatively impact satisfaction (Bradbury & Karney, 2014). Despite these general findings that couples in love-based marriages experience declines in satisfaction over time, research has continually shown that married couples in the US typically report high levels of satisfaction at any given time (Regan et al., 2012).

While the research concerning arranged marriages is less extensive than love-based, there are consistent findings demonstrating that couples in arranged marriages generally begin their relationship with low levels of satisfaction and love (Allendorf, 2013; Allendorf & Ghimire,

2013; Epstein et al., 2013). This is largely due to the fact that couples entering arranged marriages are not expected to be in love with their partner, which is a consequence of the collectivist cultures where arranged marriages are most common. About 90% of marriages in India are arranged (Gaille, 2017; Madathil & Benschoff, 2008), which is a collectivistic culture that emphasizes community, group harmony, and strong familial relationships. Rather than fulfilling the individual's primary need to belong and to be in an intimate, interpersonal relationship, arranged marriages are made based on how the marriage will mutually benefit the two families socially, politically, economically, and even religiously. In regard to Hinduism specifically, which is the dominant religion in India, marriage is regarded as a bond between families rather than between individuals (Allendorf & Ghimire, 2013; Bowman & Dollahite, 2013). Because of this, couples may actually be discouraged from feeling romantic love for their spouse, as this could potentially weaken the family's bonds and disrupt the family's social and economic obligations (Madathil & Benschoff, 2008). Rather, the love that is recommended to form between a couples is filial, companionate, and practical.

Though research shows that love and satisfaction start off low for couples in arranged marriages, largely due to their cultural context, findings also demonstrate that love and satisfaction grow with time (Allendorf & Ghimire, 2013; Epstein et al., 2013). In Allendorf and Ghimire's (2013) study of the Nepalese's beliefs surrounding arranged marriages, they discovered that marital duration had the greatest association with marital quality and satisfaction. Similarly, in Bowman and Dollahite's (2013) research interviewing Indian couples, they emphasized the importance of time spent together, as this lead to increased satisfaction. In fact, research has demonstrated that satisfaction levels in arranged marriages grow to the same level and may even surpass satisfaction levels of couples in love-based marriages, overcoming

traditional obstacles of satisfaction. Allendorf and Ghimire (2013) discovered that while raising children in love-based marriages is associated with decreases in satisfaction, having a child in an arranged marriage is associated with increases in satisfaction. Having children is viewed as an essential part of marriage and is a sign that the marriage is a success. The increase in satisfaction due to the birth of a child also has cultural implications, as couples in collectivist cultures generally have closer ties with their families and thus have greater child care support, reducing parental stress and declines in satisfaction. Likewise, in Epstein et al.'s (2013) analysis of what makes love grow in arranged marriages, most couples identified increased commitment as the greatest factor. However, greater self-disclosure, accommodation, communication, parenting, and physical intimacy were all important factors that helped couples increase their love and satisfaction in their marriages.

Despite these findings that seem to demonstrate that arranged marriages have the opposite path of satisfaction as found in love-based marriages, one of the greatest predictors of marital satisfaction in arranged marriages is the degree of choice an individual has in selecting their partner. Many cultures are relaxing their rules surrounding arranged marriages and more families are allowing individuals to have some say in who their partner will be, even giving them the right to refuse the partner that is chosen for them (Allendorf & Ghimire, 2013; Madathil & Benschoff, 2008). In Madathil and Benschoff's (2008) analysis of satisfaction levels among Indians in arranged marriages, Indian-Americans in arranged marriages, and Americans in love-based marriages, Indian-Americans reported the greatest levels of satisfaction and their ratings were significantly higher than Indian and American ratings. This group received the benefits of the two cultures they are a part of: the stability of an arranged marriage and familial support of Indian culture and the more relaxed and increased opportunity for partner intimacy promoted by

US culture. However, the study also found that Indian couples who had more choice in the selection of their partner reported significantly higher levels of satisfaction than those that did not. This is consistent with Allendorf's & Ghimire's (2013) findings and Allendorf's (2013) discovery that many Nepalese believe choosing one's partner is inherently good and results in a better relationship.

