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Articles

Dyadic Adjustment in Couples: How Partners' Social Value Within Couple and Emotional Competences Predict It

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Abstract

Knowing the determinants of couple adjustment is a challenge, both for predicting this adjustment and for helping couples in therapy in the best possible way. We based this study on the Person's Social Value Theory (Beauvois, J.-L. [1976]. The topic of social conduct evaluation. *Connexions*, 19, 7-30) which postulates that two dimensions – social utility and social desirability – support self- and other- descriptions. This study aimed to evaluate the way the evaluation of own social value within couple and the evaluation of social value within couple of the partner influence the dyadic adjustment of the spouses. In addition, we took into account the duration of the couples and the emotional competences of the spouses (using the PEC). Participants were the spouses of 152 voluntary heterosexual couples who completed a booklet of questionnaires. The results showed that the two dimensions of person's social value within couple influence partners' dyadic adjustment but in a different way for men and women and according to the duration of the couples' relationship. Furthermore, the effect of social value within couple seems to cover partially the classic effect of emotional competences on couple experience and satisfaction. The discussion underlines the relevance and interest of using the social value within the couple in the study of conjugal relationships as well as in counselling couples.

Keywords: dyadic adjustment, couples, person's social value, emotional competences

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Conjugal relationships are the most central relationship for most adults (Kiecolt-Glaser & Newton, 2001). Indeed, the spouse is the main target of emotional communication as well as the principal source of social support (Cutrona, 2012; Halford, Hahlweg, & Dunne, 1990; Rimé, 2005). As such, these relations play a core role in the life of each of us. Conjugal dynamics – the adjustment in the couple relationship – results partly from the partners' global and subjective evaluations of this relationship (Fincham & Bradbury, 1987). For example, is the relationship conflictual? Is it easy or not to make common decisions? How one feels with the partner? Is the time spent together sufficient and enjoyable? The issues of these evaluations are important because they affect the stability of the couple relation (Horwitz, McLaughlin, & White, 1998; Reizer, Ein-Dor, & Shaver, 2014) and the physical and psychological health of the partners (Bélanger et al., 2014; Proulx, Helms, & Buehler, 2007; Uebelacker, Courtnage, & Whisman, 2003).

From a fundamental as well as an applied point of view, it is therefore interesting to highlight the factors underlying these evaluations. These factors are intra-individual, inter-individual, and environmental (Bradbury,

Cohan, & Karney, 1998) and we focused here on two intra-individual factors: self-view and emotional competences. More precisely, we are interested in the perception of self *and one's partner* conceptualized on the basis of models of social psychology that support the existence of two dimensions that organize the perception of people (Beauvois, 1976). Then, because emotional expression and communication between the partners are central for their positive and negative interactions in the long term (Halford et al., 1990; Smith, Ciarrochi, & Heaven, 2008; Smith, Heaven, & Ciarrochi, 2008; Sprecher, 1987), we take into account the role of the partners' emotional competences (Batool & Khalid, 2012). Finally, because the duration of the couple relationship influences the partners' adjustment (Glenn, 1998; Henry, Berg, Smith, & Florsheim, 2007; Johnson, Amoloza, & Booth, 1992; Vaillant & Vaillant, 1993), we also study the previously mentioned factors in taking into account the duration of couple relationship.

Social Value... Within Couples

Beauvois (1976, 1995) introduced this concept in psychology and developed the TVSP (*Théorie de la Valeur Sociale des Personnes* – Theory of Person's Social Value). For him, the way the individuals describe themselves and the way they are described by others together with the precise traits that are used have both a descriptive function and an evaluative function. Thus, in addition to a (personological) description of the individuals, the traits used allow to distribute successfully these individuals on an axis representing the value they have in a particular social environment and therefore to predict their success in this environment. Researchers explore person's social value in link with the workplace or in school settings (e.g., Pansu & Dompnier, 2011) but person's social value remains totally unexplored in the field of couple functioning and couple experience as a social environment.

