

DIFFERENTIATION OF SELF: EXAMINATION OF THE CONCEPT IN THE  
INTERPLAY OF STRESS, LIFE SATISFACTION, AND MARITAL  
SATISFACTION

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO  
THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES  
OF  
MIDDLE EAST TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY

BY

AYŞE ULU YALÇINKAYA

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS  
FOR  
THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY  
IN  
THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL SCIENCES

DECEMBER 2019



Approval of the Graduate School of Social Sciences

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## ABSTRACT

### DIFFERENTIATION OF SELF: EXAMINATION OF THE CONCEPT IN THE INTERPLAY OF STRESS, LIFE SATISFACTION, AND MARITAL SATISFACTION

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December 2019, 340 pages

The purpose of the current study is to investigate the role of differentiation of self (I-position, emotional reactivity, fusion with others and emotional cut-off) as a mediator on the relationship between perceived stress, intradyadic stress, extradyadic stress and life satisfaction and dyadic satisfaction among Turkish married individuals. The sample was composed of 825 married individuals (420 women, 405 men) between 19-70 age ranges ( $M = 38.14$ ,  $SD = 1.18$ ). Demographic Information Form, Multidimensional Stress Questionnaire for Couples, Perceived Stress Scale, Differentiation of Self Inventory-Short Form, Dyadic Adjustment Scale and Satisfaction with Life Scale were used to gather

data. Structural equation modeling (SEM) was used to test the hypothesized marital and life satisfaction model.

Extradyadic stress was eliminated from the study because of the high multicollinearity values. Perceived stress, intradyadic stress, and differentiation of self were exogenous variables, while life satisfaction and marital satisfaction were endogenous variables. The results of the SEM indicated that individuals who have higher levels of perceived and intradyadic stress and higher emotional reactivity, they have lower levels of dyadic satisfaction and life satisfaction. Moreover, as the level of perceived or intradyadic stress increases and the level of I-position decreases, married individuals have lower level of life and dyadic satisfaction. The results of the study showed that the proposed model explained 37 % of the variance in the life satisfaction and 63 % of the variance in dyadic satisfaction of individuals. Consequently, the findings supported the significance of differentiation of self variables in married individuals' life and dyadic satisfaction.

**Keywords:** Differentiation of Self, Dyadic Satisfaction, Life Satisfaction, Stress.

## ÖZ

### BENLİK AYRIŞMASI: KAVRAMIN YAŞAM DOYUMU, EVLİLİK DOYUMU VE STRES ARASINDAKİ ETKİLEŞİMDE İNCELENMESİ

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Aralık 2019, 340 sayfa

Bu çalışmanın amacı, algılanan stres, eşten kaynaklı stres, eşten bağımsız stres ve yaşam doyumu ile evlilik doyumu arasındaki ilişkide benlik ayrışması değişkenlerinin (ben pozisyonu alma, duygusal tepkisellik, başkalarıyla iç içe geçme ve duygusal kopma) aracılık etme rolünü incelemektir. Çalışmanın örneklemini yaşları 19 ve 70 arasında değişen ( $M = 38,14$ ,  $S = 1,18$ ) toplam 825 evli yetişkin birey (420 kadın, 405 erkek) oluşturmuştur. Araştırmada veri toplama araçları olarak Kişisel Bilgi Formu, Çiftler için Çok Boyutlu Stres Anketi, Algılanan Stres Ölçeği, Benliğin Farklılaşması Envanteri-Kısa Formu, Çift Uyum Ölçeği ve Yaşam Doyumu Ölçeği kullanılmıştır.

Önerilen ilişki ve yaşam doyum modelini test etmek için Yapısal Eşitlik Modellemesi (YEM) kullanılmıştır. Eşten bağımsız stres boyutu, eşten kaynaklı stres ve algılanan stres ile yüksek çoklu doğrusallık değeri gösterdiği için çalışmadan çıkartılmıştır. Algılanan stres, eşten kaynaklı stres ve benlik ayrışması çalışmanın bağımsız değişkenleriyken, yaşam doyum ve evlilik doyumunu çalışmanın bağımlı değişkenleridir. YEM sonuçları algılanan stres ve evlilik stresi ile duygusal tepkiselliği daha yüksek olan bireylerin, ilişki ve yaşam doyum düzeylerinin düşük olduğunu göstermiştir. Ayrıca, stres seviyesi arttıkça ve ben pozisyonu azaldıkça, yaşam ve ilişki doyumunda düşmektedir. Araştırmanın sonuçları önerilen modelin bireylerin yaşam doyumlarındaki varyansın % 37'sini ve ilişki doyumlarındaki varyansın % 63'ünü açıkladığını göstermiştir. Sonuç olarak, bulgular evli bireylerin ilişkisel ve yaşam doyumlarında benliğin farklılaşması değişkenlerinin önemini desteklemiştir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Benlik Ayrışması, İlişki Doyumu, Yaşam Doyumu, Stres.

*To those who inspired me  
& wings of my soul*

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I grew up with all the work of this dissertation and I have learned that patience is a virtue. I am grateful to all of those whom I have had the pleasure to work during this dissertation and who add meaning to my life.

Firstly, I would like to express my gratitude to my supervisor Prof. Dr. Ayhan Demir, for his unwavering support, guidance, encouragement, and insight through several incarnations of this work. Throughout the writing process, he helped me to rise time to time after all the falls. I am so glad to work with him and learn to overcome the challenges. His hours of sacrifice, instruction and guidance have contributed greatly to the researcher and a psychological counselor that I am today. I owe a great measure of my counseling skills and theoretical understanding to his guidance.

Each of the members of my Dissertation Committee has provided me extensive personal and professional guidance and taught me a great deal about both scientific research and life in general. I would especially like to thank Assoc. Prof. Dr. Zeynep Hatipođlu Sümer, the chairman of my committee. As my professor, she taught me more than I could ever give her credit for here. She has shown me, by her example, what a good scientist (and person) should be. I would like to express my appreciation to my other committee members, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Irmak Hürmeriç Altunsöz, Assist. Prof. Dr. Fatma Zehra Ünlü Kaynakçı, and Assist. Prof. Dr. Onur Özmen. Their

constructive suggestions helped my thesis be more productive. Their kind attitudes encouraged to keep my enthusiasm to increase quality of my work. I want to express my special thanks to Prof. Dr. Esin Tezer for her criticism and encouragements about my dissertation and it was great honor for me that I worked with such a good academician through my years in the program.

I would like to express my deepest appreciations for Prof. Dr. Özgür Erdur Baker, Prof. Dr. Oya Yerin Güneri, Prof. Dr. Ali Yıldırım, and Prof. Dr. Hanife Akar. They have been a support both formally and informally with their great kindness through my years in METU.

Moreover, I would like to extend my thanks to my professors of my undergraduate years in Boğaziçi University. Prof. Dr. Fatoş Erkman, Prof. Dr. Fatma Gök, Assist. Prof. Dr. Deniz Albayrak Kaymak, Prof. Dr. Aydan Gülerce, Assist. Prof. Dr. Hande Sart, Assist. Prof. Dr. Fatma Nevra Seggie, and Assist. Prof. Dr. Bengü Börkan. They prepared me for these days, opened the doors of research world to me, taught ethics, and helped me shape my academic life. You gave me enthusiasm to keep going in the academic career. And, I would like to express my deepest appreciation for my classmates from Boğaziçi University. Each of you is very special for me and have different meaning in my life.

I would like to express my very deep gratitude to my awesome colleagues in ODTÜ, Anıl Kandemir, Dr. Gülçin Gülmez, Halil Han Aktaş, Neslihan Gök-Ayyıldız, Dr. Özlem Yıldırım Taştı, and Sevgi Kaya Kaşıkçı. I am very thankful that I had such great colleagues and friends. Their friendship and

support helped me to overcome challenges of this path. I will never forget and miss our coffee times which has a forty years of sake ☺ Our laughs and dedikodu in front of the kitchen made this thesis possible.

I have lots of “yol arkadaşı” whom with I have had this PhD journey. I am really grateful to Özden Sevil Gülen, Betül Tanacıoğlu, Hilal Döner, and Mustafa Alperen Kurşuncu. Without their friendship and the sentences that “sen yaparsın”, I would have difficulty in keep going in some periods.

Before moving to the office 420, I was in the office 405 where I have had the happiest moments in the faculty. I started to work with Dr. İdil Aksöz Efe and Dr. Çiğdem Topcu Uzer, and then continued with Dr. Zehra Ünlü Kaynakçı and Dr. Mine Muyan Yılık, respectively in the same office. Each combination of my officemates was perfect and they made my years more bearable with their comforting support. I am gratefully thankful and feel luckily that we shared the same office and became colleagues. Mine, I really do not know how I would handle with stressful periods of my doctorate without your wise, sincere and encouraging help. Thank you for being such an open, funny, and frank person. Zehra, I have always felt being wholeheartedly understood and supported both academically and personally by you. And, İdil, I am genuinely indebted to you for providing me social and emotional support in the direction of finishing to writing this dissertation. Your sincere comments, humor, excitement helped, supported, and comforted me. Finally I finished my dissertation in the ex-office of Dr. Rahime Çobanoğlu and her memories in the room inspired me while writing the thesis. I will always appreciate her valuable friendship, kindness, motivation, and humanity.

Can Dostum Merve Asarođlu, I love you and hug you. You provided me great support in every step of my life since I met you ☺ Thank you for your patience when I tell you all the negatives and pessimistic ideas coming from the bottom of my iceberg. I am lucky that I have your help and support throughout my life.

Of course I owe much to the individuals who helped me with participating in the study. I appreciate everyone who shared experiences with me.

Nobody has been more important to me in the pursuit of this project than my parents, Hanife Ulu and Halil Ulu. I would like to thank my mother and father, whose love and guidance are with me in whatever I pursue, and believe in me that I have the power find a way of handling with academic or personal difficulties. My dear sister, brother, and Dear Aylin, you are one of the inspiration sources in my life. My sister, I cannot believe that when you grew up this much and became my friend. Also, my nephew Zeynep, your joining to our family gave meaning to my life and your eyes and warm smile made my study nights more funny. Thank you for being a great accompanier with your videos and photos throughout my thesis work. My second family, Yalçinkaya people (Group Deđişik), I love all of you. Thank you for being supportive and encouraging to me. Kısacası tüm ailem, hepiniz iyi ki varsınız.

Last, but of course not least, I wish to thank my beloved half, Talha because he gave me the life I love today. Thank you for sharing this life with me and for every single moment in our special world.

As a final note, the other fantastic people of my life, you are not written in these pages but please continue to be part of my life.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AMOS	Analysis of Moment Structures
ASÖ	Algılanan Stres Ölçeği
BFST	Bowenian Family Systems Theory
CFA	Confirmatory Factor Analysis
DAS	Dyadic Adjustment Scale
DSI-SF	Differentiation of Self Inventory-Short Form
MSQ-C	Multidimensional Stress Questionnaire for Couples
PSS	Perceived Stress Scale
PTSD	Post Traumatic Stress Disorder
SPSS	Statistical Package for Social Sciences
STM	Sytemic Transactional Model
SWLS	Satisfaction with Life Scale

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Psychiatrist Murray Bowen who is the developer of the Bowenian Family Systems Theory (BFST), claims that "...the human family is a multigenerational, natural living system and that the emotional functioning of each member of the system affects the functioning of the other members in predictable ways" (Comella, Bader, Ball, Wiseman, & Sagar, 1995, p. 5). With this quote, while calling the emotional unit, Bowen does not mean the individual, but the family. Bowen proposed that all social, psychological, behavioral, and chronic physical problems are originated from emotional forces functioning in a family (Kerr & Bowen, 1988). Throughout this thesis, applications of differentiation of self assumptions of the BFST to stress in the context of marital satisfaction and life satisfaction will be the main concern.

Differentiation of self has been theorized as an essential element of psychological functioning of the individuals. Bowen argued that the outcomes of stress are controlled by differentiation of self, such that high levels of stress could effect individuals with lower level of differentiation more in comparison to individuals higher in differentiation regarding predicting dysfunction (Murdock & Gore, 2004). In this aspect, self-differentiation is the capacity to tolerate life stress (Kerr & Bowen, 1988). From this perspective, well-differentiated individuals are more resilient to the toxic effects of stress;

whereas, if the similar amount of stress is practiced by a poorly differentiated person then s/he will have noticeable consequences. Therefore, it can be concluded that then there is a link between the level of differentiation and the ability to cope with stressful events.

Starting with these assumptions, stress as an unavoidable phenomenon of modern society (Hung, 2011), will be held through the Bowenian Family Systems Theory lenses. In the past decades, pile of research have indicated that stress presents risk either for every single person's as well as couples' relationships. General stress is not at the same level as it was before; it shows downturn trends according to American Psychological Association's (2015) findings. Nevertheless, these levels are still not at the optimum level to be considered as healthy. Globally, Negative Experiences Index reached a new high level in 2017. According to GALLUP's Global Emotions Report (2018), more than one in three people said that they have experienced a lot of worry (38 %) or stress (37 %) on the day before the survey. GALLUP asked adults in 149 countries if they had the positive experience on the day before the survey. Turkey is the forth country from the bottom who had the lowest positive experiences. OECD How's Life Report (2017), measures how individuals appraise their life as a whole and asks individuals to rate their general satisfaction with life on a scale from 0 to 10. People who live in Turkey on average gave it a 5.5 grade, lower than the OECD average of 6.5. In this regard, it can be claimed that stress and well-being of individuals are up-to-date, critical concern areas for both researchers and policy makers.

It has been many years to find an answer which factors play a significant role in managing stress to pursue a more fulfilled life and satisfied relationships. While individuals work to handle with life stress, they use multiple strategies. The ability to deal with a stressor is thought to be determined by the extent to which functioning is cooperated and by whether certain strategies work well with that stressor (Folkman & Lazarus, 1980).

All human beings around the world experience stress and it is an all-familiar experience for individuals. Stress is also considered as a dyadic construct because its effect might be seen in close relationships as well as close relationships might trigger stress levels of individuals. Stress can be categorized into two groups, as being originated from outside and inside the romantic relationships. Stress might affect the interaction with people, especially with partners. The current study will also scrutiny the link between the types of stress and subjective evaluation of marital and life satisfaction.

### **1.1 Background to the Study**

The family is a crucial institution in Turkish society, often works as the primary basis of social care and support for individuals (Fields & Casper, 2001). Healthy marriages give spouses with a sense of meaning in their lives as well as serve as protective factors against life stress (Fincham, Stanley, & Beach, 2007). Besides, marriages provide a stable primary structure for establishing a family relationship and rearing the next generation (Larson & Holman, 1994). When healthy marriages are formed and maintained, they provide benefits to the individual, the family unit, and the society (Orathinkal

& Vansteenwegen, 2006). Then, why is it that specific individuals seem to be happier in their marriages and lives than others?

The reciprocal action, interaction or emotional climate of the couples play a crucial role in marital satisfaction, which is considered as a complex and dynamic process. Feelings and assessments regarding marital satisfaction may be definitely positive, explicitly negative, or ambivalent, where equally positive and negative evaluations related to one's marriage coexist (Fincham & Linfield, 1997; Kaleta, 2014). Marital adjustment includes agreement, fulfillment, togetherness, and expression of emotions between spouses and is described as the degree to which couples identify that their partners meet their demands and physical and emotional desires (Burpee & Langer, 2005). Marital adjustment contributes, directly or indirectly, to the preservation of the family unit and a better quality of life, while dissatisfaction with the marriage has been found to lead to anxiety and even dissolution of the family unit (Skowron, 2000). In that sense, marriage might be considered as the beginning of positive, negative, or uncertain experiences. Marital quality can be influenced by various aspects of demanding and worrying life conditions. However, as many scholars indicate, the primary basis for a decrease in marital quality is stress (Bradbury, Fincham, & Beach, 2000; Neff & Karney, 2004; Randall & Bodenmann, 2009 ).

Cowan and Cowan (1992) informed that 90 % of married couples who are physically able, would have children and they reported that "We can conclude with some confidence that the transition to parenthood constitutes a period of stressful and sometimes maladaptive change for a significant proportion of

new parents.” (Cowan, & Cowan, 1995, p. 412). The transition to parenthood signifies a significant life event in which a couple must both individually and together negotiates contemporary individual, marital, domestic, social, and professional alterations. Since the publication of LeMasters’ article entitled “Parenthood As Crisis” (LeMasters, 1957), a considerable literature has been created to explain in what ways having a baby modifies the lives of couples and a major part of these studies have found a decline in positive marital exchanges, an increase in marital conflict, and a decrease in marital satisfaction (Belsky & Kelly, 1994; Gottman & Notarius, 2000; Michaels & Goldberg, 1988).

Dissatisfaction arises due to stresses, and sources of conflict, as parents adapt to their caregiving roles and responsibilities, and routines spend resources of time and energy (Cowan & Cowan, 1992; Cowan et al., 1985; Lawrance, Rothman, Cobb, Rothman, & Bradbury, 2008). Some studies have put forth similar findings about a reduction in quality of marriage after childbirth, signifying that such decline is not distinctive to the transition to parenthood period yet also to the function of duration of marriage (Umberson, Williams, Powers, Chen, & Campbell, 2005), and this reduction may depend on various other individual and couple characteristics (Doss, Rhoades, Stanley, & Markman, 2009). In either case, it is clear that childbirth is a important event in the married couples’ lives, and for many, brings about a decrease in relationship quality.

Many of couples will probably experience an adverse alteration in relationship satisfaction upon becoming parents (Cowan, & Cowan, 1992; Cox, Paley, Burchinal, & Payne; 1999; Lawrance et al. 2008). After parenthood, it is

important for couples to find a balance between spending time with each other and with their children. They develop new identities about roles and their family, and this redefinition of identities will influence each individual in the family (Delmore-Ko, Pancer, Hunsberger, & Prett, 2000). In this context, two questions need to be answered: Which couples are more probable to experience poorer levels of satisfaction and what preventative actions can be taken for these couples? There is a variability, and not all couples become less satisfied with their marriages during this transition and parenthood period which depends on their exposure to different types of stress. For example, as Dew and Wilcox (2011) argue, whether spouses can renegotiate their roles and protect their time together may help preserve marital quality. Therefore, the present study takes not only married individuals with no child, but also husbands and wives with at least one child into consideration in order to understand their experiences after childbirth.

The task of marriage or coupling process is one of the biggest challenges in our daily living. Today, in Turkey the number of couples who get married decreased by 1.2 % according to the 2018 statistics in comparison to the prior year and in 2018, a total of 142.448 divorce was recorded. The speed of the divorce rate had increased by 40 % in the last ten years (TurkStat, 2015). According to Turkish Statistics Institute (2011), 96.70 % of divorces was high conflict divorce due to irreconcilable differences.

Adjusting to married life is a complicated process in any culture. As people start living as a couple, several differences resulting from each spouses' points of views, lifestyles in the family of origin, ways of solving issues, ways of

spending time and way of establishing a relationship and getting one's need met, start to emerge and affect their marriage. Encountering differences in relations can be challenging personally and interpersonally. How they handle these differences can be one of the determinants of their relationship quality. Beside the relational issues, individual factors may also determine the relationship quality such as stress, coping skills, and conflict resolution skills.

Knowing what factors put a couple at risk creates hope for helping couples to overcome the odds. In the field of counseling psychology, systemic perspectives to study family experiences and how individuals function have become a widespread interest. This interest in systemic exploration has grown the use of family therapy or counseling to encourage the well-being of individuals within their families. Family systems theory works well with individual and family problems. The conceptualization and treatment of individual and family psychopathology from a systemic perspective gained increasing support in empirical studies (Nichols & Schwartz, 2001; Shadish & Baldwin, 2003). In this context, it can be thought that the evaluation of family relationships and emotional processes affecting individual functioning is of great interest to family clinicians and researchers.