Overview and Hypotheses

Considering all of the information and research about how satisfaction develops and changes in arranged and love-based marriages, there is still no clear and consistent evidence concerning whether or not the two differ in satisfaction levels. Some research demonstrates that arranged marriages result in higher satisfaction, others that love-based do, and still some others assert that there is no difference in marital satisfaction (Epstein et al., 2013; Regan et al., 2012).

The lack of a clear consensus regarding satisfaction in arranged and love-based marriages is largely due to the lack of research comparing the two types of marriages. Therefore, this proposed study aims to answer the question of whether couples in love-based marriages are more satisfied with their marriage than those in arranged marriages. Specifically, the proposed study will assess how the factors of relationship length and spousal choice involvement impact overall satisfaction. Drawing from Madathil's and Benschoff's (2008) study, this study will assess satisfaction levels among Indian couples in arranged marriages, Indian-American couples in arranged marriages, and American couples in love-based marriages and compare newlyweds with established married couples. It is hypothesized that newlyweds in love-based marriages will be more satisfied with their marriages than those in arranged marriages, regardless of how long they have been married. However, for couples who have been married longer, it is proposed that there will be a shift and couples in arranged marriages will have the same, if not higher, levels of

satisfaction. This reasoning stems from the fact that satisfaction tends to decline for couples in love-based marriages after their first few years together and couples in arranged marriages generally begin with low levels of satisfaction, but through increased commitment, build up to greater levels (Allendorf & Ghimire, 2013; Bowman & Dollahite, 2013; Epstein et al., 2013). However, because research has demonstrated that there is often no difference in satisfaction levels between the two types of marriages (Madathil & Benshoff, 2008; Regan et al., 2012) it is also hypothesized that there is a leveling-off period of satisfaction for both types of marriages.

Method

Participants

Three different groups of participants will be recruited for this study: couples from India in arranged marriages, couples from the United States in love-based marriages, and Indian-American couples living in America in arranged marriages. One-hundred couples will be recruited from each group, meaning that 600 participants will be gathered in total. One-half of all couples will be newlyweds (i.e. married for no longer than a year) and the other half will have been married for at least 10 years. Participants will largely be recruited through web-based advertising and flyers distributed in public areas (e.g. malls, outdoor shopping centers). All participants will be monetarily compensated for their time.

Design

This experiment will be assessed using a 2 (marriage type) by 2 (marriage length) by 3 (choice involvement) design that will be analyzed using a factorial analysis of variance (ANOVA) on the dependent variable of marital satisfaction. Marriage type refers to whether the participant is in an arranged or love-based marriage, marriage length refers to whether the couple are newlyweds or have been married for at least 10 years, and choice involvement assesses the

level of involvement the participant had in choosing their partner (e.g. no involvement, some involvement, or very involved). Satisfaction is defined as how committed, supported, and loved the participant feels towards their relationship and spouse and will be assessed using the measures described.

Measures

Characteristics of Marriage Inventory (CHARISMA). Previous research concerning marital satisfaction in both love-based and arranged marriages have used the CHARISMA inventory as developed by Dr. Jane Rosen-Grandon (Madathil & Benshoff, 2008). The questionnaire consists of 37 items which has participants rate the importance of 18 different marital characteristics (e.g. loyalty, commitment, respect) and then rate how satisfied participants are with each of the characteristics, both using a 6-point Likert scale (1 = *extremely unimportant*, 6 = *extremely important*).

Satisfaction and Commitment. The Satisfaction and Commitment subscales from Dr. Cary Rusbult's Investment Model Scale have also been used in arranged and love-based marriage research (Regan et al., 2012). The Satisfaction and Commitment subscales use a 9-point Likert scale (1 = *not at all*, 9 = *extremely*) and asks questions such as "To what degree are you satisfied with your relationship," "To what extent are you attracted to your partner," and "How likely is it that you will end your relationship in the near future."

Choice Involvement. A single item concerning spousal choice will be included on the questionnaire to assess the degree of involvement each participant had in choosing their partner using a 3-point Likert scale (e.g. "Indicate the degree of involvement you had in choosing your spouse;" 1 = *no choice/involvement*, 2 = *some choice/involvement,* 3 = *ultimate decider/very involved*).