Person's social value has two dimensions (Abele & Wojciszke, 2013; Beauvois & Dubois, 2008, 2012; Dubois & Aubert, 2010; Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu, 2002) that Beauvois (1995) labelled “social desirability” and “social utility”. Social desirability is the knowledge an individual has about the affects a person can engender and about the way this person can satisfy the motivations of someone else (Cambon, 2006; Dubois, 2005). For example, if an individual describes a person as a “bad guy”, this person can generate fear or defiance and these feelings can lead this individual to keep distance from this person and to avoid asking this person for help, or even attention (see also Kuster et al., 2017). Social utility is a form of value that is associated with an individual based on her or his adequacy to essential elements of a social functioning (Beauvois, 1995). This dimension reflects the way the individuals adhere to the needs of a social functioning and to the sustainability of a social system. For example, if one perceives an individual as “competent”, one can trust in this individual and entrust responsibilities to this individual. Finally, this individual has thus opportunities to evolve in the social system at stake. Thanks to this double use of traits, the social descriptions of people can communicate a great number of affordances: Therefore, when one judges a person, one also evaluates what one can do or must do with this person in a particular social relationship (Cambon, 2006; Mignon & Mollaret, 2009).

Consequently, these two dimensions make it possible to understand partly couples' relationships. We see several reasons for this assertion. First, the social desirability corresponds to a description of the way the partners are sources of positive and/or negative affect on each other. Then, the description in terms of social utility corresponds to the way the partners perceive each other as having more or less traits that a system valorizes (here, the couple system). Therefore, these descriptions may account for the partners' ability to reach their own and *common* objectives in this system.

However, couple itself is a system that changes over time. Indeed, studies very often show that marital quality “naturally” declines over time (e.g., [VanLaningham, Johnson, & Amato, 2001](#)). Furthermore, because of life transitions (birth of a child, education of this child, departure from home of this child, health troubles, or retirement; [Lavner & Bradbury, 2010](#)) one can also easily imagine that couple adjustment is not linear across couple life span ([Belsky & Hsieh, 1998](#); [Kamp Dush, Taylor, & Kroeger, 2008](#)). For example, marriages are most susceptible to divorce in the early years (10% of first marriages before five years; [Kreider & Renee, 2011](#); see also [Clarke, 1995](#), and 24.6% at five years; *Institut National de la Statistique et des Etudes Economiques – Statistics and Economics Studies National Institute [INSEE], 2014*). Thus, one can assume that the role of the partners' social value in their conjugal adjustment depends also on the duration of the couple relationship.

We thus first hypothesize that the way each partner of a couple *describes herself or himself* on the dimensions of social value and the way each *is described on these same dimensions by the partner* influence the dyadic adjustment of these spouses, and this, depending on gender and on the duration of their couple relationship. Indeed, regardless of a person's self-view, what her or his partner thinks about this person guides their relationship. In particular, we assume that the higher the social value within the couple, the better the partners' dyadic adjustment. We also assume here that the dimensions of social value within couple that contribute to this effect differ according to both duration of couple relationship and gender. Why would the effects be different for each gender? In fact, numerous studies showed gender differences in social expectancies and roles, emotion socialization, communication, emotional and interpersonal regulation, and social support (e.g., [Ball, Cowan, & Cowan, 1995](#); [Heavey, Layne, & Christensen, 1993](#); [Heyman, Hunt, Malik, & Smith Slep, 2009](#); [Orbuch, Veroff, Hassan, & Horrocks, 2002](#); [Peplau & Gordon, 1984](#)). In the same vein, several studies showed gender differences in marital satisfaction (e.g., [Weisfeld et al., 2011](#)) and in the link between marital interactions and personal health issues (e.g., [Prigerson, Maciejewski, & Rosenheck, 1999](#); [Williams & Umberson, 2004](#)). Because male and female socialization and social roles differ (see [Sczesny, Nater, & Eagly, 2018](#)), we predict that social value of men and women would affect differently their evaluation of their conjugal adjustment (see also [Mondor, McDuff, Lussier, & Wright, 2011](#)).

Emotional Competences

Emotional competences are the ability to identify, express, understand, regulate, and control own and others' emotions in an appropriate way ([Bar-On, 2006](#); [Caruso, Mayer, & Salovey, 2000](#)). They are thus these abilities to properly identify and express what one feels and to recognize what the other feels, that is, to feel better, to have understanding relationships, and to have a good social functioning with others (e.g., [Nelis et al., 2011](#)).