Positive psychology aims to understand how individuals can negotiate, resolve and grow in the face of life's stressors and challenges. Some people are more resilient, have strengths and do not lose their sense of contentment and feelings of congruency between wants or needs and accomplishments or resources, which could be considered as signals of life satisfaction. How individuals function positively in private and social realms of their lives in the

face of difficulty (but not merely existing but truly living), is not being about a superman or superwoman. Particular to this thesis, differentiation of self was taken as one of the basics of mental well-being that may affect individuals' response to the life challenges on several phases of life.

Family systems theories are a comprehensive approach to how adults build and preserve reciprocally satisfying or fulfilling lives and close relationships and offer some solutions and strategies to intervene in couples' problems (Shadish & Baldwin, 2003). Amongst the family systems approaches, Bowen's theory was selected in this study since it provides a comprehensive explanation to the development and maintenance of intimate and mutual marital relationships (Eidi & Khanjani, 2006; Gubbins, Perosa, & Bartle-Haring, 2010). Theoretical grounds allowed us to link marital quality, individual well-being, and stress as a tool to help guide the field of marriage and family therapy and the relationship between stress, life satisfaction and marital satisfaction will be the focus of this empirical research. This study expanded on Bowen's systemic theory to provide an account of the role of differentiation of self in some aspects of marital relationships. Since differentiation of self generally means emotional maturity in more general, it can contribute to the management of conflict and stress in difficult times and can protect marital satisfaction and life quality. Differentiation of self can be one of the possible mechanisms for promoting healthy, productive and happy individuals. One of the main goals of Bowenian approach is to increase the levels of self differentiation, where the focus is on making changes for the self rather than n trying to change others.

According to Bowen, the family is an emotional system; attitudes, behaviors and interactions among people within the family system are emphasized in the theory. Eight foundational theoretical conceptualizations, which are namely differentiation of self, triangulation, nuclear family emotional process, family projection process, multigenerational transmission process, sibling position, emotional cutoff, and societal emotional process, were posited in the theory (Bowen, 1978; Nichols & Schwartz, 2001). Among the variety of constructs in Bowenian Theory, differentiation of self is the most critical to mature development and psychological health of individuals (Kerr & Bowen, 1988). The differentiation of self is a process through which balance between individuality and togetherness is managed within an emotional system. It can also be explained as the achievement of mature autonomy. Individuals invest energy to struggle to maintain a dynamic equilibrium between being dependent and independent. Differentiation starts with understanding these two separate life forces (individuality and togetherness) influencing functioning. While individuality is a desire to be separate and autonomous; togetherness is a desire to interact with others (Bowen, 1976). Therefore, self-differentiation has two levels: intrapsychic and interpersonal.

On the intrapsychic level, differentiation of self is the ability to maintain intellectual responding in the face-to-face emotional crisis or separate thought from feelings. It means that more significant differentiation is considered as protecting personal autonomy and enabling to take I positions in a significant relationship, such as marriage which is involving intense emotional experiences (Kerr & Bowen, 1988). On the interpersonal level, it is the ability to maintain one's identity without fearing enmeshment or rejection in the

context of a close and intimate relationship or to balance intimacy and autonomy with others. Differentiation of self can be observed at the functional level in dealing with anxiety and stress in an emotional system. The theory proposes that in a marriage, a more significant differentiation enables persons to have more autonomy without facing incapacitating fears of abandonment and to accomplish emotional intimacy in that same relationship without fear of feeling smothered (Bowen, 1978; Kerr & Bowen, 1988). For instance, when a crisis is experienced within a family, and differentiated individuals do not stay under the influence of others' thoughts, feelings or discourses. In other words, the more differentiated individuals do not feel a lack of self-direction while supporting their spouse's best interest. The more people experience differentiation, the more they can maintain linkages between those who contradict or advocate opposed ideas and those who withstand emotional cut off to preserve the sense of self (Schnarch, 1997). Basically, individuals have control over their feeling states and behaviors.

If one of the spouses, the husband or the wife, is in a less differentiated position in a marriage, they are considered as emotionally immature and in need of increased capacity for closeness and separateness. Bowen (1978) asserts that less differentiated husband and wife sacrifice growth and self-direction for marital stability. Whereas, marital systems, identified with a more significant differentiation of self have more role flexibility, intimate contact, tolerance for differences in point of views, less emotional reactivity and less trouble, are able to stay calm in reaction to the emotionality of the other. Bowen argues that individuals who are have higher level of differentiation will be better able to tolerate the effects of stress, since they will be more likely to employ

active, objective, problem-focused coping responses rather than avoidant or emotionally-oriented responses, which means choosing objectivity over emotionality.

The remainder of this thesis will further develop an argument for the need to examine Bowen's theory of differentiation of self and its influence on relationship satisfaction and individual well-being. The current study is designed to clarify the relationship between different types of stress (intradyadic and extradyadic stress and perceived stress), differentiation of self and marital satisfaction and life satisfaction.

## **1.2 The Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the current study is to investigate the role of differentiation of self (I-position, emotional reactivity, fusion with others and emotional cut-off) as a mediator on the relationships between perceived stress, intradyadic stress, extradyadic stress and life satisfaction and dyadic satisfaction among Turkish married individuals. Mainly, the study aims to investigate the relationship between the interplay of stress, differentiation of self and marital satisfaction and life satisfaction.

Specifically, the present study addresses following research questions: "To what extent life satisfaction and dyadic satisfaction of Turkish married individuals are explained by the hypothesized structural model comprised of differentiation of self variables (I-position, emotional reactivity, fusion with others and emotional cut-off), and stress variables (perceived stress, extradyadic stress and intradyadic stress)?" and to what extent do

differentiation of self mediate the potential influence of perceived stress, chronic intradyadic stress and extradyadic stress on life satisfaction and dyadic satisfaction among Turkish married individuals?

### **1.3 Significance of the Study**

The significance of the current study regarding practice, theory, and research is presented in this section. In terms of the practical significance of the study, it is believed that stress as a contemporary phenomena in today's daily life should be investigated in the context of marriage for several purposes. First of all, as it will be indicated more in the literature review section, stress is embedded in modern today's societies and may give rise to psychological, personal, social and economic problems. Besides, previous studies have noticeably discovered that stress is associated with harmful and unfavourable marital consequences and individual concerns. Perceived stress and feeling of helplessness against daily hassles and experiences may have an impact on the close relationships and result in marital conflicts. As a result of stress, an individual's communication and problem-solving skills may be blocked or diminished which may also affect the quality of life. Intervention programs to buffer against stress may inhibit couples' stress and to teach coping strategies have shown encouraging results (Bodenman, Charwoz et al., 2007).

Understanding the effects of intradyadic and extradyadic stressors on life satisfaction appears to be at a crossroads, between intervention possibilities and meeting essential empirical and theoretical demands. There are various studies examining life satisfaction of adults but, to my knowledge, there is no

single study in the literature that includes both different stress factors and differentiation of self variables. This study provides a unique opportunity for readers to acquire a perspective of self-differentiation and thus develop coping strategies against the inevitable stress situations they might be exposed to. Results may offer ideas to respond to stress conditions in a healthy way by preserving their identity and stability.

Marriage is the real challenge since keeping equilibrium between stressful life and marriage requires positive energy. Therapeutic intervention to increase individuals' level of differentiation of self is critical both to increase one's capacity for emotional regulation in his/her life and to achieve intimacy and mutuality in marriage. The current study is the very first attempt to focus on the mediating role of differentiation of self-processes to achieving an understanding of couple dynamics in research and clinical practice. Bowenian Theory in marriages has not been widely studied in Turkey (Togay, 2016; Varol, 2015). Therefore, the findings of the present study can be seen as an opportunity to examine whether these constructs explain the interplay between stress and life satisfaction and marital satisfaction in married Turkish adults. This study may help to understand further the relevance of the theory in our culture.

Bowenian Family Systems theory was initially advanced as a helping tool to guide the field of marriage and family therapy. Family systems theories and constructs tend to receive little consideration from marital scholars, who instead based their efforts on pleasant and aversive interpersonal interactions, communication skills, and problem-solving skills in marital functioning. This

may also facilitate further research projects in the field. Bowen's family systems theory may play an important role in theoretical and clinical developments in the field of family and marriage therapy but there is a scarcity of clinical effectiveness research supplementing its effectiveness. Instead, it seems that research in this area is still introductory (Miller, Anderson, & Keala, 2004). New doors can be opened to the more frequent use of Bowenian family therapy in the clinical setting if the study proves that differentiation of self helps married individuals to tolerate and manage stress or difficulties in the present. The current study is also one of the preliminary studies in our culture but may open the way for clinical significance studies. This study will enhance understanding how the individual's relational functioning and well-being is related to one's differentiation of self.

In terms of the significance in the research area, while there are studies in the international literature examining stress, differentiation of self and marital satisfaction at the same time and searching for direct relationship of differentiation of self with stress and satisfaction variables (Hooper, & Doehler, 2011; Krycak, Murdock, & Marszalek, 2012; Murdock, & Gore, 2004; Sandage, & Jankowski, 2010), the relationship between all variables at the same time in a model has not been examined in the Turkish culture. As a new approach, differentiation of self is suggested to be used as a mediator for psychological well-being and is expected to buffer for psychological distress (Hooper & Doehler, 2011). For these reasons, results can have significant consequences for individual and relational well-being and quality for couples' lives.

In short, to the extent that psychologists and counselors understand the components of coping with stress in order to increase quality of life and quality in marriages, they can work to facilitate it. Exploring the questions of how stress affects relationships and life satisfaction, and what factors may increase or decrease the effect of stress on individuals and relationship outcomes offer significant ideas to field specialists in order to better able to help individuals before, during and after stressful experiences, which seems to be essential to maintain fulling life and succesful marriages.

#### **1.4 Hypothesized Structural Model**

As it is demonstrated in Figure 1.1, The following structural model was proposed in order to investigate dyadic satisfaction (marital satisfaction) and life satisfaction in Turkish married individuals with at least one child. The model was based on stress framework and Bowenian Family System Theory perspective. More specifically, a model was suggested, first to examine the relationships between marital and perceived stress, and differentiation of self factors, and second to understand to what extent the combination of these factors accounts for relational and individual well-being of married individuals in a Turkish sample.

In the hypothesized model, perceived stress, intradyadic stress, and extradyadic stress are exogenous variables while differentiation of self variables and dyadic satisfaction, and life satisfaction are endogenous variables in the current study. Besides, differentiation of self is tested for both its direct effects on dyadic satisfaction and life satisfaction and indirect

mediator effect between stress variables and life satisfaction and dyadic satisfaction.

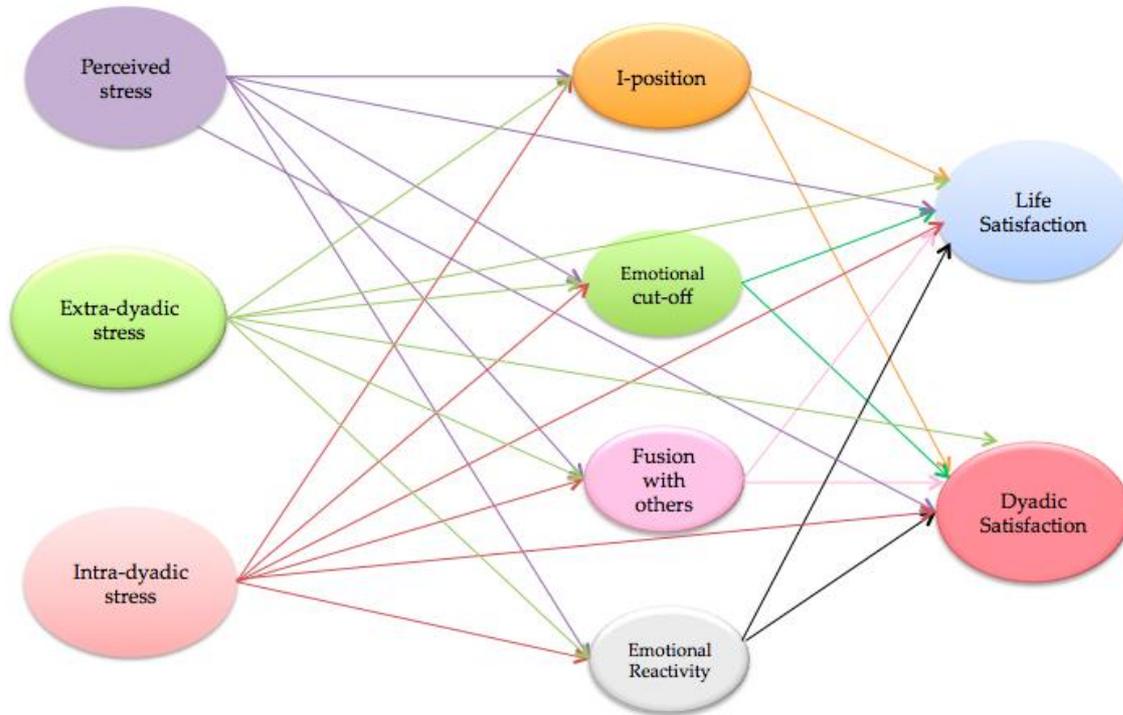


Figure 1.1 The Hypothesized Structural Model

## 1.5 Hypotheses

The following hypotheses for direct and indirect paths were tested in the present study.

### 1.5.1 Hypotheses for the Direct Effects in the Model

*Hypothesis 1a:* (Perceived stress to life satisfaction) Perceived stress will be related to life satisfaction directly (*Path 1*).

*Hypothesis 1b:* (Perceived stress to dyadic satisfaction) Perceived stress will be related to dyadic satisfaction directly (*Path 2*).

*Hypothesis 1c:* (Perceived stress to differentiation of self variables) Perceived stress will be related to differentiation of self variables (I position, cut-off, fusion with others, and emotional reactivity) directly (*Path 3, Path 4, Path 5, Path 6, respectively*).

*Hypothesis 2a:* (Dyadic stress to life satisfaction) Dyadic stress will be related to life satisfaction directly (*Path 7*).

*Hypothesis 2b:* (Dyadic stress to dyadic satisfaction) Dyadic stress will be related to dyadic satisfaction directly (*Path 8*).

*Hypothesis 2c:* (Dyadic stress to differentiation of self variables) Dyadic stress will be related to differentiation of self variables (I position, cut-off, fusion with others, and emotional reactivity) directly (*Path 9, Path 10, Path 11, Path 12, respectively*).

*Hypothesis 3a:* (Extradyadic stress to life satisfaction) Extradyadic stress will be related to life satisfaction directly (*Path 13*).

*Hypothesis 3b:* (Extradyadic stress to dyadic satisfaction) Extradyadic stress will be related to dyadic satisfaction directly (*Path 14*).

*Hypothesis 3c:* (Extradyadic stress to differentiation of self variables) Extradyadic stress will be related to differentiation of self variables (I position, cut-off, fusion with others, and emotional reactivity) directly (*Path 15, Path 16, Path 17, Path 18, respectively*).

*Hypothesis 4a:* (I position to life satisfaction) I position will be related to life satisfaction directly (*Path 19*).

*Hypothesis 4b:* (I position to dyadic satisfaction) I position will be related to dyadic satisfaction directly (*Path 20*).

*Hypothesis 5a:* (Cut-off to life satisfaction) Cut-off will be related to life satisfaction directly (*Path 21*).

*Hypothesis 5b:* (Cut-off to dyadic satisfaction) Cut-off will be related to dyadic satisfaction directly (*Path 22*).

*Hypothesis 6a:* (Fusion with others to life satisfaction) Fusion with others will be related to life satisfaction directly (*Path 23*).

*Hypothesis 6b:* (Fusion with others to dyadic satisfaction) Fusion with others will be related to dyadic satisfaction directly (*Path 24*).

*Hypothesis 7a:* (Emotional reactivity to life satisfaction) Emotional reactivity will be related to life satisfaction directly (*Path 25*).

*Hypothesis 7b:* (Emotional reactivity to dyadic satisfaction) Emotional reactivity will be related to dyadic satisfaction directly (*Path 26*).

### **1.5.2 Hypotheses for the Indirect Effects in the Model**

*Hypothesis 8a:* (Perceived stress to I-position to life satisfaction) Perceived stress will be related to I position, which in turn, will be related to life satisfaction (*Path 3 & Path 19*).

*Hypothesis 8b:* (Perceived stress to cut-off to life satisfaction) Perceived stress will be related to cut-off, which in turn, will be related to life satisfaction (*Path 4 & Path 21*).

*Hypothesis 8c:* (Perceived stress to fusion to life satisfaction) Perceived stress will be related to fusion, which in turn, will be related to life satisfaction (*Path 5 & Path 23*).

*Hypothesis 8d:* (Perceived stress to emotional reactivity to life satisfaction) Perceived stress will be related to emotional reactivity, which in turn, will be related to life satisfaction (*Path 6 & Path 25*).

*Hypothesis 9a:* (Perceived Stress to I-position to dyadic satisfaction) Perceived stress will be related to I position, which in turn, will be related to dyadic satisfaction (*Path 3 & Path 20*).

*Hypothesis 9b:* (Perceived stress to cut-off to dyadic satisfaction) Perceived stress will be related to cut-off, which in turn, will be related to dyadic satisfaction (*Path 4 & Path 22*).

*Hypothesis 9c:* (Perceived stress to fusion to dyadic satisfaction) Perceived stress will be related to fusion, which in turn, will be related to dyadic satisfaction (*Path 5 & Path 24*).

*Hypothesis 9d:* (Perceived stress to emotional reactivity to dyadic satisfaction) Perceived stress will be related to emotional reactivity, which in turn, will be related to dyadic satisfaction (*Path 6 & Path 26*).

*Hypothesis 10a:* (Dyadic stress to I-position to life satisfaction) Dyadic stress will be related to I position, which in turn, will be related to life satisfaction (*Path 9 & Path 19*).

*Hypothesis 10b:* (Dyadic stress to cut-off to life satisfaction) Dyadic stress will be related to cut-off, which in turn, will be related to life satisfaction (*Path 10 & Path 21*).

*Hypothesis 10c:* (Dyadic stress to fusion to life satisfaction) Dyadic stress will be related to fusion, which in turn, will be related to life satisfaction (*Path 11 & Path 23*).

*Hypothesis 10d:* (Dyadic stress to emotional reactivity to life satisfaction) Dyadic stress will be related to emotional reactivity, which in turn, will be related to life satisfaction (*Path 12 & Path 25*).

*Hypothesis 11a:* (Dyadic stress to I-position to dyadic satisfaction) Dyadic stress will be related to I position, which in turn, will be related to dyadic satisfaction (*Path 9 & Path 20*).

*Hypothesis 11b:* (Dyadic stress to cut-off to dyadic satisfaction) Dyadic stress will be related to cut-off, which in turn, will be related to dyadic satisfaction (*Path 10 & Path 22*).

*Hypothesis 11c:* (Dyadic stress to fusion to dyadic satisfaction) Dyadic stress will be related to fusion, which in turn, will be related to dyadic satisfaction (*Path 11 & Path 24*).

*Hypothesis 11d:* (Dyadic stress to emotional reactivity to dyadic satisfaction) Dyadic stress will be related to emotional reactivity, which in turn, will be related to dyadic satisfaction (*Path 12 & Path 26*).

*Hypothesis 12a:* (Extradyadic stress to I-position to life satisfaction) Extradyadic stress will be related to I position, which in turn, will be related to life satisfaction (*Path 15 & Path 19*).