Procedure

The study will take place in a lab with two separate rooms so that couples can fill out their questionnaires separately in an effort to reduce spousal influence and pressure to answer the questions in a certain way. Participants will first be asked to fill out basic demographics, such as their age, gender, ethnicity, and their country of origin. They will then be given a brief overview that they are going to fill out a questionnaire about their marital satisfaction. Once the questionnaire is completed, which should take no more than 15-20 minutes, they will then be asked to indicate whether they are in an arranged or love-based marriage, indicate the level of involvement they had in choosing their partner, and how long they have been married. Upon the completion of the survey, the participant will be debriefed about the study.

Results

The proposed study's aim is to answer the question of whether couples in love-based marriages are more satisfied than those in arranged marriages. A 2 x 2 x 3 factorial ANOVA will be used to assess the effect of marriage type, marriage length, and spousal choice involvement on marital satisfaction. Choice involvement is expected to have a significant effect on satisfaction while marriage type and marriage length are expected to have an interaction effect on satisfaction. The expected results are that satisfaction will be lowest for Indian couples in arranged marriages who had a minimal role in their partner choice and have been married for a short time. It is then expected that Indian-Americans in arranged marriages who had a greater role in selecting their partner and have been married for more than 10 years will have a greater or equal level of satisfaction compared to US couples in love-based marriages who have been married for more than 10 years. Lastly, it is expected that US couples in love-based marriages who are newlyweds will have the highest levels of marital satisfaction.

Discussion

The proposed study aims to contribute to the growing body of research assessing the differences in marital satisfaction among couples in arranged and love-based marriages. While considerable research has demonstrated how satisfaction develops and changes over time in love-based marriages (Bradbury & Karney, 2014; Lavner et al., 2017), research is sparse considering satisfaction in arranged marriages, especially when comparing changes in satisfaction among couples in arranged and love-based marriages. In fact, previous research has not systematically examined differences in satisfaction over time among arranged and love-based marriages, so the proposed study will greatly contribute to the literature.

The overarching goal of the study is to address whether couples in love-based marriages are more satisfied than couples in arranged marriages. As research is still inconclusive regarding this question (Epstein et al., 2013; Regan et al., 2012), this study should provide conclusive evidence concerning if and how satisfaction differs, especially in regard to the length of the relationship and the level of involvement in spousal choice. The expected results from this study will also confirm previous research findings that couples in arranged marriages begin with lower levels of satisfaction than couples in love-based marriages (Allendorf, 2013; Allendorf & Ghimire, 2013; Epstein et al., 2013). However, for those in arranged marriages who had greater choice in selecting their partner, their levels of satisfaction will increase with respect to the duration of their relationship. Likewise, the proposed study will demonstrate the well-established finding that couples in love-based marriages begin with high levels of satisfaction but decline as time goes on (Bradbury & Karney, 2014; Lavner et al., 2017).

The results of this study will also provide implications for how different cultures approach marriage and provide insight into how their standards and ideals differ regarding

marital satisfaction. Since India is a collectivist culture and the US is an individualistic culture, what they deem important to a marriage and how their satisfaction over time differs can determine what qualities and characteristics lead to a more satisfying marriage. As demonstrated by Madathil and Benschoff (2008), the collectivistic cultures that typically endorse arranged marriages prize group harmony and strong familial bonds while individualistic cultures, where love-based marriages dominate, endorse individuality and freedom. While this is a largely researched area, understanding how a blending of cultures impact marital satisfaction is a lesser understood phenomenon. As influenced by Madathil and Benschoff (2008), this study will also seek to understand how culture affects satisfaction by assessing Indian-Americans in arranged marriages – which represents the fusion of individualistic and collectivist cultures – Indians in arranged marriages, and Americans in love-based marriages.

While one of the greatest strengths of the proposed study is the variety of participants being studied, the comparison between participants, and the assessment of marriage length and choice involvement, the study also has limitations. For one, though this study will include three diverse types of participants, it can further benefit from adding more groups. Specifically, a group of Indian couples in love-based marriages would be instrumental in further assessing cultural determinants on marital satisfaction. Furthermore, India is not the only country that predominantly engages in arranged marriages; Japan, Iran, and Nepal are just a few of the large number of countries that promote arranged marriages. Thus, the research is limited because it will only study one culture. Another limitation is the number of participants that will be surveyed. Though 600 participants is a large sample, clearer and more reliable results will be obtained if more participants are gathered.