A good level of emotional competences is indeed associated with psychological well-being ([Gallagher & Vella-Brodrick, 2008](#); [Schutte, Malouff, Simunek, McKenley, & Hollander, 2002](#)), physiological well-being ([Martins, Ramalho, & Morin, 2010](#); [Mikolajczak et al., 2015](#); [Mikolajczak, Roy, Luminet, Fillée, & de Timary, 2007](#)), and social well-being ([Petrides, Frederickson, & Furnham, 2004](#); [Schutte et al., 2001](#)) favorable outcomes for the individuals.

With regard specifically to couple relationships, researchers show these positive effects of emotional competences too (for a meta-analysis, [Malouff, Schutte, & Thorsteinsson, 2014](#)). In conjugal life, partners with a high level of emotional competence would be better able to understand the emotions they perceive and integrate them with their thoughts and understanding of the situations ([Caruso, Mayer, & Salovey, 2000](#)). With this global en-

coding, they would perceive, interpret, and regulate better their emotional state but also that of their partner, leading them to evaluate their conjugal relationships as good (Brackett, Warner, & Bosco, 2005). However, the effect of these skills may depend on how each person evaluates oneself and the partner in a given relationship (sense of competence or weakness, high or low expectations, etc.).

A second (exploratory) hypothesis is thus that, considered in conjunction with the social value of the partners, the role of emotional competences in dyadic adjustment could depend on the social value of the spouses and that this effect could vary depending on gender and the duration of the relationship. For this last point, Brackett et al. (2005) showed for example that while emotional competences are linked with general marital satisfaction, they do not affect the initial rapprochement of partners and may be of less interest as predictors of marital satisfaction when the couples are already very well experienced.

To summarize, a first hypothesis is that the social value of the partners influences their dyadic adjustment and that this effect differs according to the partners' gender and couple duration. A second hypothesis is that when one takes into account social value, the effect of emotional competences in couples' satisfaction would only be small and would appear for couples whose couple duration is medium and not short or long.

Method

Participants

The participants were both partners of 152 heterosexual couples. The women were aged from 20 to 78 years ($M = 38.28$, $SD = 13.99$) and the men were aged from 21 to 81 years ($M = 39.52$, $SD = 14.62$).

Procedure

We invited the participants to take part in a voluntary and unpaid study that we presented as an investigation of the determinants of conjugal adjustment. We recruited them in the extended social networks of the investigators (family members, neighbors, friends, and friends' network). The investigators were master's students and gave to each spouse of the couples in separate envelopes an information letter, a consent form, and a booklet of questionnaires. We guaranteed both anonymity and confidentiality of answers and data. In particular, we identified each couple and each partner by the use of a specific code and asked each partner to put personal booklet in the joined envelop and to close it before taking it back to the investigators.

The partners first filled their consent form and returned it to the investigators. Then, they individually filled out a series of questionnaires which included (1) a measure of social value that have been adapted for the couple context – this measure first focused on the Self and second on the Other, (2) a measure of emotional competences, and (3) a measure of adjustment in couple. Finally, they answered a series of socio-demographic items (age, sex, level of education, couple's duration, and number of children).

Material

The participants first described themselves (self-evaluations) and their partner (other-evaluation) on 18 items using 7-point scales ranging from -3 to +3, opposing a personality trait and its antonym. The instruction for self-evaluations was "Generally, how are you within your couple?" and the instruction for other-evaluations was

"Generally, how is your spouse within your couple?". To obtain as much consistency and adequacy as possible in the evaluations, it was important to consider these traits in a contextualized way (see Mollaret & Nicol, 2008). We chose the traits among those enlisted by Le Barbenchon, Cambon, and Lavigne (2005) who analyzed personality traits in terms of the way these traits describe individuals' social utility or social desirability. The criteria for our choice of these traits were that the items loaded highly on one of the two dimensions and that one could apply these items to couple system. Nine traits targeted the agreeableness, the solicitude, and the morality of the partners, that is, their social desirability within couple (e.g., from -3: not romantic to +3: romantic or from -3: not benevolent to +3: benevolent). The nine other traits targeted the efforts, the ease, and the competences of the partners, that is, their social utility within couple (e.g., from -3: submissive to +3: dominant or from -3: non-chalant to +3: dynamic). The score for each dimension is the mean of a participant's answers.