*Hypothesis 12b:* (Extradyadic stress to cut-off to life satisfaction) Extradyadic stress will be related to cut-off, which in turn, will be related to life satisfaction (*Path 16 & Path 21*).

*Hypothesis 12c:* (Extradyadic stress to fusion to life satisfaction) Extradyadic stress will be related to fusion, which in turn, will be related to life satisfaction (*Path 17 & Path 23*).

*Hypothesis 12d:* (Extradyadic stress to emotional reactivity to life satisfaction)  
Extradyadic stress will be related to emotional reactivity, which in turn, will be related to life satisfaction (*Path 18 & Path 25*).

*Hypothesis 13a:* (Extradyadic stress to I-position to dyadic satisfaction)  
Extradyadic stress will be related to I position, which in turn, will be related to dyadic satisfaction (*Path 15 & Path 20*).

*Hypothesis 13b:* (Extradyadic stress to cut-off to dyadic satisfaction)  
Extradyadic stress will be related to cut-off, which in turn, will be related to dyadic satisfaction (*Path 16 & Path 22*).

*Hypothesis 13c:* (Extradyadic stress to fusion to dyadic satisfaction)  
Extradyadic stress will be related to fusion, which in turn, will be related to dyadic satisfaction (*Path 17 & Path 24*).

*Hypothesis 13d:* (Extradyadic stress to emotional reactivity to dyadic satisfaction). Extradyadic stress will be related to emotional reactivity, which in turn, will be related to dyadic satisfaction (*Path 18 & Path 26*).

## **1.6 Definition of Key Terms**

*Life Satisfaction* refers to the cognitive-judgmental process that individuals evaluate their global life satisfaction (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985). Life satisfaction was measured by five items from the Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener et al., 1985).

*Marital Satisfaction* is described as “the subjective and global perception of happiness and contentment with one’s marriage” (Woszidlo & Segrin, 2013, p. 525-526) and a subjective evaluation of a married couple's relationship

quality. It is measured by a dyadic satisfaction subscale of the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (Spainer, 1976).

*Differentiation of self* is a process through which balance between individuality and togetherness, and thinking and feeling are managed within an emotional system. Individuals invest energy to struggle to maintain a dynamic equilibrium between being dependent and independent. While individuality is a desire to be separate and autonomous, togetherness is a desire to interact with others (Bowen, 1976). It is a desirable therapeutic goal to increase a person's differentiation of self and is assumed to provide greater flexibility in coping with stress. Differentiation of self was measured by twenty items from the Differentiation of Self Inventory-Short Form (Drake, Murdock, Marszalek, & Barber, 2015). The following four factors are indicators of a person's levels of differentiation of self:

*Emotional reactivity* describes a person's tendency to react to stress by irrational emotional flooding.

*Cut-off* reflects one's tendency to end inter-personal relationships and cut them off as a way of dealing with tension and conflicts in symbiotic relationships.

*Fusion with others* taps the inclination to build complex and dependent relationships with significant others.

Taking *I-position* refers to the individual's ability to stand for and take position for himself or herself and independently and autonomously express his/her will.

*Perceived stress* is the degree to which circumstances in one's life are judged as stressful and the degree to how unpredictable, uncontrollable, and overloaded individuals find their lives to be. One of the determinants of stress appraisals is the person's interpretations of their relationships to their environments (Cohen, Kessler, & Gordon, 1997). Perceived stress was measured by ten items from Perceived Stress Scale (Cohen, Kamarck, & Mermelstein, 1983).

*Intradyadic stress* is the degree of stress to which spouse's experience with respect to his/her husband's or wife's characteristics and behaviors in the past twelve months. It was measured by ten items, from the chronic, intradyadic stress subscale of the Multidimensional Stress Questionnaire for Couples (Bodenmann et al., 2008).

*External stress* is the degree of stress, individuals experience in last 12 months due to the daily hassles in their lives (i.e. child rearing, education, employment, social relationships, family of origin, living conditions etc.). It was measured by eight items, from the chronic, extra-dyadic stress subscale of the Multidimensional Stress Questionnaire for Couples (Bodenmann et al., 2008).

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In this chapter, the review of the related literature will be discussed in four main sections. In the first section, theoretical framework of the study and differentiation of self are discussed in light of the theoretical literature and empirical studies. Secondly, conceptualizations of marital satisfaction, life satisfaction and stress are addressed. Furthermore, the third section addresses empirical stress and satisfaction studies in international literature and in Turkey. Finally, the fourth section provides a summary of the literature review.

#### **2.1 Theoretical Framework: Differentiation of Self**

In the early 1940's and 1950's, several scholars initiated developing theories using what is now identified as the family systems approach (Broderick & Schrader, 1991; Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 1996). Many prominent scholars (Bateson, Jackson, Haley, & Weakland, 1956; Bateson, Jackson, Haley, & Weakland, 1963; Bowen, 1978; Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 1996; Lidz, Fleck, & Terry, 1957) studied families to examine their communication patterns since dysfunctional communication within the nuclear family was realized as a significant element of the process of developing a mental illness.

With the increasing prominence of family systems approaches to therapy, it becomes essential for researchers to evaluate these theories and their core constructs. Gurman and Kniskern (1991) found in their meta-analysis of family therapy outcome studies from 1970 to 1981 that family therapy is an effective approach beyond chance and considering the families and couples in family therapy, majority of the marital cases, couple clients, and the family cases improved. Furthermore, they state that "individual therapy for marital problems had markedly poor outcomes and almost double the negative outcomes compared to conjoint therapy." (p. 749). In fact, they have a conclusion that although problems are individualized or intrapsychic and not originated from interpersonal context, family therapies are generally more effective than individual psychotherapy in any case.

Murray Bowen proposed a conceptual approach to marital and family therapy. According to Bowen, the family is an emotional system; attitudes, behaviors and interactions among people within the family system are emphasized in his family systems theory. Among the variety of constructs in Bowenian Theory, differentiation of self is the most critical to mature development and psychological health (Kerr & Bowen, 1988). It is a process through which balance between individuality and togetherness is managed within an emotional system. Bowen's theory makes several assumptions in the treatment of couples and families about the formation of the couple, the issues they face, and therapeutic goals necessary for healing.

Some of Bowen's (1978) assumptions for the formation of distressed couples include: a couple's level of differentiation predicts and contributes to the

amount of symptomatic behaviors or conditions, and marital relationship exhibited by members of the family, anxiety, discord, and thus marital satisfaction.

Due to the shift from individual to family dynamics, the Bowenian Family Systems Theory (BFST) has been criticized with the idea that self has been lost in the family. However, in the theory, the self is still present and the self is seen more as a self-in-relation (Bowen, 1978; Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 1996). Self is part of the intellectual system and is in-relation-to-others. Self develops in the system and grows cognitive abilities to discriminate himself or herself from the environment and other people. In essence, this cognitive separation is about ability to realize and distinguish what are their own emotions and that of others (Bohlander, 1995a; Bowen, 1978; Friedman, 1991; Kerr & Bowen, 1988). Differentiation of self is considered as a healthy emotional distancing while emotional cut-off is unhealthy distancing. Differentiation of self is seen as a state where emotion is admitted, but decisions are mostly rational and independently made. On the other hand, emotional cut-off is a state where decisions are made mostly from a reactive, emotional state and could still be influenced by others' opinions (Bohlander, 1995a; Bowen, 1978; Friedman, 1991; Kerr & Bowen, 1988).

In order to understand the functioning of the individuals, three different but interrelated systems are defined in the theory. According to Bowen (1978), the emotional system, the feeling system and the intellectual system are composed of individuals' mental processes. The emotional system drives the behavior, similar to all other living creatures. The feeling system is different from

emotional system in a sense that feelings system is a cognitive awareness component of the emotional system. Emotions are not felt and they regulate initial and primary drives. The awareness and interpretations regarding the drive is the feeling system. Bowen's theory is mostly interested in the emotional system and in this context family is regarded as an emotional system. The family's emotional system is the atmosphere created by the functioning of family members. Therefore, it can be said that individuals both influence family atmosphere and are influenced by it according to their phenomenological emotional reality (Bartle & Rosen, 1994; Bohlander, 1995a; Kerr & Bowen, 1988). Regarding intellectual system, it is parallel to brain development and refers to cognitive functions (Friedman, 1991; Kerr & Bowen, 1988). This system operates under the emotional and feeling systems. All three systems influence one another and the development of the intellectual system is primarily important for the development of differentiation of self.

Viewing himself or herself as an individual apart from origin family and nuclear family is the basic component found in the definition of differentiation of self. Licht and Chabot (2006) put differentiation of self in the meeting point of the development of individuation and the development of intrapsychic ability to separate thoughts and emotions. According to Charles (2001), emotional maturity and acting independently while maintaining relationships are achieved through differentiation. Drake (2011) summarizes the indicators of self differentiation as feelings of security, empathy, sensitivity, and concern, and the capacity to reflect rationally and realistically in the middle of a highly emotional situation.

People consume energy to strive to sustain a balance between being dependent and independent. Differentiation begins with recognizing these two distinct life forces (individuality and togetherness) influencing optimal functioning of individuals. Being dependent, namely being separate, is being aspired to be autonomous; on the other hand, togetherness is a desire to contact with others (Bowen, 1976). Consequently, self-differentiation has two components: intrapsychic level and interpersonal level. On the intrapsychic level, differentiation of self is the ability to separate thought system from feeling system. It means that individuals reflect on experienced situations and come to the realization of their actual feelings. This capacity is tested with the ability to cope with stressful situations, keeping objectivity to reduce emotional reactivity and sustaining I position. On the interpersonal level, differentiation of self determines the capacity to experience emotionally mature relationships without fearing enmeshment or rejection and with preserving autonomy in intimate relationships.

Highly differentiated individuals can support the interest of others, even if it is conflicting with their own interest. This does not create a sense of a loss of selfhood. In other words, one does not have to leave the situation to keep his/her sense of self. The more individuals have higher levels of self-differentiation on interpersonal level; the more they can resist to emotional cut-off and fusion while dealing with stress and anxiety in emotional system (Bowen, 1978; Kerr & Bowen, 1988). Regarding this argument, Schnarch (1997) states that,

When these two life forces for individuality and togetherness are expressed in balanced, health ways, the result is a meaningful relationship that does not deteriorate into emotional fusion. Giving up your individuality to be together is as defeating in the long run as giving up your relationship to maintain your individuality. Either way, you end up with being less of a person with less of a relationship. (p. 55)

Here, Schnarch means that as one protects his/her personal autonomy and become himself/herself in the intimate relations, and as s/he is able to say “this is who I am, what I want to do, what I will or will not do.”, s/he will be living with his/her essential self. The more differentiated a self, the more a person can be an individual while in emotional contact with a group. However, low-differentiated individuals may not have inner knowledge and appreciation of one’s own emotions and cognitions, and as a result, have to live with pseudo self. As one’s level of self-differentiation decreases, his/her subjective evaluation of global view of life satisfaction, well-being and relationship satisfaction will be at lower levels. The reason is that s/he will not be feeling that s/he is guiding the course of action in his/her life.

Bowen makes the distinction between the essential self and the pseudo self. The former type of self is not open to discussion in the relationship system in that it is not revised by force. The essential self is also not open to gain approval, or to increase one's stand with others. The pseudo self, on the other hand, yields easily to external pressure that is gained under the affection of the relationship system (Bowen, 1978). In contrast to essential self, the pseudo self is open to modification in the relationship and is the part that fuses together with others in a healthy emotional relationship.

According to Skowron and Friedlander (1998), there are four underlying factors to compose differentiation of self: emotional reactivity, fusion with others, emotional cut-off and ability to take I position. First, emotional reactivity is about one's potential to remain calm and not to be overwhelmed while being effected by emotional situations. When there is less emotional reactivity, it means the capability to react with less emotional intensity. Second, fusion with others occurs when people have a tendency not to remove themselves from a painful relationship and do not express their own beliefs and thoughts. Third, the desire to escape, avoid or emotionally withdraw during stressful situations is assessed by emotional cut-off. After the stressful events occur, intensity of an affect increases and individuals with higher levels of differentiation become more capable of acknowledging, experiencing, and coping with stronger emotions and are less likely to feel the need to emotionally withdraw. Lastly, Bowen (1978) defines I position as an ability to maintain individual's identity or resilience of the identity, despite stress, anxiety and strong power of significant others. These components operate under the umbrella of differentiation of self and signals one's level of differentiation.

In order to put on a basic allegory, differentiation of self can be resembled to Christmas tree lights. The Christmas tree lights are generally connected in series circuit and lights come on at the same time. But if one goes off, it affects the rest of them and all go off. This type of connection, that is, one's automatic connection to the group means undifferentiation of self. On the contrary, if the light is arranged in a parallel circuit, it does not matter if one goes off. The rest will continue to operate and give light. This ability to work independently of

the rest of the group can be a sign of differentiation. People are not bulbs and more than on and off (Morril, Hawrilenko, & Cordovo, 2016).

### **2.1.1 Differentiation of Self in Marriages**

Bowen (1978) claims that under stress, a family system will express symptoms in one of the three ways: marital conflict, dysfunction in a spouse, or projection onto one or more children. He further explains that depending on the family, one area might absorb more dysfunction than the others or a combination of the three may be affected.

Friedman (1991) proposes that if the process of differentiation is difficult to achieve, symptoms can occur in altered ways, one of them is relationship conflict. The existence of conflict related to minor issues in a committed relationship is unavoidable whether the couple is parents or not, and how a couple handles conflict will have a significant impact on their relationship satisfaction (Cramer, 2002). Partners with poor levels of differentiation of self cannot recover quickly from challenges, are more emotionally sensitive, and have less tolerance and resistance for stress (Roberto-Forman, 2008). The reduction of stress and anxiety increases levels of autonomy (Papero, 1990), giving the couple more choices regarding how to take action in a situation.

People, who is very low on differentiation, have difficulty to function on their own and do not know what they want and ask for others what they think. In a relationship, they become fused with their partners and react emotionally. Emotion, feeling and thinking systems become fused and act together. On the other hand, people with higher levels of differentiation are able to think

objectively and act autonomously (Bartle & Rosen, 1994; Kerr & Bowen, 1988; Knudson-Martin, 1994). Praise or criticism do not influence them, and they are not cut-off from their emotions.

In a marriage, two different people come together and form a new unit. From a constructivist perspective, throughout his or her life, each person creates his/her own unique reality (Gale & Long, 1996). Highly differentiated people have a perception of reality which consists of unique perceptions, beliefs and experiences, at a different level compared to emotionally immature, less differentiated individuals. Unlike highly differentiated people, low differentiated individuals comprehend life as solid, inflexible, and constant. They progress reality through emotional reactivity rather than intellectualization and assume that others experience the same reality with the same meaning. Poorly differentiated people have only a single actuality that is their thoughts, judgments, and beliefs. A low differentiated person experiences cohesiveness via fusion, which requires identical realities; nevertheless, in case of identical realities are not met, the low differentiated person interrupts all the contact, cut-off and starts to isolate himself/herself from others to maintain his or her actuality. Cut-off does not have a positive contribution to individuals' emotional maturation. Contrarily, it maintains homeostasis within the system by continually swinging between the two extremes: togetherness and separateness (Bowen, 1978; Titelman, 1998). In sum, it can be said that the level of differentiation of self of each spouse determines their emotional experiences and functioning as a couple.

In contrast to immature people with low levels of differentiation, highly differentiated individuals build reality-based upon unique comprehensions, judgments, and experiences. For highly differentiated individuals, realities differ among people, and they become objectively real as individual perceptions as well as shared meanings. Also, well-differentiated people's reality is adaptable, dynamic, and amenable. Togetherness functions as a bridge between two or more individuals. In that, they can share joint realities that both sides engage into the same extent in creating cohesion. A well-differentiated person views self as being autonomous yet connected to others and utilizes both intellectualization and emotional reactivity in developing perceptions and meanings. A highly differentiated individual is confident in his/her truth and sustains the ability to use self-verification, calms himself/herself down, describes and lives according to his/her own teachings, and keeps a cool head in the face of contrasting ideas without feeling to force his/her reality on others (Bowen, 1974; Bowen, 1976; Bowen, 1978; Kerr & Bowen, 1988; Titelman, 1987; Titelman, 1998).

Once two individuals get married, they experience a new emotional oneness, "we-ness," and each spouse tries to deal with this cohesion by using mechanisms that are used in relationships with their families of origin (Bowen, 1978; Kerr & Bowen, 1988). A typical mechanism used to deal with the amount of fusion or closeness is emotional distancing. Emotional distancing occurs automatically and generally without the partner's awareness, which ultimately turns into an acceptable life style. Distance is an instinctive flight response to emotional intensity, and couples differ in their capacity to connect to each other on emotional issues. Although distancing is automatic, it often

creates more emotional distance than individuals want, and the balance between togetherness and individuality becomes unequal. The concept of emotional distancing shows that a continuous fight and need for balance between individuality and togetherness is evident in significant relationships (Bowen, 1978; Guisinger & Blatt, 1994; İmamoğlu, 1998; Kağıtçıbaşı, 1987; Kağıtçıbaşı, 1990; Kerr, 1981; Kerr & Bowen, 1988; Papero, 1990; Reynolds, Remer, & Johnson, 1995; Skowron, 2000; Titelman, 1998; Triandis, Bontempo, Villareal, Asia, & Lucca, 1988; Triandis, 1994; Tuason & Friedlander, 2000). Clarifying patterns of emotional distancing and emotional sensitivity within a couple reflects the degree of fusion and anxiety in marriage. One's way of thinking and feeling about self, spouse, and types of reactive behaviors spell out the specific emotional dances for each couple (Titelman, 1998).

All in all, differentiation of self was developed by Murray Bowen as a tool to guide the understanding of an individual and his/her relationships with significant others and decision making process. Many researchers and scholars believe that differentiation of self is a fundamental concept of an individual's successful navigation throughout his/her life journey.

## **2.2 Conceptualization of the Study Variables**

In the second part of the literature review, what follows theoretical framework is wider definitions and conceptualizations of study variables. The conceptualizations of the study variables are presented below. The presentation of the conceptualization starts with the endogenous variables of the proposed model study, namely marital satisfaction and life satisfaction and followed by exogenous variable, stress.

### **2.2.1 Marital Satisfaction**

Marital satisfaction can be defined as the subjective evaluation of spouses that a marital relationship is good, happy, satisfying or successful (Callan & Noller, 1987). Each member of the couple brings a set of expectations, personality dynamics, a particular level of emotional or physical health and family background into the marriage. Combinations and inter-relations of these factors determine marital satisfaction for the couple (Talmage, 1985).

Definition of marital satisfaction is limited to subjective evaluations of the relationship, which are grounded in social exchange and equity theories. These theories assume that an individual is satisfied if that person evaluates his or her relationship as meeting or exceeding the set of internal standards for a good relationship and if the person does not perceive any other relationship as meeting those standards as well (Thibaut & Kelly, 1959). Kurdek (1992) argues that if a person compares the rewards and costs of a current relationship with other alternative relationships or with a personal standard of a good relationship, then satisfaction would be affected. Social exchange theory asserts the principle that individuals escape from costly behavior or situations and instead of them, they look for rewarding relationships and interactions. Nye (1979) summarizes that social exchange theory is all about the ways to maximize our gains and minimize our losses in relationships. In the context of marriage, the gains or rewards from the marital relationship may be instrumental resources (material resources and care) or relational resources (physical love and companionship), however costs may involve conflicts, hostility, violence, and abuse of power (Callan & Noller, 1987).