Though this study contains limitations, these limitations can lead to enhancing further

study. Future research should focus on other countries besides India, as this is a rather common country to study when researching arranged marriages, and this area of research should expand beyond just one country and culture. It is expected that other countries that endorse arranged marriages will have similar levels of satisfaction as couples in this study, but they might provide different characteristics that are important to a marriage. Another interesting future experiment based on the proposed study is to examine how relationship beliefs differ between couples in arranged and love-based marriages. Two common beliefs are destiny and growth beliefs – destiny beliefs hold that relationships are either meant to be or not and imply the existence of a soulmate, while growth beliefs hold that relationships require work and are expected to grow with time. Since love-based relationships are entered into because of feelings of love and arranged marriages show a trend of love developing over time, it is hypothesized that on average, more couples in love-based relationships will endorse destiny beliefs while more couples in arranged marriages will endorse growth beliefs. Considering this, further interesting research should look at how rates of marriage counseling differ between couples in arranged and love-based marriages and whether this help-seeking behavior is related to marital satisfaction. Since it is proposed that couples in arranged marriages are more likely to endorse growth beliefs and couples in love-based marriages are more likely to endorse destiny theories, it is expected that couples in arranged marriages will seek out help because they view their relationship as something that can grow and benefit from being worked on.

In sum, satisfaction is an important component of marriage, as the quality of an interpersonal relationship has a significant impact on an individual's mental and physical health. This research should provide a conclusive answer on how satisfaction differs between couples in love-based and arranged marriages. The proposed study is unique because it analyzes three

different populations in an effort to understand how the factors of relationship length and spousal choice involvement affect satisfaction. Arranged marriages are currently understudied and information regarding how satisfaction differs between these two types of marriage is currently inconclusive, so this study will greatly contribute to the current body of literature.

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PSYC 423 Research Proposal Assignment
Grading Rubric

Please copy and paste the grading scales so that they appear as a separate page at the very end of your submitted document.

Title Page _____/5
Running head, title, page number, name & institution

Abstract _____/10
Concise summary of project (main points of each section)
Between 150-250 words

Introduction (2-3 pgs.)
Opening (First section of intro) _____/50
Sets the stage for literature review, broadly introduces topic and variables
Literature Review (Second section of intro)
Review research findings and theory from articles to build a case for your study
Effective and relevant transitions between articles
All articles conceptually linked together and support hypothesis
Closing (Third section of intro)
Ties the five studies presented together
Relates previous research to hypothesis
Research Question and Hypothesis clearly stated

Methods (1-2 pgs.) _____/35
Must have the following subsections:
Participants
Number of expected participants
Demographic description of participants
Inclusions/exclusions
Type of sampling/recruitment
Measures
Detailed definition for each measure
Reference for each measure if applicable
Procedure
Clear description of how the study was conducted
Instructions to participants
How groups were formed, specific manipulations

Results (.5-1 pgs) _____/15
Reminder of hypothesis/question
Explain how question will be answered (analysis that will be used)

State and report what analyses are expected to reveal (what will your results show?)
Interpretation expected results in “plain English”

Discussion (2-3 pgs.) **_____/35**

Explain potential reasons for findings
Relate expected findings to previous research and/or ideas from introduction
Implications and applications of the results
Important limitations/strengths
Future research
Conclusion, “so what?” statement

References **_____/20**

At least 8 sources, six of which are empirical
References page conforms to APA style
No first names used, only initials
Correct capitalization for article and journal titles, double spaced
Hanging indentation, correctly alphabetized, italicized where needed
All references match with an internal citation and vice versa

APA Style **_____/20**

Double-spaced, 12-point Times New Roman font, 7-10+ pages, 1-inch margins, correct heading and page numbers, section headings, correct citations and quoting format within the paper

Overall Writing Style **_____/10**

Grammar/Spelling, clear and concise writing, appropriate tone for scientific writing, third person, past tense

Final Grade	**_____/200**	
Please copy and paste the grading scales so that they appear as a separate page at the very end of your submitted document.		