The participants then completed the 50 items of the PEC (Profile of Emotional Competences; Brasseur, Grégoire, Bourdu, & Mikolajczak, 2013). Participants rated their degree of agreement "at this point in time" with the 50 proposals (e.g., being able to express emotions in a socially accepted manner) using 5-point Likert scales (from 1: *Not at all* to 5: *Entirely*). PEC is a measure of emotional competences in five dimensions that are at the intra- and inter-individual levels (identification, understanding, regulation, use of emotions, and expression of own emotion/listening to the emotions of others). The general score of emotional competences is the mean of the participants' answers.

The participants finally completed the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS, Spanier, 1976) in its French brief form (Antoine, Christophe, & Nandrino, 2008). This brief form (DAS-16) includes 16 items using 6-point scales (from 1: *Totally disagree* to 6: *Fully agree*). DAS-16 measures two dimensions of dyadic adjustment. The participants first indicate for several domains to what extent they generally agree with their spouse (e.g., decision-making, sexual relationships, and expressions of affection). They should then indicate how good their couple interactions are (e.g., "we discuss calmly" or "we laugh together"). The score of dyadic adjustment is the sum of the answers; the highest this score, the best the adjustment. A score of at least 54 constitutes the cut-off for a good adjustment (Antoine et al., 2008).

Results

First, after data collection, we assigned the participants to one of three groups according to the duration of their relationship. Although this categorization is questionable (see Discussion), we have used it to test our hypotheses. The idea that duration effect on couples is not linear guided this partition. We also based it on an attempt to have an almost similar number of couples in each category as well as on data from literature on couple duration and marital satisfaction.

Thus, we created a first group of 59 "young" couples. The relationship duration of these couples was between one and five years of common life ($M = 2.98$, $SD = 1.33$). The women were aged from 20 to 56 years ($M = 26.15$, $SD = 5.73$) and the men were aged from 21 to 56 years ($M = 26.70$, $SD = 5.5$); 28% among them have one child or more who lives in the parental home. A second group included 40 so-called "intermediate" couples whose partners had a relationship duration between six and 19 years ($M = 10.74$, $SD = 3.69$). The women were aged from 21 to 62 years ($M = 36.02$, $SD = 8.46$) and the men, from 23 to 66 years ($M = 37.3$, $SD = 8.84$). Among these couples, 70% had one child or more, with all these children still living in the parental

home. A third group was a group of 53 “experienced” couples. The partners lived together from 20 to 57 years ($M = 31.21$, $SD = 8.76$). The women were aged from 41 to 78 years ($M = 53.79$, $SD = 8.03$) and the men aged from 40 to 81 years ($M = 55.47$, $SD = 8.88$); 94% among them had one child or more – 50% of these children still lived in the parental home.

We then analyzed the data using stepwise regressions using as predictors both partners’ self-reported social desirability and social utility and social desirability and social utility that the other attributed to them. To test the second hypothesis, we conducted a second set of stepwise regression analyses with emotional competences as an additional predictor.

Descriptive Analyses

Table 1 shows the Cronbach’s alphas for the measures. These alphas are satisfactory. In particular, the alphas for the measures of the dimensions of social value within couple show a good reliability.

Table 1

Global Cronbach’s Alphas for the Scales Used (Social Value Within Couple, Emotional Competences, and Dyadic Adjustment) per Gender

Measure	Gender	
	Men	Women
Self-reported Social Utility	.829	.776
Self-reported Social Desirability	.752	.753
Social Utility reported by the partner	.809	.823
Social Desirability reported by the partner	.836	.847
Emotional Competences	.880	.905
Dyadic Adjustment	.895	.885

In addition, the scores of dyadic adjustment are good (well above 54) and are consistent with the scores observed in the population of reference (Antoine et al., 2008) (Table 2). This means that the couples who participated in this study did not experience marital distress and that the data reflect a general “normal” functioning.