It is viewed that satisfaction is characterized not only by the absence of dissatisfaction but also by the inclusion of both satisfactory and unsatisfactory features (Fincham, Beach, & Kemp-Fincham, 1997). Otherwise, it is not realistic to expect pure relationships with only positive elements and satisfactory qualities. Kamo (1993) believes that satisfaction increases when perceived rewards such as warmth and self-disclosure increased and when the relationship is perceived as fair.

Happiness and satisfaction in marriage are important concepts in human life and in protecting the psychological health of married individuals. Marital adjustment protects the psychological health of married individuals and makes the family and married individuals more resistant to different socio-economic risks. The deterioration of the couple's dyadic adjustment affects the interactions between the partners, and the psychological integrity of the family members (Sardoğan & Karahan, 2005).

In the studies aimed at determining the characteristics of family and marriage relationship, the concepts of happiness and satisfaction in marriage are discussed together with the concept of marital adjustment. Tezer (1986) describes marital satisfaction as the perception or subjective belief of the individual towards the degree to which his or her needs are met in the marital relationship. This perception includes individuals' subjective feelings of happiness and satisfaction. The concept of marital happiness, which includes both general feelings about marriage and feelings related to certain aspects of the relationship, also expresses the feeling of satisfaction about the individual's marriage (Yılmaz, 2001). Marital adjustment defines the success

and functionality of married couples in marriage (Crane, Algood, Larson, & Griffin, 1990). Another important concept that is the subject of research is the concept of marital quality. The concept of marital quality is a more general term that includes the concepts of couple adjustment, satisfaction and integrity. It is thought that high marital quality is associated with good adjustment, healthy communication, higher satisfaction and happiness in marital relationships (Spanier, 1976).

The studies focusing on marital satisfaction are mainly based on two models: intrapersonal and interpersonal. Moreover, they examine how marriages change over time (Amiri, Farhoodi, Abdolvand, & Bidakhavidi, 2011; Caughlin, Huston, & Houts, 2000; Karney & Bradbury, 1997). In the intrapersonal model, people's personality types show how they react to crucial social stimuli (Karney & Bradbury, 1997). In other words, unchanging factors that each partner brings into the marriage are assessed to observe how they respond to one another within the relationship, which consequently affects their satisfaction of marriage (Caughlin et al., 2000). On the contrary, interpersonal models assert that relationships come into view from the interaction between the partners (Karney & Bradbury, 1997) and that relationship processes such as communication and emotional contagion influence the partners' marital satisfaction levels (Caughlin et al., 2000). Precisely, the dyadic communication process is empowered by having a strong resemblance and connectedness for the couple. Laurenceau, Barrett, and Rovine (2005) claim that satisfied couples in their marriages are more responsive to their partner and reveal emotions via understanding and validation.

Successful marriages include more interaction, empathy, and shared responsibilities and obligations. In Turkey, marriage studies that attempted to find out underlying factors of successful marriages, have mostly examined the concepts of adjustment (Soylu & Kağnıcı, 2015; Tutarel-Kışlak & Göztepe, 2012; Yazıcı-Çelebi, 2016), marriage quality (Gürel, 2016; Kurt, 2018), and marriage satisfaction (Yıldız & Baytemir, 2016). In the present study, marital satisfaction concept have been examined as the indicator of the healthy and successful marriages where individuals' needs are met.

Earlier stages of marriages play a vital role in terms of the development of closeness and communication skills that can protect the relationship satisfaction from the side-effects of stress (Bodenmann, 1995; Markman, Rhoades, Stanley, Ragan, & Whitton, 2010). Despite the level of satisfaction which is expected to reach at the peak level in the beginning of the marriages, couples' satisfaction levels tend to subject to change over time (Kurdek, 1999). The decrease in relationship satisfaction is widely viewed in the first years of the relationship (Lavner & Bradbury, 2010). One reason for the decrease can be psychological distress, which come into existence when stress is poorly coped with (Kurdek, 1999). Both social support and marital adjustment were associated with anxiety, depression, and stress (Cohen & McKay, 1984; Kessler & McLeod, 1985; Pal, 2017; Sahu & Singh, 2014).

Despite given the importance of relationship satisfaction in the longevity and permanence of close relationships, satisfaction alone cannot protect against the harmful effects of stress (Whisman, Beach, & Snyder, 2008). The fulfillment of duties and responsibilities within the family, taking care of children together

with the spouse, mutual love, respect and value in the relationship, spending the leisure time together, coping with problems, spouses' support for each other, positive communication between spouses, the partners 'mutual economic support and each spouse having a job increase marital satisfaction, and thus increase the quality of marriage (Terry & Kottman, 1995).

### **2.2.2 Life Satisfaction**

Life satisfaction expresses the difference that occurs when a person's expectations about life are compared with what they have and it shows how much the individual's experiences and expectations match. Life satisfaction in general refers to a time course covering not only a certain period of time, but all life. It is necessary to perceive the well-being of an individual for his/her whole of life, not an instantaneous moment. Life satisfaction comes from perception rather than the real situation. Satisfaction or pleasure that an individual experiences at a certain moment in his or her life should not be perceived as life satisfaction. It is just a state of emotion experienced at a certain moment. Life satisfaction is closely related to what extent an individual's experiences with one's life meet with individuals' expectations (Saygılı, Onay, & Ayhan, 2017).

Satisfaction with life, which can also be interpreted as the level of positivity, reached by evaluating the quality of life of the individual, and if expresses the degree of realization of the pleasure that the person receives from the life s/he lives. When the main variables that determine the satisfaction of life are considered, it can be seen that they consist of age, health status, lifestyle,

personal experiences, stress, environmental factors, and personality traits of the person (Güler & Emeç, 2006; Zhan, 1992).

There are various definitions of life satisfaction, which is a difficult concept to define due to the fact that life takes place in a process and person priorities can be differentiated. Life satisfaction can be expressed in the most obvious way as the satisfaction of a person from his or her life in general. In this respect, the main factors of life satisfaction are the satisfaction that an individual experiences in his / her business and private life (Can & Soyer, 2008). Even though life satisfaction is often used in the same sense as the concepts of happiness and subjective well-being, different characteristics of life satisfaction according to these concepts draw attention and are the subject of research. Happiness is a term used especially for goodness in general, while personal satisfaction is at stake in life satisfaction. In terms of life satisfaction, happiness is accepted as a more forward-looking situation, while life satisfaction is an instant situation. However, happiness is used as a more abstract concept than life satisfaction (Akin & Yalınız, 2015).

An individual's general evaluation of self is generally defined as life satisfaction (Pavot, Diener, Colvin, & Sandvik, 1991). Similarly, Diener (2000) argues that life satisfaction comes from people's assessment about their lives including judgment about the past, present and the future. Life satisfaction is subjective well-being of cognitive component. Life satisfaction refers to the evaluation of one's here and now feelings and attitudes concerning life and satisfaction with those evaluations (Diener, 1984). Individuals with higher

levels of life satisfaction feel that they have a better life than other people do (Erdoğan, Bauer, Truxillo, & Mansfield, 2012).

Quality of life can be measured via a person's satisfaction with life, which shows the sense of contentment and feelings of congruency between desires or wishes and achievements and possessions (Huebner, 2004; Wolfgang, 2010). It is one of the fundamentals of being mentally healthy that may impact the individual on several bases of life. For instance, satisfaction with life might affect a person cognitively; that is, rational and intellectual functionings might be impaired as well as physical and mental health (Kulick & Ryan, 2005; Lim & Jennings, 1996).

Life satisfaction demonstrates individual's circumstances in terms of cognitive assessment (Zhan, 1992). According to Pavot and Diener (2009), a person compares his/her perceived life circumstances with criterion which are self-constructed. In case of presenting life satisfaction, a person's advancement toward desired aims is cognitively evaluated (Zhan, 1992), and this cognitive evaluation is also a component of subjective well-being (Diener, 2000). A similar definition is put forward by Diener, Emmons, Larsen, and Griffin (1985) who assert that life satisfaction is a concept that which includes a person's subjective evaluation of life quality. As one component of subjective well-being, in the present study life satisfaction is discussed as a result of personal judgements and evaluations regarding the extent to which one is satisfied in life based on his/her own subjective reference or criteria.

### 2.2.3 Stress

In the 1930s Hans Selye, a physician had portrayed stress as a strain on living organisms. Selye's concept of stress has been used to describe the body's mobilization on dealing with a challenge or threat (Selye, 1976). Selye, a frontiersperson in stress research, defined stress as non-specific response of the body to any demand. Selye classified stress into two categories: distress (harmful or disease-producing stress) and eustress (beneficial or desirable stress) (Drafke & Kossen, 2002). Eustress is pleasant, or at least, challenging and can produce encouraging outcomes such as the maximization of output and creativity. Ironically, life can become overwhelming without eustress. On the other hand, distress becomes apparent when a person perceives himself or herself as having no ability to control a stressful event. Distress is likely to result in a loss of productivity and a decline in the overall levels of well-being (Selye, 1976). Although everyone displays a response to stress, reactions vary widely across individuals. It is stated that the person under stress can use his or her energy in either a destructive or constructive way (Rowshan, 1998). Then, it is important to note that not all stress is all negative or bad and not always expressed as a negative condition. Stress can be a motivator that adds color to life from time to time.

Stress is mostly connoted as completely irritating, something terrible, annoying and undesirable (Mckenna, 1994). For instance, concepts or phrases such as depression, loss of self-control, straining oneself, feeling anxious or insomnia are generally used to describe what stress means to us (Sutherland & Cooper, 2000). The word "stress" is widely known and used by almost all

people, however, many of them could not say the definition of it (Woodham, 1995). Stress is mostly known with its negative connotations.

The expression of stress has been used to explain conditions that bothers physiological and psychological homeostasis, subjective feelings of stress, and influences by those experiences in daily life functioning. Wheaton (1996) classifies the terms “stressors” and “distress” into two categories. The former one refers to problems or threats and the other refers to an individual reaction to those conditions. Wheaton (1996) define the term stress as being the mediator between stressors and distress.

Lazarus (1996) puts forward a broad definition of stress by stating stress is a phenomenon for both animals and human being, which gives rise to severe and distressing experience and which has an enormous impact on the behaviors of people. Stress stems from the insecurity of physically and emotionally threatening conditions and the pressure to take these conditions away. The probability of stress increases when an individual’s microsystem (environment) is highly demanding that cannot be satisfied through his/her resources and proficiencies (Rue & Byars, 1997). In a broad term, stress is described as a comprehensive human and animal concept which end up with disturbing experience and it has detrimental effects over the behaviors of a person (Lazarus, 1966). People face unexpected events, pain and happiness from childhood to old age. In the face of these events, it is important for people to develop strategies to cope with these situations.

Stress has been regarded as either a reason or a consequence of some phenomenon that changes stability of a person (Hunt, 2003). On the other hand, Lazarus and Folkman (1984) describe stress from a transactional approach, by stating that stress is a reaction beyond an environmental stimulus. Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) description of stress is based on the relationships among persons, their characteristics, and the developments occurring around them. On the other side, some experts' definitions center around cumulative effects of events and the coping skills without reducing their physical, emotional, financial, and social resources. Stress and stressors have been scrutinized in terms of life events, chronic strains, and daily hassles (Thoits, 1995).

Stress can be defined as all of the physiological and psychological defenses of the organism that maintain the existing balance against any change from outside or inside. The negative aspects of stress, which undertook a vital function by presenting the energy needed to survive in ancient times, have come to the fore. Although many situations encountered in daily life are not dangerous, they are seen as harmful by people and thus initiate the stress response. When this is the case, individuals are exposed to stress for no reason. After a while, this process has a detrimental effect on health. This situation shows that the stress imposed on the situations faced by the individual is effective on the degree of stress. The ways in which people perceive the situation they face and whether they can cope determine the stress responses (Lazarus, 1993). Same stressors trigger different reactions from each individual.

Stress has been described as a system of consequence response to an action or a circumstance that places particular physical or psychological demands on both an individual's relationship with other people and that person's environment (Hellriegel, Slocum, & Woodman, 1986). Rue and Byars (1997) define stress as a mental and physical condition that is a consequence of the perceived threat of danger and the pressure to resist it. Stress is proposed to be raised from the gap between individual's needs, abilities, and expectations and environmental demands, changes, and facilities (Cummings & Worley, 1997). In these definitions, stress was defined as a psychological and physiological reaction to perceived threats that appear when individuals' resources and strengths could not suffice to the demands of that stressful situation. The stress comes in sight when environmental factors are in demand concerning person's abilities, skills and resources, under conditions in which the person expects a substantial difference in rewards and costs resulting from meeting the demand versus not meeting it (Rue & Byars, 1997). This dilemma regarding the evaluation of rewards and costs and potential of meeting the demand also creates stress, beside the actual event.

Stress is a complex structure that affects our physiology, thoughts and emotions as a reaction, and it is a situation that occurs when people encounter or perceive situations that exceed their abilities (Hiebert-Murphy, 2002). According to Robbins and DeDenzo (2001), stress is a feeling which exists when a person confronts with chance, restrictions or orders that is ambiguous and crucial, and it can show itself in both positive and negative ways. Stress can be regarded as favorable when the situation offers someone an opportunity to acquire something. On the other hand, if stress keeps a person

away from doing desired things, then it is considered as negative (Woodham, 1995). It is important to have stress in certain amounts in order to survive, however, overpowering stress can lead an individual to exhibit maladaptive behaviors (Sullivan & Decker, 2001).

Stress is the effort that an individual exerts over the limits of his / her body psychologically and leaves individuals in negative physical and social environments (Cüceloğlu, 2002; Güçlü, 2001). Baltaş and Baltaş (1998) also define stress as a threatening to physical and mental organism and forced by the psychological and social status (Baltaş & Baltaş, 1998). In another definition, stress is seen as the inability of the individual to respond strongly to the effects of psychological problems and negative factors on the individual (Okutan & Tengilimoğlu, 2002). Stress is defined as the presence of various symptoms (distress and reflection on the body) in the organism due to physical, psychological and social factors (Saygılı, 2005). In sum, stress can be regarded as any stimulator that threatens the person in physical, psychological, and psychosocial terms.

The subject of stress has been addressed by many researchers in different aspects due to its content. The fact that the factors causing stress and the resulting reactions are different from each other has led to the production of relevant theories. These theories differ in terms of their definitions, attention to psychological and physiological changes, and their emphasis on individual-environment relationship (Ogden, 2000).

As one of the first theoretical explanations of stress, the biologist Walter Cannon's model stands out. According to Cannon (1932), stress occurs when external environmental stimuli disrupts the natural balance of the organism. According to him, stress, which is an emergency response, is the “war or run” response of the organism against the external, life-threatening stimulus and is of existential importance. If a person believes that s/he can cope with the danger s/he faces, s/he prefers to fight, and if s/he believes s/he cannot cope with this situation, s/he prefers to escape.

In a study conducted to evaluate individual differences in perception of stress-related situations, adult participants were shown films where people had various accidents and injuries. Stress responses of the participants were measured and divided into four groups. Before the film was shown to the first group, participants were told that the scenes in the content of the film were not real; the second group was told that the film was meant to teach the ways of protection from accidents and the individuals were really injured. The third group were told that the injured people suffered excessive physical pain. No explanation was given to the fourth group and this group was considered as the control group. When the results were examined, it was observed that the stress symptoms in the control group were quite high compared to the first two groups. Stress symptoms of the third group were also higher than the control group (Lazarus, 1993). Thus, it can be concluded that although the same film was watched, participants' levels of stress symptoms changed due to their differences in the perceptions of the same event.

Stress can be observed in a wide range of areas such as marriage, romantic relationship, social relationship, work, economic issues, and health issues (Pereira-Morales, Adan, & Forero, 2017). Stress in its most general form can be expressed as a harmony problem that includes the threat of disrupting the general balance of the person (Budak, 2001; Öztürk & Uluşahin, 2011). Human beings come across with a wide range of stressors, which can have undesirable effects on them in the course of their daily lives and well-being (Thoits, 2010).

Perceived stress is a state or a condition that represents the global assessment of the importance of, and difficulty dealing with personal and environmental challenges (Cohen, Kamarck, & Mermelstein, 1983). Weekes, MacLean, and Berger (2005) found that increased levels of perceived stress were associated with higher levels of depression and anxiety. Acute or chronic stressful situations generally put individuals at risk for psychological and physical problems. Consistent with this viewpoint, numerous studies have found that perceived stress is strongly associated with negative emotions such as anxiety, anger and depression (Spada, Nikčević, Moneta, & Wells, 2008). These negative emotions are associated with lower life satisfaction (Suldo & Huebner, 2004), as is perceived stress (Bluth & Blanton, 2014).

In sum, the broader use of the term stress creates different meanings and may create potential ambiguity. In the current study, the term stress was used to describe subjective feelings of stressful experiences and the process by which these experiences affect individual functioning in physical, psychological and psychosocial terms. Stress can leave psychological and physiological impacts

on individuals and can be reduced through the use of coping skills and through effectively disclosing the feelings associated with that.

### **2.2.3.1 Type of Stressors**

Stressors refer to problems or threats that individuals appraise while determining stress reactions. Most human beings face stressful situations arising from work environment, financial issues, children, sickness, and disagreements with other people (Randall & Bodenmann, 2017). Besides, some people confront additional and more severe problems such as poverty, high rates of crime, scarcity, and wars (Hilpert & Kimamo, 2016). Studies indicate that stressors have deleterious impacts on an individual's mental (Thoits, 2010) and physical well-being (Larzelere & Jones, 2008).

When the information about stress sources has been reviewed, it can be seen that stress sources are collected in three groups. These are daily events, life events, and specific events. Daily events are time-limited events that require change and adaptation. For example, bad grades from an exam and headaches can be evaluated as daily events. Life events, unlike daily events, are events that last longer periods of time and lead to changes in life form. Pregnancy, economic problems, retirement, moving, leaving one of the children can be given as examples of life events. Specific events can also be chronic conditions. Divorce, loss of spouses, menopause can be evaluated as specific events (Cüceloğlu, 2003).

Randall and Bodenmann (2009) classify reasons of stressors into two categories as external and internal factors. In external classification, stressors might originate from having a bad day at work or having a difficult exam. On the other hand, having a conflict with one's couple/partner can be considered as a cause of internal stressor. The distinction between reasons plays a vital role in figuring out how types of stress make an impression on individuals' well-being. Along with the perceived stress, the present study focuses on both internal and external types of stress . While external stress is related to stressors originating from outside the marriage, intradyadic stress, also called as marital stress, results from spouse-related internal factors. According to Omoluabi (1994), marital stress refers to the perceived disturbance that affects the aims of happiness and other good expectations of couples in marriage. One of the earliest studies conducted by Hahlweg, Kraemer, Schindler, and Revenstorf (1980) reveal the fact that basic reasons of marital stress dwell upon problems with sexuality, loss of affection, anger management, and personal habits of one's partner.

Randall and Bodenmann (2009) proposed a typology of stress examined from a relational framework. This typology is paramount to contemplate the various types of stress when understanding its potential impact on well-being: internal (within the relationship) vs. external (outside the relationship); acute (within past 7 days) vs. chronic (within last 12 months); and major (e.g., severe illness, death of partner) vs. minor (e.g., everyday hassles). In order to comprehend possible consequences of stress on relationship satisfaction, one must screen three dimensions of the stress: first, locus of stress, namely, either external or internal stress; second the severity of stress that is major or minor

stress; and lastly, length of time (acute versus chronic stress). As mentioned above, having problems with school, work, family members (not with the partner, husband or wife) or friends might lead to stressful situations and such stressors are those that originate from outside the relationship called as external stressors. On the contrary, internal stressors, have its origin within the relationship, such as partner's difficult or insufficient behaviors. Primary stress sources can be exemplified with severe illness, loss of a family member, or critical changes in life. On the other side of the coin, minor stressors are ordinary daily sources of stresses that one may usually experience such as getting late to appointment or stacking in heavy traffic. Finally, it should not be underestimated that involvement in stress might be lasting for a few days (acute), or lasting several months (chronic).