Table 2

Partners’ Scores of Dyadic Adjustment per Gender and Category of Couple Duration

Gender	Category of couple duration ^a					
	“Young” Couples		“Intermediate” Couples		“Experienced” Couples	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Men	72.72	12.83	73.80	10.75	73.61	9.30
Women	78.05	8.51	75.04	9.21	71.89	12.41
Comparison between genders	$F(1, 116) = 7.07, p = .009.$		$F(1, 78) = 0.30, p = .582.$		$F(1, 104) = 0.66, p = .420.$	

^a $F(2, 149) = 5.09, p = .007.$

Furthermore, these scores do not differ except for the mean score of women from “young” couples which are higher than the mean score of men from “young” couples and are also higher than the mean score of women from “experienced” couples (Bonferroni’s post-hoc test: mean difference = 6.16, $p = .0017$).

Effects of Social Value Within Couple on Dyadic Adjustment

We first used stepwise regressions to test the effects of self-reported social value within couple and social value within couple reported by the partner. Self-reported and other-reported social value within couple influence the partners' dyadic adjustment but this influence differs according to both gender and couple duration (Table 3).

Table 3

Effects (Stepwise Regressions) of Self- and Other-Reported Social Utility (S-U) and Social Desirability (S-D) Within Couple on Dyadic Adjustment as a Function of the Participants' Gender and Category of Couple Duration (Young, Intermediate, or Experienced)

Steps	R^2	F	Contributions
Men			
All Couples		$F(2, 149) = 34.47, p < .0001$	
Step 1	.19		Self-reported S-U, $\beta = .43, p < .0001$
Step 2	.32		Self-reported S-U, $\beta = .37, p < .0001$ S-D reported by the partner, $\beta = .36, p < .0001$
"Young" Couples		$F(2, 56) = 15.89, p < .0001$	
Step 1	.27		Self-reported S-U, $\beta = .52, p < .0001$
Step 2	.36		Self-reported S-U, $\beta = .47, p < .0001$ S-D reported by the partner, $\beta = .31, p = .0063$
"Intermediate" Couples		$F(2, 37) = 18.43, p < .0001$	
Step 1	.38		S-D reported by the partner, $\beta = .62, p < .0001$
Step 2	.50		S-D reported by the partner, $\beta = .50, p = .0003$ Self-reported S-U, $\beta = .37, p = .0052$
"Experienced" Couples			
Step 1	.12		S-D reported by the partner, $\beta = .34, p = .0119$
Women			
All Couples		$F(2, 149) = 15.02, p < .0001$	
Step 1	.14		Self-reported S-D, $\beta = .37, p < .0001$
Step 2	.17		Self-reported S-D, $\beta = .33, p < .0001$ S-U reported by the partner, $\beta = .18, p = .0223$
"Young" Couples		$F(2, 56) = 22.28, p < .0001$	
Step 1	.39		Self-reported S-D, $\beta = .62, p < .0001$
Step 2	.44		Self-reported S-D, $\beta = .55, p < .0001$ S-U reported by the partner, $\beta = .25, p = .0195$
"Intermediate" Couples			
Step 1	-		---
"Experienced" Couples		$F(2, 50) = 10.88, p < .0001$	
Step 1	.20		Self-reported S-D, $\beta = .44, p = .0009$
Step 2	.30		Self-reported S-D, $\beta = .41, p = .0012$ S-U reported by the partner, $\beta = .33, p = .0077$

The higher the women evaluate their own social desirability within couple (Self-reported Social Desirability) and next the higher their partners evaluate positively women's social utility within couple (Social Utility reported by the partner), the best women's dyadic adjustment is. However, this is not the case for "intermediate" couples. The pattern of results is quite different for men. Indeed, while self-reported social utility within couple primarily predicts dyadic adjustment in men, the way their female partners see them high in social utility within couple is also a relevant factor and even, this factor seems to become the more important after the first years of common life ("Intermediate" and "Experienced" couples).