According to the stress-divorce model, Randall and Bodenmann's (2017) study argue that relationship quality is more prone to be affected by external, minor and chronic stressors. Stressors that are based on extrinsic factors can spill over into the relationship and give rise to stress within the relationship, that is, cause internal stress. The process of spreading into relationship has been well authenticated in the literature and proved that stress experienced at one point of life might appear by causing stressful results for the relationship. The stress-divorce model also reveal that minor stressors might have influence over the quality of the relationship (Bodenman, 2000; 2007). Research results are revealing that negative behaviors of couples in the home stem from an increased level of external stress (Bolger, DeLongis, Kessler, & Wethington, 1989) and cause even more negative relationship evaluations (Tesser & Beach, 1998).

Stress may come from any sources including work, social life, and marriage (Kolade & Olowodunoye, 2013). Stressors should be understood as part of contextual factors that create a demand on the couple or the individual. Hence, including different sources of stress in the current study will provide a broader understanding of how differentiation functions in each type of stress.

### **2.2.3.2 Stress in Marriages**

Bernard (1984) gives a comprehensive definition of marriage by stating that it is considered as one of the crucial relationships involving emotional and legal ties between two individuals for love, happiness, desire to have sex or to run away from an unhappy situation. Researchers have investigated in-depth ramifications with different dimensions of the environment so as to reach extensive understanding of how stress affects marriage (Karney, Story, & Bradbury, 2005).

Several explanations regarding the linkage between stress and adverse relationship outcomes have been suggested by the researchers. Couples' stress and coping mechanisms drew attention of researchers in an increasing number of studies and took its place in theoretical contributions (Bodenmann, 2000; Revenson, Kayser, & Bodenmann, 2005; Story & Bradbury, 2004). For instance, stress can expand undesirable communication patterns, such as anger and withdrawal. Furthermore, stress can affect mental health and physical well-being in an unfortunate way and this situation co-occurs with the existence of sexual dysfunction (Merz, Meuwly, Randall, & Bodenmann, 2014).

Bodenman's Stress and Divorce Model (1995, 2000) is more specific in terms of the role stress plays in a relationship: specific roles of internal stress (e.g., negative communication patterns and dyadic conflicts, health problems) and external stress (e.g. work stress, financial stress, stress due to family of origin and stress due to uncondusive districts) in marriage. According to this model, the experience of stress in one domain of life can spill over into one's relationship, causing stress within the relationship. Stress is likely to bring large amounts of direct and indirect effects on marriage, such that probability of being affected by subtle general stress level is more likely than direct effects of stress.

According to Bodenmann (2000), minor external stresses that spill into marriage are specifically detrimental, as they incrementally but continuously decrease the quality of marriage, leaving partners unconscious and unaware. It is argued that stress affects marital quality in four ways: First, time partners spend together decreases, which leads to loss of joint activities, weaker sense of unity, and less self-expression. Second, external stressors hinder the quality of interactions, leading to less positive, and more negative interactions as well as disengagement. Third, external stressors bear the risk of psychological and physical troubles, namely, sleep disorders, sexual dysfunction and mood disturbances. Last but not least, external stressors may lead to the emergence of problematic personality traits, such as rigidity, anxiety and hostility. As such, partners' incapacity to successfully cope with their experiences of minor stressors can lead to a deterioration in relationship satisfaction over time and eventually the termination of the relationship. The final outcome of this process would be partners sharing less of their private lives, individual needs,

ambitions and interests, in other words, mutual alienation (or disaffection or disillusionment (Huston, Caughlin, Houts, Smiths & George, 2001). In time, partners become strangers, engage in more conflict and therefore the likelihood of divorce increases. The adverse effects of stress on marriage, however, could be managed through effective personal and couple coping behaviors.

This model argues that deterioration in marital quality is associated with everyday stress. However, three additional factors help determine if a marriage ends with divorce. These are the existence of facilitating conditions or alternatives (e.g., prospects of finding a better partner), the non-existence of critical inhibiting conditions (e.g. high religious or moral standards, children) and emergence of adequately relevant triggers (Lewis & Spanier, 1979).

According to the interactional view of stress and coping, the stress is theorized as being correlative. In other words, the experience of stress of partners have mutual relations because one partner's stress becomes the other partner's stress (Revenson & Lepore, 2012). Stress in couples and families in terms of major life events have thoroughly been studied for many years according to the ABC-X theory (Hill, 1958; McCubbin & Patterson, 1983). ABC-X model is one of the comprehensive family-stress theories (Hill, 1958) and provides perspective to understand stress as a dyadic phenomenon. For example, the vulnerability-stress-adaptation model (Karney & Bradbury, 1995) asserts that enduring vulnerabilities, stressful events and adaptive processes lead to unfavorable relational outcomes. Vulnerability-stress-adaptation model revealed the effects of external stressors on couples. According to this model,

external stressors have an influence on the partners' relationship, and the dimension of effect is contingent not only on content of the stressful event but also on the partners' enduring vulnerabilities and adaptive processes. Karney and Bradbury (1995) posit that the combination of enduring vulnerabilities (neurotic type of personality traits, fluctuant and unsteady family past), stressful events (important changes in life, stressful experiences), and poor adaptive processes (lack of abilities in making empathy, problem solving skills, defensive and hostile manner) might lead to marital stress and termination. Furthermore, couples who get married with a high level of enduring vulnerabilities might encounter distress and marital dissolution. Damaged marital quality is assumed to trigger the subsequent acute life events. This process becomes progressively worse with considerable chronic stress (Karney, Story, & Bradbury, 2005).

Different from the ABC-X model and vulnerability-stress-adaptation model, systematic transactional model asserts that couples' relationship is influenced by external stressors as well as from as a sources of stress themselves (Bodenmann, Ledermann, & Bradbury, 2007). Apart from this, according to systematic transactional model, having physical and psychological disorders on the individual level might stem from extradyadic stress as well as intradyadic stress. Partners' relations, distinctly possibly, are affected by the subjective stress sources that originate from external stressors, and this in turn, causes further stress for both partners. Systematic transactional model explains daily hassles and minor external stressors as a trigger of extradyadic stress for couples (Revenson & Lepore, 2012).

In Bodenmann's (2005) experiments, stress was found to be directly correlated with collapse of marital interaction. Couples were exposed to stress induction and they were videotaped for 10 minutes. Results revealed that stress induction leads to decrease in quality of marital communication. Especially, couples' negative behavior such as criticism, domineering, aggressive, and warlike behaviors soar up as positive behaviors such as active listening, interest, and empathy are in decline. Frye and Karney (2006) conducted a longitudinal study with a sample of 82 recently married couples. The results showed that under stressful conditions either men or women were more prone to display physical or verbal aggression. Solely for men, chronically stressful conditions pave the way for exhibiting physical aggression, especially when they undergo high levels of acute stress. Frye and Karney (2006, p. 18) conclude that "circumstances that drain partners' emotional resources may make effective interaction more difficult and maladaptive behaviors are more likely to occur." For example, marital distress consists of generalized criticism (holding responsible the partner as a person), defensiveness (shirk responsibility, refusing guilt), belligerence (aggressive or warlike behavior), contempt (putting partner in disrespected position, sneering), and domineering (asserting one's wishes over couple in an impolite way) (Hilpert, Bodenmann, Nussbeck, & Bradbury, 2013).

Cultural differences between partners play a vital role in their levels of stress (Crippen & Brew, 2013; Kim, Prouty, & Roberson, 2012). For instance, couples in intercultural relationships may have different opinions regarding rituals, customs, and celebrations of holidays (Crippen & Brew, 2013), regarding the degree of involvement of couples' family members in decision-making

(Bustamante et al., 2011; Seshadri & Knudson-Martin, 2013), and different beliefs of importance on how to express affection, both privately and publicly (Biever, Bobele, & North, 1998). Cultural differences play a vital role in marriages that partners from the different cultures are more prone to face higher levels of stress unlike couples married within the same culture (Fu, Tora, & Kendall, 2001; Seshadri & Knudson-Martin, 2013). However, couples' level of communication regarding their different cultural beliefs, reframing capacity, open communication, and partners' coping with stress style increased their relationship satisfaction (Seshadri & Knudson-Martin, 2013; Silva, Campbell, & Wright, 2012). Honoring intercultural differences while dealing with stress enhance to stay in a satisfied relationship since by doing this couples increase their awareness that stress is not resulting from the relationship itself, but from the differences in viewpoints.

Since, couples' ability to manage stressful events might be enhanced with the help of intervention programs, it is firmly believed that accumulation of stress is needed to be investigated more deeply (Bodenmann, Lederman et al., 2006). In essence, in the daily routine of life, facing stressful events is unavoidable; therefore, how partners can handle with stress has utmost importance in their relationship (Bodenmann, Randall, & Falconier, 2016). Stress related to marriage and spouse's characteristics may cause interpersonal tensions to increase, but being aware of the triggers and its impact on our emotional and intellectual functioning can be the first step to be protected from its negative side effects. The degree of involvement to deal with stress and behaving in a constructive way may determine the impact of stress.

### **2.2.3.3 Coping with Stress**

Diseases and different problems arise when stress is chronic. The body loses strength and suffer when the defense cannot be immediately passed through the appropriate coping mechanisms. As long as there is a factor causing stress, the reactions of the body continue. Thus, anxiety, sadness, and frustration as psychological effects will be experienced and many physiological symptoms may follow this situation. After the appraisal of harm, threat or challenges resulting from the stressor event, individuals generate certain behavioral or cognitive operations which would carry them from the alarm and resistance phase to the relief phase and create positive influence. In this section, coping and as another concept which is relevant to stress experienced in marital life, dyadic coping will be examined.

In the stress and coping literature, coping efforts are highlighted with their function to manage threats to individual well-being. Stressors can be defined as transitions, changes or life events that have the potential to bring about a change within the family (McCubbin & Patterson, 1983) or other multiple stress-inducing changes. If stressors affect an individual or a family, they have to decide how to behave in order to minimize negative impacts, and this determination and decision is referred as coping. Coping has also been defined as the various actions taken to avoid the harmful effects of an event or to control emotional distress in an adaptive way (Pearlin & Schooler, 1978). Lazarus and Folkman (1988) describe coping as "the process of managing demands (external or internal) that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of the person" (p. 283). Stressful experiences push our repertoire of

thinking, feeling and behaving. In order to manage the demands of stress, coping responses are initiated and individuals use a wide range of behavioral or cognitive strategies to grow from the events. Coping can be explicit or implicit but it has the similar function to overcome the stress in either case. According to Lazarus and Folkman (1984), coping strategies can target the improving some aspect of the stressful situation, or changing one's emotional response to the situation. Stress theories have also asserted that self-esteem, self-confidence, and positive perceptions about the self may buffer the negative impacts of stress by decreasing perceived threat and allowing implementation of effective coping strategies (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

The family or the individual tries to ease the demands that have been placed upon them (McCubbin, Thompson, & McCubbin, 1996). In the case of this study, married individuals need to find ways of coping with the challenges of perceived stress and marital stress and to ease the stressors they face. In the literature of coping mechanisms, different kinds of coping strategies exist, such as escape-avoidance and active coping strategies (Krohne, 1993). In avoidant coping strategies, people do not directly address stressful events and it is considered as a psychological risk factor. In active coping, taking action to remove the stressor come into scene. There are behavioral coping mechanisms, problem focused coping mechanisms and emotion-focused mechanisms (Eisenberg, Fabes, & Gutrie, 1997). The effectiveness of the coping strategy rests on its ability to reduce immediate distress and contribute to long-term positive outcomes.

Coping includes self-regulation, emotion regulation of stress reactions, behavior control and cognitive processes. Basically, differentiation of self refers to individuals' capacity, or lack of capacity, first to separate instinctually driven emotional reactivity from thoughtful, goal directed activity and second to find a balance between emotional and intellectual functioning (Titelman, 2014). Kerr and Bowen (1988) assert that stress is experienced in the basis of differentiation of self, and Bowen (1978) argues that differentiation of self is related with decreased symptoms of stress, lower level of perceived stress and fewer feeling of anxiety. In a line of research, researchers have focused on the role of differentiation of self in the interplay of stress and distress and found significant results (Murdock & Gore, 2004; Skowron, Wester, & Azen, 2004). Both research findings and Kerr and Bowen's (1988) theoretical arguments support the idea that the higher the level of differentiation of self, the more stress is required to trigger physical or psychological symptom. Impact of the level of differentiation of self in individual's life becomes more visible in case of stressful conditions. In other words, well-differentiated individuals sense less stress from a particular stressor and also recover faster from the symptoms. In this sense, differentiation of self can also be considered as a kind of coping mechanism and a sign of resilience.

Managing stress can be a difficult task, but it is an essential skill to learn. Stress can be seen in a wide range of areas such as marriage, romantic relationship, social relationship, work, economic issues, and health issues (Pereira-Morales, Adan, & Forero, 2017). Stress, in its most general form, can be expressed as a harmony problem that includes the threat of disrupting the general balance of the person (Budak, 2001; Öztürk & Uluşahin, 2011). Coping mechanisms may

help to re-balance the individual, as differentiation of self does. It is important to clarify that not all individuals with low levels of differentiation always experience negative symptoms and stress and they may be able to maintain emotional balance until being exposed to stress.

Differentiation of self is associated with coping skills and provides individuals a basis for resistance to development of stress symptoms. In addition, emotion regulation and increased rational thinking are components of differentiation of self. These qualities of differentiation of self support positive functioning of individuals and increase their ability to navigate difficult situations. Not only in stressful situations, one's differentiation of self reflects more basic dispositional tendencies within the individual and reflects how individuals respond to a particular class of event.

Beside the term individual coping, relationship researchers also highlight the importance of dyadic coping which is a form of interpersonal coping mechanism during the stress and in dyadic coping, one partner responds by corresponding verbal or nonverbal dyadic coping reactions on the part of the other partner (Bodenmann, 1997). Dyadic coping not only decreases the likelihood of negative behaviour between partners but also helps to improve relationship functioning. Partners who feel understood and cared for are found to be enjoying more closeness, trust and satisfaction (Cohen & Wills, 1985; Hilpert, Bodenmann, Nussbeck, & Bradbury, 2013; Falconier, Jackson, Jackson, & Bodenmann, 2015). Dyadic coping behaviors protect partners from the negative effects of stress. Since differentiation of self has both interpersonal

and intrapsychic aspects, dyadic coping behaviors may also be related to one's differentiation of self.

In order to diminish hazardous effect of stress, partners find themselves communicating their stress to their romantic partner. Partners' stress regulation system comes into play by individual and dyadic coping strategies when stress occurs in the relationship. For instance, to obtain empathy or interest, partners can convey their stress to their partner (positive dyadic coping) and the recognition of these coping behavior has been found to be correlated with healthy relationship. Dyadic coping consists of emotion-focused dyadic coping (expression of understanding, validating feelings), problem-focused dyadic coping (helping or guiding under challenging situations), and delegated dyadic coping (taking over partner's responsibilities) (Bodenmann, 2000).

Bodenmann (2005) distinguishes positive and negative dyadic coping as well as problem and emotion-focused dyadic coping. In positive dyadic coping couples are supportive of each other. Positive types of dyadic coping are grouped into three categories: supportive, common, and delegated dyadic coping (Fallahchai, Fallahi, & Randall, 2019). Supportive dyadic coping includes finding solutions or focusing on emotions with an effort to figure out feelings of stressed partner. Supporting dyadic coping includes empathic understanding and solidarity with the partner such as encouraging and helping with daily tasks, caring each other or providing emotional help. Delegated dyadic coping makes reference to free the stressed partner from his/her duties and responsibilities. Delegated dyadic coping refers to the

action that one partners' support in response to request from the other one. For example, one of the spouses ask for practical support and the couple organizes new division of labor (Fallahchai, Fallahi, & Randall, 2019). In supportive and delegated dyadic coping, one of the partners carries responsibility; however, in common dyadic coping, both partners be in cooperation to deal with stressful situation (joint problem-solving, joint information seeking, sharing of feelings, relaxing together) (Falconier, Jackson, Hilpert, & Bodenmann, 2015). Common dyadic coping means joint problem solving when partners face a stressful situation. They use problem solving abilities together with each other, searching for information, or relaxing together.

A meta-analysis study conducted with 72 different samples reveal that both the total dyadic coping dimension and positive and negative dyadic coping as collected dimensions strongly predict relationship satisfaction, regardless of participants' gender, age, level of education, and nationality. Common dyadic coping plays an important role in reducing negative daily stress (Falconier, Jackson, Hilpert, & Bodenmann, 2015).

According to Bodenmann (2005), partners deal with a stressor successfully by positive dyadic coping behaviors. On the other hand, negative dyadic coping refers to not being able to cope with stress in a preferred behavior such as failing to undermine the stressful situation or partners' feelings and making fun of the partner. In some instances, partners may undertake that their partner might be able to cope with single-handedly. Negative dyadic coping includes poisonous responses, such as blaming other couple for not coping

well and inconclusive support (e.g., providing support but believing that the partner should solve the problem without that support). Positive dyadic coping is considered to establish a balance for the partner in the face of challenges. In contrast, negative dyadic coping is expected to take away from partner's adaptation to the stressor. Negative dyadic coping can be shown as hostile dyadic coping when support is going together with being of little worth, distancing, mocking, sarcasm, open disinterest, or underestimating the importance of partner's stress. A second form of negative coping is ambivalent dyadic coping, which is referred to the type of attitude, even if unintentionally, that in case of stressful situations supporter couple's contribution would be useless or unneeded. Another type of negative dyadic coping is superficial dyadic coping, which contains a kind of support, that is not frankly or sincerely rather it is hypocritical. For instance, asking partner's feeling without active listening or behaving without empathy (Bodenmann, 2005). In fact, several studies indicate that dyadic coping is linked with relationship satisfaction and negative dyadic coping is linked with relationship dissatisfaction (Ledermann, Bodenmann, Rudaz, & Bradbury, 2010; Papp & Witt, 2010).

The Systemic Transactional Model (STM) (Bodenmann, 2005) was produced to give an explanation to couples' stress and coping processes. The model asserts that outer stress can leak into the relationship and impact couples' stress reaction together with partners' coping behaviors (Hilpert et al., 2016; Wunderer & Schneewind, 2008), and this in turn, form undesired relationship conditions and dissatisfaction (Buck & Neff, 2012; Herzberg, 2013). According to the STM, effects of stress and coping processes are mediated by intradyadic

stress and dyadic coping. Internal stress might end up with hostility within the relationship. Internal stress mediated as external stress intensifies couples' negative personality traits and conflicting interactions and this situation decreases attachment and produces dissatisfaction between partners (Ledermann et al., 2010; Bodenmann et al., 2007).

Bodenmann (1997) found a significant correlation between self-perceived everyday stress and likelihood of divorce but in Bodenmann's study (1997), coping was argued to be an even more crucial indicator of divorce than stress itself. Similarly, in Bodenmann and Cina's (2006) study, it is revealed that coping is a more crucial predictor of divorce than stress. Together with individual coping, dyadic coping is considered as a primary and powerful predictor of quality and stability in marriage (Bodenmann, 2005). Dyadic coping refers to the attempt of partners to deal with situations where relationship is solely impacted, indirectly, by individual stress, or stress within the couple affects both partners. In both instances, the couple engages in a stress management process that is aimed at restoring a new homeostasis within both partners individually, within the couple as a unit, and within the social environment (Bodenmann, 2005).