Effects of Emotional Competences on Dyadic Adjustment

Regardless of social value, the level of emotional competences positively influences dyadic adjustment of female partners: respectively for “young” couples, $R^2 = .16$, $t = 3.24$, $p = .002$, for “intermediate” couples, $R^2 = .12$, $t = 2.29$, $p = .0279$, and for “experienced” couples, $R^2 = .07$, $t = 2.00$, $p = .0513$. This is also partly true for male partners: respectively for “young” couples, $R^2 = .19$, $t = 3.67$, $p = .0005$, for “intermediate” couples, $R^2 = .19$, $t = 3.00$, $p = .0048$, and for “experienced” couples, $R^2 = .01$, $t = 0.81$, $p = .4195$.

Effects of Social Value Within Couple and Emotional Competences on Dyadic Adjustment

Finally, we added emotional competences scores to previous dyadic adjustment predictors. This analysis shows variable effects depending on both gender and duration of the couples. For female partners, emotional competences influence the dyadic adjustment only for the “intermediate” couples: $R^2 = .12$, $\beta = .35$, $p = .0279$. For male partners, considering emotional competences does not enable to predict better the dyadic adjustment for “experienced” couples. However, emotional competences are involved in the dyadic adjustment of the “intermediate” couples at the same step of analysis (Step 2, $R^2 = .51$, $F[2, 37] = 18.99$, $p < .0001$) as that of the effect of social desirability reported by the partner (for which β is now .57) with a standardized coefficient of .36. Emotional competences are also involved in the dyadic adjustment of the “young” couples but in an additional step of analysis (Step 3, $R^2 = .42$, $F[2, 56] = 13.11$, $p < .0001$) with a standardized coefficient of .25 (and respectively for self-evaluated social utility, $\beta = .39$, and for social desirability reported by the partner, $\beta = .27$).

Discussion

This study aimed first to test the influence of self- and other- evaluations of the two dimensions of social value within couple on the dyadic adjustment of heterosexual couples' partners coming from a general population. We took also into account the partners' gender and the duration of their couple relationship. Next, this study aimed to evaluate the additional role of emotional competences in this adjustment.

Person's Social Value Within Couple and Dyadic Adjustment

Our first hypothesis was that the way the partners describe themselves on the dimensions of social value within the couple and the way they are described on these same dimensions by their spouse influence their dyadic adjustment. We also supposed that this influence depends on both gender and duration of the couple relationship. We confirmed this hypothesis.

Indeed, a first result of this study is that the higher the scores on the dimensions of social value within the couple, the better the partners' dyadic adjustment. However, according to our hypothesis, this effect appeared generally in a different way for male and female partners. For men, self-reported social utility within couple plays primarily a particular role in their adjustment, and then, the social desirability within couple their partner reports for them has a role to play. For women, the reverse is true with a central role of the self-reported social desirability within couple and next of the social utility within couple the men report for them.

It seems thus that the dyadic adjustment of these spouses depends on both self-views of these partners and the way the other perceives them on dimensions of person's social value but in a crossing way as a function of gender. This could be due to social roles of gender (Sczesny et al., 2018). Men would traditionally be the agent-ic partners (they “have to be” strong, confident, and competent), therefore partners who embody high social utility, whereas women would adopt the communal roles (they “have to be” warm, romantic, and attentive), demonstrating high social desirability (Eagly & Mladinic, 1989; Eagly & Steffen, 1984; Heilman & Eagly, 2008). This state of affairs could enable to create and maintain a *status quo* in these couples, social roles being clearly defined and daily played (see Testé & Simon, 2005) as well as known and adjusted (Croft, Schmader, & Block, 2019).

Such an interpretation is consistent with the effects of couples' relationship duration because social roles could be of different importance according to the time or step in the life of a couple. Thus, self-reported social utility is of particular importance for men in young couples because men may want to show that they are capable to do things in the right way and that they are competent, dominant (Sczesny et al., 2018). At the same time, social desirability may be particularly important for women in young couples; they should show that they are feminine and loving, that is, they can play the communal role that is associated with gender stereotypes (Sczesny et al., 2018). The same thing occurs for experienced couples. One can imagine that, for example when their children leave home, the women have to refresh their identity as “loving wives” because they can seem less motherly and may have to compensate this loss in their social role in the couple. Nevertheless, future studies will help to disentangle the effects of couple duration versus the effects of age of the spouses: we are indeed well aware of the fact that they are “naturally” often intertwined and age of the partners could itself engender both different evaluations of social value within couple and different links between this social value and dyadic adjustment. The links between self- and other-views and dyadic adjustment may also differ according to what the partners do at a given time within the couple, that is, according to the role they are able to play as a function of their professional activity for example or of their willingness to invest more domestic activities (Croft et al., 2019). Researchers have already shown the links between profession, socio-economic level, and marital satisfaction (see Bradbury, Fincham, & Beach, 2000) but future studies could explore the links between the profession, the overall social value of individuals, their social value within the couple, and their dyadic adjustment.

More generally, our results also bring the question of culture (see Weisfeld et al., 2011). Would these results be different with participants from different cultures? Would these results be different with partners of intercultural couples? Would these results be different with partners of homosexual couples? This last question could clarify the potential role of people's general social value and social value that is specifically within couple in dyadic adjustment.

Our results are promising because, even though the couples who participated in this study were not in conjugal distress, it is easy to imagine that a measure of social value within couple would allow therapists to predict better the functioning of couples in distress. Moreover, such a measure could facilitate work on the way each partner perceive herself or himself within the couple and perceive the other (Segrin, Hanzal, & Domschke, 2009). Such a practice could help to reinforce both degree of agreement and quality of interactions (that is, dyadic adjustment) within the couple by means of a crossover of the partners' points of view (as it is the case for example for sexual relationships: Dobson, Campbell, & Stanton, 2018 or attachment strategies within couples: Mondor et al., 2011).

Similarly, the links shown between self-esteem and marital adjustment (e.g., [Bélanger et al., 2014](#)) may in fact reflect the links between person's social value and adjustment. In this respect, the use of a measure of social value could refine the results by decomposing the dimension on which individuals perceive themselves positively or less positively and perhaps better target elements of the Self-concept that these individuals should reinforce to improve their social interactions.

Finally, and from a more fundamental point of view, many researchers have tested the links between personality traits in the Big Five and couple relationships and satisfaction, and despite a good consensus for some dimensions, differences appeared in the results for others. For example, the influence of Extraversion and Openness are questionable because these dimensions influence sometimes positively and sometimes negatively marital satisfaction (e.g., [Altmann, Sierau, & Roth, 2013](#); [Rosowsky, King, Coolidge, Rhoades, & Segal, 2012](#)). Additionally, several researchers (e.g., [Rosowsky et al., 2012](#)) showed gender differences in these links between dimensions of personality and marital satisfaction. From the perspective of the Theory of Person's Social Value ([Beauvois, 1995](#)), the reasons could be that these personality traits saturate in fact on both dimensions of social value and are too general because they one assesses them outside a specific context (see [Mollaret & Nicol, 2008](#)) – here the couple system. We think that person's social value is a promising avenue to understand better the links between *how an individual is within her or his couple* and the way *this individual experiences the interactions within the couple*.

Person's Social Value Within Couple, Emotional Competences, and Dyadic Adjustment

Our second hypothesis was that the positive effect of emotional competences on dyadic adjustment would depend partly on the partners' social value within couple, and, again, this would vary depending on gender and the duration of the relationship.

First, the results of this study confirmed the effect of emotional competences on dyadic adjustment ([Brackett et al., 2005](#)) except for men of couples for at least 20 years (“experienced” couples). Next, it seems that despite the literature showing this effect of emotional competences on couples' marital satisfaction (e.g., [Malouff et al., 2014](#)) these effects can hide another process (that is, the effects of the way people perceive themselves in terms of their social desirability and social utility in the couple system). We could imagine in particular an overlap between person's social value and the ability to identify own emotions and those of others or the ability to correctly express own emotions *in relation to a specific person* (here the spouse), or to correctly decode the emotions of the other by habit of living together or in link with reactions that we can anticipate from this other person.