One of the earliest empirical studies regarding the relationship between dyadic coping and quality of marriage, points to the notable correlations between marital support and marital satisfaction (Burke & Weir, 1975). Couples' support to each other was highly correlated to marital satisfaction of wives in several studies (Acitelli & Badr, 2005). It was revealed that dyadic

coping may prevent the hazardous effects of internal stress on relationship functioning (Brock & Lawrance, 2008; Neff & Broady, 2011).

Increasing number of research indicated that external originated stress may cause partners less likely to respond to and communicate with their counterparts in an adaptive and relationship-enhancing ways. For example, high levels of stress has been proved to hinder effective interaction between spouses. In several studies, couples' level of stress was manipulated in the experiment and their interactions were observed before and after in a stress induction task. Upon this task, partners' level of stress declined by 40% (Bodenmann & Shantinath, 2004).

According to the STM (Bodenmann, 2005), stressful events and coping mechanisms have an impact over romantic relationships because of partners' interdependence. The STM proposes that stress-coping process is a mutual process, that is, one partner's experience of stress affects the other partner as well because stress is experienced not only verbally but also non-verbally. Overcoming stressful events also depends on partners' attitudes towards each other. In short, if stressed partner is supported by the other partner negative effect of stress will be absorbed (Randall & Bodenmann, 2017). This reciprocal process may then impact relationship gratification.

Men and women are more satisfied with their relationships within the days when they received more emotion-focused dyadic coping from their partners, even after controlling for the average received support. Thus, receiving more support might lead directly to positive effects, such as feeling closer to or more

connected with the partner (Cutrona, 1996). This support result in an increase in relationship satisfaction on that day. This finding supports the other studies conducted with Western samples, which shows that individuals feel more intimate, close, and less negative on days when they receive more support (Bar-Kalifa & Rafaeli, 2015; Belcher, Laurenceau, Graber, Cohen, Dasch, & Siegel, 2011).

Individuals with high levels of differentiation show a high degree of psychological adjustment (Skowron & Friedlander, 1998). They show less negative mental and physical symptoms in individual and familial stress conditions (Hooper & DePuy, 2010). They are more flexible and adaptable under stress. This is not because they are smarter than other people. The main reason for their flexibility and adaptability is that they have mental skills that can reduce the psychological pressure they are exposed to during the stress events (Kerr & Bowen, 1988). In this regard, although differentiation of self is a broader concept, it can function as a coping mechanism in case of stressful events. Coping and dyadic coping can be considered within the larger framework of differentiation of self, and the role of differentiation of self in the coping processes can be taken into consideration throughout the discussion of the results. Both the individual and relationship focused coping should not be underscored while understanding individual functioning and agendas in stress and coping processes.

## **2.3 Research on the Relationships among Differentiation of Self, Stress, Marital Satisfaction and Life Satisfaction**

Considering the relationships between variables of the proposed life satisfaction and marital satisfaction with regard to stress and the differentiation of self model, the literature provides a rich baseline. Yet, the review of literature has not yet provided information about studies including all study variables combined in a model. Hence, the findings of previous studies regarding study variables are described below. Then, major research findings in the Turkish literature regarding these variables will be presented.

### **2.3.1 Stress and Marital Relationship Studies**

Stress cannot simply be deemed as a personal phenomenon that affects only one person (Hill, 1958), but rather a dyadic dynamic construct, influencing both romantic partners and their relationship (Bodenmann, 1995; 2005). Stress, as the physical or psychological reaction to real or imagined needs, is intertwined with our social body (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) and could shape the way one interacts with others, his/her romantic partner in particular (Randall & Bodenmann, 2009). While more frequent stress could be traced back to character, such as neuroticism (Bolger & Zuckerman, 1995; 2000) or mental health conditions, such as diagnosed anxiety or depression (Lovibond, 1998), the focus is on the connection between stress and satisfaction in romantic relationships, regardless of personal correspondence to stress. Empirical studies have demonstrated that stress is associated with more negative behavior in marital interactions, which consequently leads to more negative relationship outcomes. Previous studies have demonstrated the

importance of harmful effects that stress may cause in a romantic relationship (Bodenmann, 1997; Randall & Bodenmann, 2009).

Numerous studies examined the effects of outstanding stress such as severe chronic illness, including cancer or chronic inflammation of joint (Schmaling & Goldman Sher, 2000), economic stress (Conger, Ge, & Lorenz, 1994), or life-stage transitions (Heaton, 1990) on marriage. James and Johnson (1988) indicate that critical life events (e.g., financial strains and home life stress) and marital satisfaction are negatively related. However, Williams (1995) and Bodenmann (2000) mention inconsistent associations between major stress events and marital quality, especially in critical life events exclusive of marital stresses (e.g., severe troubles in the relationship, separation, daily life stressors). One of the reasons of inconsistent findings regarding the relationship between stress and marital quality might be that some couples do not possess sufficient problem solving abilities, and therefore, are more susceptible to negative impact of stress while some of the couples have more resources. Coping resources of couples are more important than the severity of stress.

Findings indicate that stress affects marriage in several ways; external stress factors lead to less satisfying spousal interactions (Repetti, 1989), and exposure to stressful life events lead to more frequent marital aggression (Cano & Vivian, 2001). Stressful people complain more about marital dissatisfaction compared to less stressful persons (Story & Bradbury, 2004). Stress stemming from outside the relationship (external stress) could upset the relationship itself (Repetti, 1989) and persons' satisfaction in it (Buck & Neff, 2012; Randall

& Bodenmann, 2009). Studies on the role of context in marriage suggest that increased environmental stress levels are associated with negative processes and outcomes in marriage (Neff & Karney, 2004). Therefore, to have a more complete picture of how individual vulnerabilities and dyadic factors influence marital satisfaction, it is important to take into account the context of a relationship, mainly spouses' interaction elements. Bolger, Zuckerman, and Kessler (2000) state that individuals' daily routine are filled with stressful experiences (e.g., work, child care). If such experiences are not handled completely during the day, stress can spill over into the relationship and determine their interactions.

Another group of studies demonstrate that communication between partners is particularly influenced by stress. Work-related stress has a documented effect on communication in marriages (Crouter, Perry-Jenkins, Huston, & Crawford, 1989; Repetti, 1989). Schulz, Cowan, Cowan, and Brennan (2004), found that work stress can spill over into relationships via rising social withdrawal and hostility. Systematic behavioral observations demonstrated that more daily workload lead to more negative dyadic communication at home. For three days, husbands and wives completed questionnaires at the end of the work day and at bedtime regarding their behaviors. Referring to questionnaire data, Schulz et al. (2004) argue that women's marital behavior is negatively affected with workday stress and it showed that under stress, women tend to be more aggressive, while men are more reserved and more willing to wander away in stressful days in work. Stressed partners showed either more withdrawn or aggressive behavior. Despite gender differences in

response to work stress, no differences were found in typical marital behaviors, under non-stressed conditions.

Halford, Gravestock, Lowe, and Scheldt (1992) cited similar results using a diary approach. Couples note more negative interactions during the weekdays compared to weekends, when daily stress levels are lower. In a lab experiment wherein 70 couples were filmed for 10 minutes in two identical settings, once before and once after a stress induction, Bodenmann (2000) found that stress has a direct negative effect on marital affairs. Neff and Karney (2017) discusses two routes that higher levels of stress decrease marital well-being. First, external stress resulting from the daily hassles produces problems in marriage by creating an energy leakage which lessens time and attention given to intimacy promoting activities. Secondly, external stress can free up the spouses' energy and resources required to constructively respond to marital difficulties (Neff & Karney, 2017). It can be concluded that stress resulting from outside the relationship creates both additional marital problems and hinders the couple's constructive responses to the marital problems.

Distinctions between men and women's stress communications offer an interpretation that men have an apparent tendency to provide inferior support to women under great stress (Bodenmann, Meuwly, Germann, Nussbeck, Heinrichs, & Bradbury, 2015). Relevant literature also indicate that men and women's behavioral patterns under stress, as well as their coping processes, differ (Bodenmann et al., 2015). This finding enables researchers to predict distinct actions of genders. Husbands, who hold traditionally higher statuses, show more conflict behaviors and demand more support from wives (Chen &

Li, 2014) under stressful conditions. Support of a partner was proven to decrease tension and stress as well as increase the quality of life, due to its effects on experiential stressors (Carlson & Perrewé, 1999; Dehle, Larsen, & Landers, 2001; Julien, Chartrand, Simard, Bouthillier, & Bégin, 2003).

The fact is that a partner is not only under the influence of his/her own stress but is also affected by his/her partner's, which is especially harmful if a couple is in a conflicted or negative tie (Neff & Karney, 2007). Gottman and Levenson (1988) asserted that stressed men would develop this stress reaction in response to their partners' emotional expressions of stress. Women's stress reactions and tensions create more negative marital behavior in men. In the case of both partners suffering from high levels of stress, both partners tend to be more sensitive towards negative expressions from their partners, as their cognitive resources are already scarce due to the ongoing fight with stress (Larson & Almeida, 1999).

A longitudinal study conducted throughout four years discovered that with heightened stress levels, couples report more particular problems in their marriage (e.g., problems with communication, showing affection) and resort more to maladaptive attributional style, that is accusing the spouse for negative incidents in their marriage (Neff & Karney, 2004). Therefore, stress seems to have a two-fold effect, wherein stressed couples are more susceptible to negative relationship events as well as less capable of managing marital events constructively (Neff & Karney, 2017). Data from the National Survey of American Life (Lincoln & Chae, 2010) suggest that domestic (i.e., financial

strains) and external (i.e., unfair treatment) social stressors are detrimental for the quality of marriage and psychological distress.

Research studies on samples from the general public found that marriage helps to maintain mental health (Booth & Amato, 1991; Horwitz, White, & Howell-White, 1996; Simon, 2002; Williams, 2000). It has been argued that such an effect could be due to the influence marriage has on socioeconomic status and social support (Waite & Gallagher, 2000). All psychological distressing variables including depression has been negatively associated with marriage. Cairney et al. (2003) argue that married mothers are less likely to report a history of depression, chronic stress, reduced social contact, economic difficulties, and adverse experiences in childhood, and have a greater perceived social support in comparison to single mothers. Similarly, Afifi, Brownridge, Cox, and Sareen (2006) argue that psychiatric disorders such as depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), antisocial personality disorder, generalized anxiety disorder, anxious-misery disorders, dysthymia, and disorders with externalized symptoms are more widespread among single mothers. Married people complain consistently less of depression than non-married people (Brown, 2000; Gutiérrez-Lobos et al., 2000; Ross & Mirowsky, 1989). Married couples report less depression compared to couples in cohabitation (Brown, 2000).

Dissatisfactory marriages are found to lead to weight gains (Kershaw et al., 2014; Robles, Slatcher, Trombello, & McGinn, 2014; Troxel, Matthews, Gallo, & Kuller, 2005), often more so in women (Whisman & Uebelacker, 2012; Whisman, Uebelacker, & Settles, 2010). When couples have higher level of

stress, deficiencies in a marital quality could particularly lead to weight gains. Studies on single individuals also show that there is a correlation between chronic or prolonged stress and weight gain on individuals (Block, He, Zaslavsky, Ding, & Ayanian, 2009).

Karney and Bradbury's (1995; Bradbury & Karney, 2004) theoretical framework, derived from their meta-analysis of the large literature on marriage, suggests that distress and breakdown arise from the combination of enduring vulnerabilities (e.g., problematic personality traits such as neuroticism and turbulent family of origin), stressful events (e.g., major life events and challenging circumstances), and weak adaptive processes (e.g., failure to help, empathize with and support the partner; defensive, aggressive, and disengaged problem-solving skills). This point of view presumes that marital quality fluctuates downward as these adaptive processes are compromised or disrupted by acute life events, and when chronic stress is high, these fluctuations are expected to be particularly large (Karney, Story, & Bradbury, 2005).

While the accumulation of stress is believed to operate as an immediate trigger, the general everyday stress level is a more enduring reason for divorce that erodes marital quality, leading to mutual alienation and increasing risk of divorce. Bodenmann and Cina (2006) also show that daily stress was a reliable predictor of divorce. Negative interactions such as contempt, aggression, defensiveness, criticism and withdrawal are crucial indicators of low relationship quality and higher risk of divorce (Karney & Bradbury, 1995; Gottman, Coan, Carrere, & Swanson, 1998).

Bodenmann (2005) and Karney and Bradbury (1995) suggest that stress can be deleterious to functioning to and endurance of intimate relationships. Consistent findings indicate that with both men and women, internal daily stress levels are inversely proportional with marital and sexual satisfaction and sexual activity and directly proportional with sexual dysfunction. Except for sexual dysfunction, there are significant partner effects between internal daily stress and relationship functioning. In particular, the partner who reports more daily stress and tension in a relationship is more likely to also report lesser levels of marital and sexual satisfaction as well as sexual activity. These findings support the initial argument presented in this study that daily stress internal to the relationship, as reported by both partners, is directly proportional with weaker relationship functioning.

Rogge (2002) has investigated the factors that predict marital discord and dissolution in early stages of marriage. Divorce after three years of marriage is more likely if wives experience high levels of stress at the initial stages of the marriage and divorce over the first 5 years of marriage is predicted by indices of negative communication (Rogge, 2002). Some studies reveal that some types of stress such as poverty play a role in the level of warmth and hostility in marital relationships (Cutrona et al., 2003), and how different forms of stress differs in the speed rate of marriage deterioration (Karney et al., 2005). Total stress levels are found to be much lower in stable relationships than divorced couples (Buck & Neff, 2004), which is in line with the findings of Hahlweg, Kraemer, Schindler, and Revenstorf (1980), who argue that stress is likely to reduce individuals' ability to react constructively to relationship issues, despite even their best intentions. If the spouses do not have enough

coping resources, stress may directly or indirectly lead to divorce, and therefore, investigating stress in the context of marriage is also critical in this sense.

### **2.3.2 Stress and Marital Satisfaction Studies**

Research focusing on the quality of relationship have begun to clarify the interaction between stress and marital functioning. A number of research demonstrated that high levels of stress is associated with low levels of relationship satisfaction (e.g., Bodenmann, 2000, 2005; Cohan & Bradbury, 1997; Harper, Schaalje, & Sandberg, 2000; Story & Bradbury, 2004). In addition, a series of studies indicate that, like Western couples, Chinese partners also become less satisfied when they are exposed to higher stress levels (Hilpert, Bodenmann, Nussbeck, & Bradbury, 2013; Story & Bradbury, 2004).

In Bodenmann's (2005) study intracultural couples' internal stress has been found to be negatively linked with relationship satisfaction. Moreover, relationship satisfaction has lower levels in couples who have high levels of perceived stress and in the partner of the distressed couples' (Falconier, Nussbeck, Bodenmann, Schneider, & Bradbury, 2015). Put it differently, Partner A's internal stress level does not only affect himself/herself, but also have an effect on Partner B, and B also perceives low levels of relationship satisfaction due to cross-over effects of stress from one partner to another (Bodenmann, 1995, 2005; Neff & Karney, 2007). This brings researchers the necessity to examine the actor and partner alliance between stress and relationship satisfaction to understand the negative association between intradyadic stress and relationship satisfaction (Kenny, Kashy, & Cook, 2006).

Changes in acute stress and satisfaction of marriage was scrutinized in a longitudinal study. Karney and his colleagues (2005) conducted a 4-year period longitudinal study with a topic of stress spillover and examined the changes in satisfaction of marriage over time between the average levels of role strain which is type of stress related to the roles loading onto individuals. Results indicated that in case of stressful time periods, couples are less satisfied (Kamey, Story, & Bradbury, 2005). Role strain's level was found to be related with quick decrease in one's own satisfaction of marriage for both couples. Chronic stress is a vital concept (Reis & Gable, 2000; Repetti, 1989), and consequently, it become visibly crucial to assess the change rates in role strain and satisfaction over time.

The couple's life cycle may also influence the impact of the stress on relationship satisfaction. Between-subjects comparisons of couples, experiencing high versus low levels of external stress indicate that those facing more magnificent stress exhibit sharper decrease in marital satisfaction during the early years of marriage, in addition to higher rates of marital termination (Bahr, 1979; Conger, Rueter, & Elder, 1999). Impact of stress in early years of marriage in comparison to later years is considered to be more critical.

Negative marital quality depends on how much one's partner is condemning, disheartening, annoying, or demanding (Walen & Lachman, 2000). Positive marital quality is less predictive of health than negative aspects of the relationship (Kiecolt-Glaser et al., 2015; Kiecolt-Glaser & Newton, 2001; Liu & Waite, 2014), and the effects of stress on health is triggered by negative quality

of marriage (Birditt & Antonucci, 2008; Birditt, Newton, Cranford, & Ryan, 2015). In fact, a pile of research indicate that stress and low leveled marital relationship quality connect and are linked with the health and mood of both side of couples (Birditt et al., 2015; Carr, Cornman, & Freedman, 2016; Robles et al., 2014). Along with their effects on relationship behaviors, low levels of marital appraisals were found to be related with external stressor.

Couples who are satisfied and live free of stress should be marked by high exchange of positive interactions and reinforcements such as being concerned, sense of obligation, and tenderness; while, distressed and dissatisfied couples should score higher in negative interactions (Coyne & DeLongis, 1986; Reis & Shaver, 1988). A number of research found that low levels of relationship satisfaction and increased levels of risk for divorce were predicted by negative interactions (e.g. Gottman, 2014; Karney & Bradbury, 1995; Weiss & Heyman, 1997).

It would not be surprising that high levels of chronic external stress correlated with chronic internal stress, which then leads to lower relationship satisfaction (Bodenmann, Ledermann, et al., 2007; Karney et al., 2005; Neff & Karney, 2004). Empirical evidence have provided support for the finding that stress haa a significant effect on marital communication, marital satisfaction, and the development of close relationships (Bodenmann, 2000; Neff & Karney, 2004; Repetti, 1989; Story & Bradbury, 2004). For instance, according to Repetti (1989), if stress spills over into couples' relationship it would increase negative behavior of partners, and consecutively impact dissatisfactory relationship outcomes. Besides, marriages that are exposed to enormous levels of chronic

stresses most likely end up with divorce (Bodenmann, 2000; Karney, Story, & Bradbury, 2005). Bodenmann (2005) also found negative correlation between stress and relationship satisfaction. The findings indicate that relationship conflicts and marriage termination depend on the context of a marriage (Karney et al., 2005; Neff & Karney, 2004; Story & Bradbury, 2004) and that marital interactions, attributions, and satisfaction are negatively affected by external stressors (Karney et al., 2005).

In a comprehensive study, women's chronic external stress was found to influence men's relationship satisfaction. The results indicate that increased women's chronic stress reduces men's relationship satisfaction, and women's chronic external stress might also increase men's internal stress and have a negative effect on men's relationship satisfaction. Provided that women are experiencing chronic internal stress, this extremely influences their satisfaction of relationship (Merz, Meuwly, Randall, & Bodenmann, 2014). Neff and Karney's (2009) study reveal that women's level of stress affect the relationship rather than the stress levels of males'.

The links between the types of stressors and relationship satisfaction were indicated to be consistently negative. Even though several studies outlined direct consequence, a great deal of research investigated various mediators. For instance, reduction in self-regulation, increase in partner aggression and depressive symptoms were found to mediate the relationship between stress and relationship satisfaction (Randall & Bodenmann, 2017). From the perspective of STM, internal stress and dyadic coping should also mediate the

link between external stress and relationship satisfaction (Xu, Hilpert, Nussbeck, & Bodenmann, 2018).