Indeed, this study showed that emotional competences influence both male and female partners but only in addition to social value and not at all times of couples' life. In particular, emotional competences keep their effect for women of “intermediate” couples, precisely the period where social value do not predict dyadic adjustment. This result partly confirms the second hypothesis.

In “intermediate” couples, the fact that social value failed to predict women's dyadic adjustment and the fact that emotional competence had an effect on their dyadic adjustment could be justified by a few ideas. We can think that social value is not as important as it was (in “young” couples) or it will be (in “experienced” couples)

because at this specific moment of their lives (the children are growing up, the work life goes on), everything is more or less stable or balanced. In other words, the partners do not need particular manifestations of social utility and social desirability at this moment of their relationship because they are well balanced in their lives and used to each other the way they are. However, daily life may require managing feelings with or towards the partner. The abilities to identify emotions, express them, and regulate them may be central in the maintain of couple during this long transition from a “young” to an “old” couple, during which all have to remains as it always was, children – if the couple has children – are still at home, professional retirement is far away and first flames of romantic encounter are sometimes a past story. Future studies could explore with interest the links between the level of emotional skills of spouses and the dyadic adjustment of these spouses. Future studies could also continue to explore the role of self-descriptions and partner's descriptions in these relationships because social value within couple of the partners may related with the effective use of their emotional competences. We think that this could also be a way to improve couples' ability to develop good quality dyadic coping (e.g., [Bélanger et al., 2014](#); [Kotsou, Nelis, Grégoire, & Mikolajczak, 2011](#); [Levesque, Lafontaine, Caron, Flesch, & Bjornson, 2014](#)).

Finally, this “intermediate” period, which is very large here (six to 18 years of couple duration) would merit a special look because it is few studied (but see [Belsky & Hsieh, 1998](#); [Kamp Dush et al., 2008](#)) and it is precisely very long and numerous things can happen during this period ([Hirschberger, Srivastava, Marsh, Cowan, & Cowan, 2009](#)). This point would be worth developing with a large sample of couples to “unravel” this period, view the state of the partners' dyadic adjustment, identify the factors that determine it point to point, and even, which life events modify the balance in marital functioning (for men and women: [Belsky & Hsieh, 1998](#); [Lavner & Bradbury, 2010](#)) and/or change the weight of these factors (e.g., [Lavner & Bradbury, 2010](#)).

Limitations

This study has several limitations. First, the correlation between spouses' age and duration of couples' relationship remains a recurrent problem when analyzing time effects in marital relationships. Studies exploring for example second unions or tardive union could help to bring clear answers to this question. Second, this study is not a longitudinal one. Again, such longitudinal studies could help to describe the possible evolution of the links shown here across couple life. Third, the participants were precisely partners of well-adjusted and non-distressed couples. Studying the links between social value and dyadic adjustment in distressed couples could be an interesting lead to follow. Fourth, the way we categorized the couples is quite questionable. While this categorization based on literature and data, the question of real differences between couples of, for example, five or six years of couple life remains. Again, a follow-up study could help to have a better picture of the evolution of these couples. Regression analyses per blocks with a larger sample of couples could also be a way to overcome this limitation.

Conclusion

Despite these main limitations, the results of this study are promising. The application of Person's Social Value Theory ([Beauvois & Dubois, 2008](#)) to the couple relationship could both predict dyadic adjustment and maybe help therapists strengthen this adjustment through a work on self and partner's perception in couple. Actually, this could be a new means for couples therapists to both point out specific difficulties and to work on the cross perceptions that the partners have of each other.

This study is one of the first to apply this theory to couples and opens up interesting avenues for future studies because social value could underlie other determinants of couple relationships: Personality? Self-esteem? Assertiveness? Attachment strategies? Emotional competences? Indeed, according to Beauvois (1976), social value helps not only to describe people, but also to evaluate them – and to evaluate them *in a social context*. The traits used help individuals to know what they can or should do with others. These traits are therefore guidelines for behaviors. This is stimulating. It could be a very relevant tool to understand better the more or less sustainable interactions between individuals. This is true in particular in the sense that partners must be interdependent for the couple system to work and that each partner needs to know what they can or should do *for themselves, for the other, and for the common relationship*, i.e. for the best possible dyadic adjustment.

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