Marital satisfaction and marital quality are negatively correlated with everyday stress and daily hassles in cross-sectional studies (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Traa, Vries, & Bodenmann, 2015). Some cross-sectional studies used questionnaire data as a type of data collection to show the relationship between minor stress or daily hassles and marital quality (Bodenmann, 2000; Whiffen & Gotlib, 1989). Being exposed to high levels of stress continuously and consistently decreases the quality of relationship (Buck & Neff, 2012). Buck and Neff's (2012) study indicate that when couples experience high levels of stress out of routine, they are more likely to exhibit behaviors toward their partners and state less positive marital appraisals. On the contrary, the same spouses show more positive manners to each other, on days of lower stress. Buck and Neff's (2012) study also demonstrate that men are more prone to be less satisfied with their relationships on stressful days. On the other hand, for women, stress levels were not found to be linked with relationship satisfaction. The findings also help to understand that even happy couples may have difficulty in remaining in adaptive relationship processes under stressful conditions. Another study indicates that women's satisfaction of marriage is negatively linked to their own and couple's stress levels, and the aftermath will be buffered by supportive dyadic coping of men (Brock & Lawrence, 2008).

Provided that stress has its origin apart from the marriage related issues, this situation leads couples to have maladaptive relationship behaviors and

negatively affects marital satisfaction, which is also called as stress spillover (Randall & Bodenmann, 2009). Bodenmann (2005) states that the concept of stress spillover clarifies the reason of collapse of happy relationships over time as experiencing stressful environments may damage communication skills and functional behaviors. Even though couples establish healthy relationships, in case of stress they may fluctuate negatively in their behaviors.

Studies conducted with men show that after controlling for average levels of stress, within-person stress spillover process in the stressful days makes men less satisfied. This result yields that when stress goes beyond the average level on stressful days, further negative impacts might emerge (Hilpert, Xu, Milek, Atkins, & Bodenmann, 2018). Results of the studies that focus on gender revealed that correlations between stress, relationship satisfaction, and interaction all depend on gender (Baucom, McFarland, & Christensen, 2010; Bodenmann, 2000).

Several studies indicate that mutual support between partners increases satisfaction of marriage (Dehle, Larsen, & Landers, 2001; Pasch & Bradbury, 1998), and it is also asserted that impeding stress related downturn of the marital relationship plays a crucial role in satisfaction of marriage (Cutrona, 1996). Participants who received more support, compared to the average person in the sample, were found to be not affected from stress in terms of relationship satisfaction (Hilpert et al. , 2018).

Gottman and Levenson (1992) found that dissolution and lower levels of instability between couples were linked to higher levels of relationship

satisfaction. In addition to this, relationship satisfaction is also connected with mental and physical well-being (Beach, Katz, Kim, & Brody, 2003; Kiecolt-Glaser et al., 2005; Proulx, Helms, & Buehler, 2007). Furthermore, many research studies have found a negative correlation between stress and marital satisfaction and adverse health outcomes (Ledermann, Bodenmann, Rudaz, & Bradbury, 2010; Leidy, Parke, Cladis, Coltrane, & Duffy, 2009; Whiteford, Degenhardt, Rehm, Baxter, Ferrari, & Erskine, 2013). These studies have also verified the relationship among marital satisfaction and perceived stress and its dimensions: emotional tension, intrapsychic stress, and external stress (Kaleta, 2014; Maroufizadeh, Hosseini, Foroushani, Omani-Samani, & Amini, 2018; Plopa, 2008; Plopa & Makarowski, 2010). In other words, high levels of perceived stress contribute to the deterioration of marital satisfaction for either men or women.

A meta-analysis, based on the results of 24 empirical studies, shows that marital satisfaction and its endurance are found to be correlated with types of stressors (Randall & Bodenmann, 2009). In addition, studies conducted in the last decade have shown that poor dyadic interactions are prompted by stress and this situation leads to a decrease in relationship satisfaction and dissolution of marriages (Bodenmann et al., 2006; Ledermann et al., 2010).

Lincoln and Chae (2010) found that financial instability was negatively correlated with marital satisfaction among Americans. Similarly, other studies report a correlation between economic factors (Bryant et al., 2008; Clark-Nicolas & Gray-Little, 1991), financial strain (Cutrona et al., 2003), and low levels of marital quality among African American couples. Sources of stress

such as financial difficulties exacerbate negative emotions, and hence, couples come up with expressing feeling of anger and not being satisfied with each other (Bolger, Foster, Vinokur, & Ng, 1996).

Understanding of how stress and marriage interact with each other is of great importance since marital satisfaction and marital quality are negatively correlated with everyday stress and daily hassles and chronic stress. There is a two-way relationship, and stress and marital quality have bidirectional relationships. For example, Lincoln and Chae's (2010) study show that marital satisfaction has a protective role over psychological distress and is a potential to guard mental health from unfair treatment and financial strain. Mental health is positively affected by marital transitions, individual standing, and being satisfied. Anxiety and depression, for both genders, are triggered by low levels of marital quality and high levels of stress (Williams, 2003). Stress and marital satisfaction impact and are impacted by each other. In the current study, stress is tested as one of the predictors of marital satisfaction.

### **2.3.3 Stress and Life Satisfaction Studies**

Satisfaction with life reveals a sense of gratification, contentment and feelings of congruency between demands or wishes and achievements or possessions, and can be taken as a measure of quality of life. It is one of the basics of mental well-being that may affect the individual on several planes of life. It may influence rational and intellectual functioning, as well as physical and mental health.

Life satisfaction has been studied with different individual and relational variables. For example, research has found that life satisfaction is positively associated with self-esteem (Chow, 2005), positive parent-child relationship, academic success, and being adapted (Dew & Huebner 1994; Huebner, 2004; Leung & Leung, 1992), family structure (Evans & Kelley, 2004), optimism (Acun-Kapikıran, 2012) and is negatively correlated with loneliness (Goodwin, Cook, & Yung, 2001), depression (Wong & Lim, 2009), nervousness, and uneasiness, and substance abuse (Gullone & Cummins 1999; Zullig et al. 2001). Life satisfaction contributes to different experiences in different periods of life, and friends, school, living environment, family and self are different factors contributing to life satisfaction.

Perceived positive stress and life satisfaction are found to be positively correlated while negative stress is found to be negatively linked with life satisfaction (Abolghasemi & Varaniyab, 2010). Likewise, it has been found that stress is an important predictor of life satisfaction. (Barnes & Lightsey 2005; Hamarat et al. 2001). Several studies conducted with college students have documented that high levels of stress is correlated with decrease in perceived satisfaction with life (Anders, Frazier, & Shallcross, 2012; Bailey & Miller, 1998; Buser & Kearney, 2017; Malinauskas, 2010; Saklofske, Austin, Mastoras, Beaton, & Osborne, 2012; Simons, Aysan, Thompson, Hamarat, & Steele, 2002; Weinstein & Laverghetta, 2009). On the other hand, studies show that for those college students who succeed in managing the sources of stress, life satisfaction tends to show increases. (Boujut, Bruchon-Schweitzer, & Dombrowski, 2012; Deniz, 2006; Saklofske et al., 2012).

For instance, Anders, Frazier, and Shallcross (2012) studied with 1,084 college students and their study showed that as the numbers of stressful events experienced increases, life satisfaction decreases. Bailey and Miller (1998) examined 243 college students and reported that participants who show high life satisfaction are expected to experience reduced perceptions of stress compared to participants who show moderate and low levels of life satisfaction. After a study of college athletes with major ( $n = 54$ ) and minor ( $n = 69$ ) injuries, Malinauskas (2010) stated that increased levels of stress were associated with decreased life satisfaction. Simons and his colleagues (2002) studied 172 college students and documented a link between increased levels of stress and decreased life satisfaction. Buser and Kearney (2017) examined the relationship between stress, adaptive coping and life satisfaction. While higher stress indicated lower life satisfaction, regression results confirmed that after controlling for stress, adaptive coping had a positive influence on life satisfaction. As it is in marital satisfaction, rather than stress, how individuals deal or overcome with it makes a difference regarding the impact of the stress on life satisfaction.

The relationship between perceived stress and life satisfaction has been documented many times with different samples, where high levels of perceived stress were found to be correlated with low satisfaction for university students and adults, respectively (Barnes & Lightsley, 2005; Rey & Extremera, 2015; Suh et al., 2016). Stress has been approved to have an impact on well-being such as satisfaction of life as well as approved as intervening variable between personality characteristics and satisfaction with life

(Hamarat et al., 2001; Rey & Extremera, 2015). How individuals cope with stress is often a significant variable in the outcome of life satisfaction.

In a study of 132 university students aged between 18 and 22, the relationship between self-differentiation and interpersonal and psychological well-being in young adulthood was investigated. It was found that less emotional cut-off and dependence on others and higher ability in taking I position predicted higher interpersonal and psychological well-being in relationships. These findings support Bowen's (1978) claim that self-differentiation supports greater psychological well-being (Skowron, Stanley, & Shapiro, 2009).

Kim and Jung (2015) investigated the relationship between life satisfaction and differentiation of self among 759 South Korean university students and found that higher differentiation of self significantly led to higher life satisfaction, meaning that there was a positive correlation between life satisfaction and self-differentiation. Besides, they concluded that 16.1 % of variance in attitudes toward marriage was explained by gender, age, life satisfaction, differentiation of self and family functioning.

Studies demonstrated that traumatic experiences can go together with decreased life satisfaction in middle school students (Chappel, Suldo, & Ogg, 2014; Lyons, Huebner, & Hills, 2016). Furthermore, life satisfaction plays a vital role in guarding the effect of unpleasant factors on adolescents' mental health (Tang & Chan, 2017). Unexpected and difficult events in human life might have a detrimental effect on individuals; thus, causing turmoil reaching to full potentials. If individuals are not able to reach their full potential, their

positive affect may become lower and lack of life satisfaction occurs. Decrease in life satisfaction eventually will end up with low quality of interpersonal relationships, psychological tensions and aggression, depression, drug abuse, bulimia and cancer (Hamid, Koochaki, & Hayatbakhsh, 2012).

Life satisfaction, as one of the indicators of individual well-being, is affected by stressful life events. Life satisfaction is perceived by evaluating the overall objective quality of lives in different domains such as health, financial status, and social relations, and perceptions of less or no stress in these domains may have a positive influence on life satisfaction.

#### **2.3.4 Differentiation of Self and Marital Satisfaction Studies**

According to Bowen (1978), the more a person is differentiated the more s/he will be satisfied with his/her life and marriage (Manzi, Vignoles, Regalia, & Scabini, 2006; Peleg & Yitzhak, 2011). Highly differentiated individuals are those who are not flooded by their dominant emotions, do not perceive the necessity to cut off emotionally, and are able to take "I position" in their relationships, which means that they do not need to conform to others' expectations and accept ownership of one's thoughts and feelings (Kerr & Bowen, 1988; Skowron & Friedlander, 1998). In this regard, when individuals experience stress, their levels of differentiation can function as a protective or as a risk factor in terms of impacting marital satisfaction.

Another assertion of Bowen is that the level of differentiation of spouses affect marital functioning, adjustment and satisfaction (Bowen, 1978; Friedman, 1991; Kerr & Bowen, 1988). Marital satisfaction is considered as an important

area for research since it impacts marital quality issues such as divorce, health, and child development. Bowen's theory predicts that couples with lower levels of differentiation are unable to effectively deal with family's chronic anxiety. The theory argues that they cope with anxiety by manifesting symptoms in a spouse, arguing, and developing symptomatic children with behavioral problems, and these factors will contribute to a lowered marital satisfaction.

Prior research on differentiation of self and marital satisfaction present mixed results (Bartle, 1993; Berger, 1991; Cunnington, 1993; Skowron, 1996; Vanamburgh, 1988). All these studies used convenient sampling and their sample were composed of mostly white individuals, more than 80%. Skowron (1996) and Vanamburgh (1988) found gender differences, where women were more emotionally reactive, had lowered differentiation of self than men and showed stronger correlation between marital satisfaction and differentiation of self. Various other studies also reveal that there is a significant difference between self-differentiation scores of women and men (Hanımoğlu & Akbaş 2018; Peleg & Yitzhak, 2011; Polat, 2014; Skowron, 2000; Skowron & Dendy, 2004).

In a study by Peleg and Yitzhak (2011), the mean scores of emotional reactivity and fusion of men were significantly higher than that of women and it was found that the differentiation of the self was related to the emotional anxiety-responsiveness in women and to the separation anxiety of the sub-dimension of dependence on others in men. As the self-differentiation increases in both sexes, separation anxiety decreases. In a study conducted by Skowron and

Dendy (2004), it was found that men showed less emotional reactivity than women. According to another study conducted in Turkey (Polat, 2014), it was found that the total scores of self-differentiation showed a significant difference between the two genders, in favor of men.

Lim and Jennings (1996) examined 113 married couples and investigated the impact of level of differentiation on marital distress and marital satisfaction. The researchers concluded that low differentiated individuals experience greater levels of marital distress and conflict while higher differentiated individuals report more enjoyment, intimacy and marital satisfaction. In addition, highly differentiated individuals experience greater marital satisfaction in contrast to undifferentiated persons who experienced increased levels of marital distress. Furthermore, their results suggest that the impact of differentiation of self on marital satisfaction is stronger for women than men (Lim & Jennings, 1996).

In Peleg's study (2008), 121 Israeli men and women at various stages of married life were examined and the correlation between differentiation of self and marital satisfaction was found to be different. Men's satisfaction of marriage was found to have a negative relation with emotional reactivity and emotional cut-off, and a positive relation with I position. On the other hand, women's marriage satisfaction was found to be negatively linked with only emotional cut-off (Peleg, 2008). Correlations between marital satisfaction and the other sub-dimensions of differentiation of self were not significant. According to the results of a survey conducted with 60 married couples, Richards (1989) demonstrated a strong positive correlation between

differentiation and marital satisfaction, measured by Locke-Wallace Marital Adjustment Test.

Racite (2001) analyzed the level of differentiation and marital satisfaction in distressed and non-distressed couples. The 60 married couples were taken from a marital enrichment seminar and a clinical population. Participants completed the Dyadic Adjustment Scale and the Family Systems Personality Profile. Both distressed and non-distressed were assigned to groups: healthy like, healthy unlike, unhealthy like, and unhealthy unlike couples. Results revealed that higher differentiation (non-distressed) groups reported higher levels of marital satisfaction than the lower differentiation (distressed) groups. Within the clinical group, 22 of the 30 clinical couples experienced varying levels of differentiation, while 20 of the 30 marital enrichment couples reported similar levels of differentiation. These findings support the Bowen's hypothesis that partners with similar differentiation levels experience less marital problems (Racite, 2001).

Leigh (2000) studied the relationship between differentiation of self and religion and the effect of this relationship on marital satisfaction in Black and White couples. The two marital variables focused on communication and conflict resolution skills. The participants included 49 Black couples and 45 White couples who were similar in overall demographics. The patterns of correlations were similar between Black and White couples. The results supported the relationship between differentiation of self and marital satisfaction; however, findings did not indicate any significance between religion and differentiation.

Timm (2000) analyzed the effects of differentiation of self, adult attachment, and sexual communication on sexual and marital satisfaction with a sample of 205 married participants. Results showed that differentiation of self and adult attachment were significantly and positively related to sexual communication. Marital and sexual satisfaction, and sexual communication had positively correlated relationships with differentiation of self.

Griffin and Apostol (1993) assessed the effectiveness of Relationship Enhancement programs on increasing the functional and basic levels of differentiation. The study included twenty married couples with a pre-test/post-test method used to measure differentiation of self, quality of relationship, and anxiety levels among couples. The couples received training in relationship skills over six sessions. The results showed a significant increase in the functional and basic levels of differentiation of self, as measured by the Level of Differentiation of Self Scale and the Family Relationship Questionnaire, a significant increase in the quality of relationships and a decrease in anxiety levels (Griffin & Apostol, 1993).

Other researchers (Kaiser, Hahlweg, Fehm-Wolsdorf, & Groth, 1998) utilized psychoeducational programs, which involved communication and problem-solving training, clarifying expectations between spouses, and exercises to enhance sexual relationships. At post-assessment, the intervention couples reported fewer problems than the control group, and at the one-year follow-up, the intervention couples reported fewer problems when compared to pre-assessment (Kaiser, Hahlweg, Fehm-Wolsdorf, & Groth, 1998). These studies support the idea that working to increase differentiation of self can improve

relationship functioning and aid in developing more stable marriages and families over time; however, more research is needed within the area of increasing one's level of differentiation, especially within the sexual relationship.

In his dissertation, Kwon (2000) found that 29.3% variance in marital satisfaction was explained by differentiation of self for husbands ( $n = 125$ ), while 27.9 % variance in marital satisfaction was explained for wives ( $n = 125$ ). For husbands, as their level of differentiation increases, their marital satisfaction also increases. But for wives, the relationship was in opposite direction. As wives were able to take I position and were less emotionally reactive, their marital satisfaction decreased. This means that as women become less approval seeking, less anxious about experiencing emotional closeness, while becoming more independent and differentiated, their satisfaction decrease. This result is in line with stereotypical gender roles, where the husband is more independent, assertive and unable to talk about feelings and the wife is dependent and seek approval from her husband and the family.

Foster, Jurkovic, Ferdinand, and Meadows (2002) investigated the effect of the genogram on couples, and established the relationship between the current family relationships, the five-session genogram-based therapy and the couples' family data. The findings of the study showed that the couples were closer to both the family of origin and each other in nuclear family and that the level of differentiation of the self increased.

In a study conducted by Spencer and Brown (2007) with 53 lesbian couples, it was found that there was no significant difference in the differentiation levels of lesbian couples. At the same time, a positive relationship was found between the satisfaction of the relationship and the differentiation of the self. In this study, it was also found that internalized homophobia had a more meaningful connection with relationship satisfaction than self differentiation.

Hill, Hasty, and Moore (2011) investigated the role of self-differentiation in terms of facilitating forgiveness in the context of couple and family relationships. According to the researchers, highly differentiated individuals are more open to forgiveness because they allow themselves and others to accept more. Besides, it is argued that well-differentiated individuals are not focused on the errors. But they understand that humans can make a mistake, and the important thing for a family is how to cope with it when it occurs. This may involve relational healing.

In a study by Ross, Hinshaw and Murdock (2016), the relationship between self-differentiation and attachment styles was examined. Findings revealed that lower ability to take I position, emotional reactivity and fusion with others predicted anxious attachment styles. Those with avoidant attachment styles were more likely to have a high level of emotional cut-off. In another study with 225 adults, the relationship between self-differentiation, adult attachment styles, and self-control (auto-control ability) was investigated. It was found that high levels of self differentiation with secure attachment style predicted high self-control. It was found that auto controlled individuals with higher I position, low emotional reactivity and low anxious attachment style were high

in relationships. The results showed that adults, who reported being less anxious, avoided attachment and had more self-differentiation, had the ability to control their attentions and behaviors carefully (Skowron & Dendy, 2004).

In a study by Peleg (2008), the relationships between self-differentiation and marriage satisfaction between 121 Israeli married men and women at various stages of life were investigated. In general, marriage satisfaction was found to be negatively associated with emotional reactivity. In the findings with gender differences, it was determined that self-esteem, emotional reactivity and emotional cut-off were related to marital satisfaction in men, and only emotional cutoff and marital satisfaction were related in women.

Peleg and Yitzhak (2011) conducted a study to examine the relationship between self-differentiation and separation anxiety and the similarities of spouses in terms of these two variables. The results of the study showed that the spouses had similar levels in terms of self-differentiation and I-position sub-dimensions. When the other sub-dimensions were examined, it was found that women reported higher levels of emotional reactivity and fusion with others than men. In addition, there was a high correlation between men's fusion with others and separation anxiety levels, while women's emotional reactivity levels and separation anxiety levels were highly correlated. However, according to the situation experienced, the separation was evaluated as moderate and more severe level, and it was stated that there was a significant relationship between anxiety and self-differentiation in more severe group.

In the available literature, there is a consistency among majority of studies that differentiation of self is an important predictor of marital satisfaction, marital adjustment and sexual satisfaction. Higher levels of differentiation is related to higher levels of marital and sexual satisfaction and adjustment in marriages (Arpita, 2006; Bhatt, 2001; Bradbury, Fincham, & Beach, 2000; Birditt & Antonucci, 2008; Campos, Keltner, Bech, Gonzaga, & John, 2007; Harrison, 2003; Hobby, 2004; Hollander, 2007; Kwon, 2000; McCullough, 2005; Patrick, Sells, Giordano, & Tollerud, 2007; Peleg, 2008; Richards, 1989; Richter, 1998; Skowron, 2000; Timm, & Keiley, 2011). These findings help us to understand that emotional availability in maintaining relationship is fundamentally essential. Furthermore, having a higher level of differentiation of self, mainly higher ability to take I position, less emotional reactivity and fusion with others facilitate more explicit and satisfying communication between spouses. For example, this open communication provides more explicit dialogues between partners regarding their sexuality which increases their sexual satisfaction and marital satisfaction indirectly (Timm & Keiley, 2011). Higher differentiation of self measured as lower emotional reactivity and cut-off resulted in less emotional flooding during quarrels and higher satisfaction in the dyad (Gubbing, Perosa, & Bartle-Haring, 2010).

### **2.3.5 Differentiation of Self and Life Satisfaction Studies**

Bowen argues that differentiation of self plays an important role in individuals' optimal functioning and well-being and that it is universal and accordant to all cultures (Bowen, 1978). In vast majority of studies, differentiation of self was found to be positively associated with well-being

(Tuason, & Friedlander, 2000) and satisfaction (Peleg, 2008), and negatively associated with anxiety (Nikbakht, Ahmadi, & Dashti-Nejad, 2012; Skowron, & Friedlander, 1998) and stress (Biadsky-Ashkar & Peleg, 2013) in both individualistic and collectivist societies (Peleg & Rahal, 2012). Differentiation of self also concerns with psychosocial development. Jenkins, Buboltz Jr., Schwartz, and Johnson (2005) investigated the relationship between concept of differentiation of self and Erikson's psychosocial stages of development on university undergraduates and concluded that level of self differentiation significantly predicts psychosocial development in young adults.

For example, Peleg and Rahal (2012) aimed to examine the intercultural differences of the relationship between self-differentiation and psychological symptoms in the sample consisted of 282 college students, including 162 Jews and 120 Arabs. In general, they found a negative correlation between self-differentiation and psychological symptoms in both Jewish and Arabic groups. In cross-cultural terms, Jewish participants (representing an individualist society) reported higher levels of emotional reactivity and fusion in comparison to Arab participants (representing a collectivistic society). Arab participants reported higher I-position and emotional cut-off than Jewish participants. In line with this result, it was suggested that cultural characteristics should be taken into consideration in the studies conducted with individuals related to self-differentiation, and interventions should be shaped according to individuals' ethnic groups.

Biadsky-Ashkar and Peleg (2013) studied the relationship between life satisfaction and self-differentiation among Jewish ( $n = 114$ ) and Arab ( $n = 154$ )

women. Satisfaction with life and emotional cut-off had significant negative correlation for both ethnic groups. Among Arab women, satisfaction with life was found to be positively associated with I-position. However, correlations between satisfaction with life and emotional reactivity and fusion with others did not show significance. Regression analysis showed that for both ethnic groups that differentiation of self explained significant variance in life satisfaction. In general, this research finding provides support for the universality of the Family Systems Theory and for the argument that differentiation of self is an important factor that may influence emotional well-being in all cultures.

Chung and Gale (2006) found that the need for autonomy and a sense of belonging is possessed by all communities regardless of culture. In individualistic cultures, the emphasis is centered on the value of differentiation of self and autonomy; on the contrary, in collectivistic societies, people value belonging and closeness. Furthermore, Tamura and Lau's (1992) study investigated the fusion of people with others, between Japanese and British cultures. As a collectivist culture, Japanese strongly emphasized fusion, whereas the British participants reported lower levels of fusion. Chung and Gale (2006) compared differentiation of self between European-American and Korean students. Koreans were found to have lesser levels of differentiation of self and ability to take I-position, and European-American students had low levels of emotional reactivity, emotional cutoff, and fusion with others. According to Chung and Gale (2009), Korean families were found to be discouraging to maintain a high level of self-differentiation to their members. It was also revealed that self-differentiation was positively linked with family

functioning. Most of the dimensions of family functioning were negatively associated with emotional reactivity and emotional cutoff and positively associated with I position within both ethnic groups. These correlations were weak among the Korean participants.

Peleg-Popko (2002) found that self-differentiated students had less tendency to be socially anxious and showed physiological symptoms, and thus the less a student's level of differentiation, the more they may be at risk for high levels of social anxiety. Skowron, Holmes, and Sabatelli's (2003) study with 221 adults showed that differentiation and psychological well-being were significantly related to each other as measured by the Life Satisfaction Index. Miller, Anderson, and Keala (2004) reported in their review of basic research regarding validation of Bowenian theory that correlation between self-differentiation and psychological distress was strongly associated with each other. Bartle-Haring and Gregory (2003) found that highly self-differentiated people were found to have a chance to be shielded by psychological distress. Although these studies used different scales, their findings are similar and consistent with each other.

Individuals with high levels of differentiation were found to: have low chronic anxiety and psychological symptoms (Skowron & Friedlander, 1998), cope with stress situations better and solve problems better (Murdock & Gore, 2004), have effective problem solving skills, high academic success and psychological adaptation (Skowron, 2000), have few relationship problems (Wei, Vogel, Ku, & Zakalik, 2005), have high psychological maturity and few problematic behaviors (Gavazzi, Anderson, & Sabatelli, 1993), have high

psychological well-being (Elieson & Rubin, 2001; Skowron, Holmes & Sabatelli, 2003; Skowron & Schmitt, 2003; Skowron, Stanley & Shapiro, 2009) and have healthy interpersonal relationships (Skowron, Stanley, & Shapiro, 2009). Wei, Vogel, Ku and Zakalik, (2005) found that there is a significant relationship between self-differentiation and mood. In a study conducted by Kim-Appel, Appel, Newman, and Parr (2007), it was found that the factors that make up the differentiation of the self (emotional reactivity, fusion with others, I position) are the definitive predictors of psychological symptoms (depression, anxiety). Bohlander (1999) found that differentiation of self (measured by the LDSS) made significant contributions to explaining married men's psychological well-being and concluded that differentiation of self is moderately correlated with overall psychological well-being.

Murdock and Gore (2004) extended their study based on previous works. They point out that the study conducted by Bartle-Haring et al. (2002) used a mediation model where stress mediated the relationship between differentiation of self and psychological functioning. However, Murdock and Gore (2004) tested a moderation model and anticipated that differentiation of self moderates the relationship between stress and distress. The authors demonstrated that the interaction of perceived stress and differentiation of self explained significant variance in psychological functioning beyond that predicted by stress or coping strategies. The results of this study, which examines the relationships among stress, coping and self-differentiation, support Bowen's arguments. The hypothesis that differentiation of self directs the relationship between perceived stress and psychological functioning has been confirmed. In addition, when the relationship between the use of various

coping strategies and self-differentiation is examined, repression and reactive coping methods were found to be associated with lower self-differentiation level (Murdock & Gore, 2004).

### **2.3.6 Differentiation of Self and Stress Studies**

An important aspect of self-differentiation is its capacity to deal with life stress. Bowen asserts that highly differentiated individuals have the capacity to separate thoughts and feelings, maintain the contact with strong feelings, and not give up logical reasoning. This ability of proper use of emotion and intellect is tested under intense or stressful situations. In the face of emotional challenges like stress and anxiety, high differentiation of self demonstrates itself as less emotional reactivity, more sustaining I position and ability to remain calm (Kerr & Bowen, 1988). Differentiation of self is expected to be visible practically in dealing with strong feelings in an emotional system.

Well-differentiated individuals cope better with stressful situations and their ability to remain objective reduces emotional reactivity during emotionally charged periods (Framo, 1992). Bowen defines a differentiated person as one who is able to maintain objectivity and relate to people in the system while in the mid of stress and crisis. On the other hand, under stress less differentiated individuals have more difficulty in thinking clearly and maintaining a solid sense of self in close relationships (Bowen, 1978; Kerr & Bowen, 1988). Kerr and Bowen (1988) argue that stress would be experienced in the context of differentiation of self (Murdock & Gore, 2004; Skowron, Wester, Azen, 2004).

Under stress imposing conditions, poorly differentiated individuals tend to focus their full attention and give their all energy to emotional episode or flooding they experience, and therefore, they may miss fulfilling the required tasks. Due to unstable emotions, mood changes, not being able to keep themselves on reasonable and rational manner, they cannot keep going on the track for the benefit of certain life goals (Peleg, Halaby, & Whaby, 2006). The high amount of emotional flooding may increase the probability of creation of fused relationships or emotional cut-off in case of lower level of differentiation of self. However, highly differentiated people are able to adopt a position in inter-personal relationships, adjust their feelings as well as retain their personal identity within substantial and intimate relationships, think, feel and act for themselves even under stressful conditions (Tuason & Fiedlander, 2000). They are able to distinguish between emotional and rational processes and react efficiently and adaptively to stressful conditions (Gushue & Constantin, 2003).

It is also important to note that in order to show the complexity of relationship between stress and well-being, Kerr and Bowen (1988) state that “people at any point on the scale (of differentiation), if stressed sufficiently, can develop physical, emotional, or social symptoms. The higher the level of differentiation, however, the more stress required to trigger a symptom” (p. 97). It means that rather than the level of stress, differentiation of self level determines the impact of stress on individuals’ lives. In this point of view, people who are well differentiated are more resistant to the negative effects of stress, while the same amount of stress experienced by people who are poorly differentiated will have more apparent consequences. Efforts to examine this

proposal have led to two explanations of the relations among stress, differentiation, and symptoms. Some studies use differentiation of self as moderator in the relationship between stress and distress, while others use it as mediator (Murdock & Gore 2004; Murray et al. 2006; Skowron et al. 2004).

Regarding the studies focusing on stress and differentiation of self, first Bartle-Haring, Rosen, and Stith (2002) found evidence that one aspect of differentiation of self, emotional reactivity, was related to stress and psychological distress. Later, Murdock and Gore (2004) show that differentiation of self is significantly, and negatively correlated with perceived stress and that differentiation of self moderates the relationship between stress and psychological dysfunction, indicating that people with lower levels of differentiation experience more psychological distress than people with higher levels of differentiation in reaction to the same levels of stress. Perceived stress, differentiation of self, and their interaction are significant predictors of psychological distress.

Subsequently, Krycak, Murdock, and Marszalek (2012) explored the relations among stress, emotional support, and differentiation of self as predictors of psychological distress in a sample of 200 college students and asserted the significant role of actual and perceived stress on differentiation of self. They have concluded that when both stressful events and perceived stress were measured, differentiation of self was found to be a significant partial mediator of their effects on psychological distress. The model indicated that I position partially mediated the relationships between academic stress and perceived stress and between social stress events and perceived stress. Emotional

reactivity partially mediated the relationships between academic stress events and perceived stress and between social stress events and perceived stress. They explained that the measured type of stress, actual stress and perceived stress may result in different conclusions. In the case of actual stress, individuals experience a real stressful and specific event. For example, breast cancer or colorectal cancer cases consists of 25 pairs of individuals were examined and differentiation of self was found to be negatively correlated with experienced stress and level of intrusive thoughts (Bartle-Haring & Gregory, 2003).

Academic stress is also negatively linked to the level of differentiation of self. To be able to take I position and decreased tendency to emotional reactivity, fusion and cut-off decrease the stress resulting from studying and being a student (Skowron, Wester, & Azen, 2004). Academic stress is also negatively linked with the level of differentiation of self. To be able to take I position and decreased tendency to emotional reactivity, fusion and cut-off decrease the stress related to study (Skowron, Wester, & Azen, 2004). Skowron et al. (2004) tested both the moderation and mediation hypotheses, and found that higher levels of differentiation were negatively related to both stress and psychological distress. However, they found that differentiation partially mediated the relationship between stress and adjustment. In a longitudinal study, Skowron et al. also (2009) demonstrated that higher levels of differentiation of self predicted lower levels of psychological distress over a 12-week period.

Murray, Daniel and Murray (2006) examined the usefulness of Bowen family systems theory as a framework for understanding fibromyalgia syndrome. This cross-sectional Internet-based survey was composed of 201 participants who are diagnosed with fibromyalgia syndrome. Results showed that more severe symptoms of fibromyalgia syndrome were significantly correlated with higher levels of perceived stress, lower levels of differentiation of self, and higher levels of emotional cutoff. In addition, indicators of differentiation of self (i.e., emotional cutoff and emotional reactivity) were found to moderate the relationship between perceived stress and symptom severity.

The results of the studies conducted by Murdock and Gore (2004) and Skowron et al. (2004) differ in terms of the relationships among stress, differentiation of self, and psychological distress. As described earlier, Murdock and Gore (2004) and Bartle-Haring et al. (2002) displayed support for Bowen's hypothesis that differentiation of self moderated the relationship between stress and psychological distress, whereas Skowron et al. (2004) found that differentiation of self mediated this relationship. When the relationship of differentiation and stress is investigated, there is also a study showing no significant relationship between exposure to stressful life events and the level of differentiation of self (Tuason & Friedlander, 2000). The samples come mostly from university students and young adults but measures of stress differ among studies. As a general conclusion for the above mentioned studies, people with higher levels of differentiation of self experience less psychological distress than people with lower levels of differentiation of self.

Rogers, Hertlein, Rogers, and Cross (2012) studied guided visualization interventions on perceived stress, dyadic satisfaction and psychological symptoms on high stresses couples and they have reported that differentiation of self and sense of coherence mediated the relationship between perceived stress and dyadic satisfaction of couples. Vaziri, Jomehri, and Farrokhi (2014) studied 100 Iranian college students, and their findings showed that total differentiation of self scores positively predicted sense of coherence. In other words, they argue that more differentiated individuals perceive their world as more coherent, which in turn leads to more psychologically healthy life. Sense of coherence means the extent to which one sees world as comprehensible, manageable and meaningful. With less energy spent for the pursuit of relationships, well-differentiated individuals share more of their energy for their choices of life goals. Since they are not driven by feeling world, they are able to balance thinking and feeling function, and able to differentiate objective and subjective reality, these qualities enable them to enjoy satisfying their lives (Anonymous, 1972; Gilbert, 1992).

Studies regarding stress and differentiation of self support Friedman's ideas (1991) that differentiation of self is negatively correlated with the severity of symptoms one can develop under a certain stressor. Highly differentiated individuals should experience higher stress in comparison to less differentiated individuals in order to become symptomatic. In other words, individuals with lower levels of differentiation of self are more prone to be negatively affected by stressors.

### **2.3.7 Differentiation of Self, Stress, Marital Satisfaction and Life Satisfaction Studies from Turkey**

The available Turkish literature has demonstrated that two studies were conducted in order to adapt two different measures of the concept of differentiation of self in Turkey. In the study conducted by Işık and Bulduk (2015), the Differentiation of Self Inventory - Revised Form (Skowron & Friedlander, 1998) was adapted to Turkish and at the same time the relationship between state anxiety and self-differentiation was examined. Işık and Bulduk (2015) found significant negative correlation between each sub-dimension and total scores of differentiation of self and trait anxiety. In the other study, Sarıkaya et al. (2018) adapted the Turkish version of the Self-Differentiation Scale-Short Form (Drake, Murdock, Marszalek, & Barber, 2015) and examined the relationships between self-esteem, anxiety, and authenticity. Sarıkaya et al. (2018) reported significant positive correlation between self differentiation and self-esteem and authentic living, and negative correlation between trait anxiety, accepting external influence and self-alienation.

Studies that examine the differentiation of the self in a relational context are noteworthy in Turkey. In his study, Polat (2014) examined couple's adjustment and some psychological symptoms (depression, anxiety and stress) in terms of the level of self-differentiation in married individuals. The study found that the level of differentiation of self predicted the level of depression, anxiety, and stress in married individuals and when the level of self-differentiation was examined in terms of the sub-dimensions, it was founded that the

emotional cut-off and taking I-position subscales significantly predicted the dyadic adjustment; emotional reactivity, emotional cut off, and taking I position subscales predicted depression; emotional reactivity and taking I position subscales predicted anxiety; emotional cut off, emotional reactivity, and taking I position subscales predicted stress.

Polat and İlhan (2018) conducted a study with 362 married Turkish couples and investigated dyadic adjustment and some psychological symptoms with regard to differentiation of self. They concluded that dyadic adjustment, stress, depression and anxiety among married individuals were predicted by total score of differentiation of self. Bivariate correlations showed that emotional reactivity, fusion with others and cut-off were significantly and positively correlated with depression, anxiety and stress scores. There was also a negative relationship between I-position and these psychological symptoms. Dyadic adjustment total score was negatively correlated with emotional reactivity, cut-off and fusion with others while was positively correlated to I position. Differentiation of self also explained 15 % of the variance in dyadic adjustment.

Hanımoğlu and Akbaş (2018) studied whether the differentiation of self and the family functioning of college students predict their perceived stress, anxiety and depression. Results suggested that emotional reactivity, emotional cut-off and I position were meaningful predictors of scores obtained from the Perceived Stress Scale. Similarly, emotional reactivity, emotional cut-off and I position were found to be meaningful predictors of score obtained from Beck Depression Inventory.

Kalkan (2018) conducted a study to examine the marital relationship quality in the context of differentiation of self and relational authenticity. The participants of the study were 603 married individuals. According to the results, taking I position and emotional cut-off were significant predictors of marital relationship quality.

Erdem-Özyurt (2019) examined the psychological well-being of university students in terms of differentiation of self. There were 395 university students in the study from Buca Faculty of Education. It was found that differentiation of self was a significant predictor of psychological well-being and general health level.

Boldaz-Telli (2019) investigated self-differentiation, forgiveness in the relationship, relationship satisfaction between jealousy and conflict resolution reaction, and whether there is a mediation role of relationship adjustment and emotional dependency in 120 married couples. When the mediator role of relationship satisfaction, relationship adjustment, and emotional attachment to the spouse were examined, it was found that the indirect effect of relationship satisfaction was significant at the time of self-differentiation, forgiveness, and pretending to be absent.

In their study, Mert and Topal (2018) addressed whether there is a significant relationship between self-differentiation and spiritual orientation levels of 256 university students (183 women and 73 men). They found that that women experienced more emotional reactivity and fusion with others than men. In terms of economic income, it was found that there was a significant difference

in the dimension of emotional cutoff, and emotional cutoff increased as economic income increased. In addition, there was a positive relationship between spiritual orientation and self-differentiation.

Mert and Gülmez (2018) examined the relationship between self-differentiation and altruism levels among university students in a study conducted with 252 university students. In the study, it was found that there was a positive significant relationship between the level of self-differentiation and altruism levels of the students. According to the study findings, women had significantly higher scores in terms of emotional reactivity of self differentiation than men. In the study, the students with higher socio-economic level of self-differentiation sub-dimension of taking I-position received higher scores than the other students.

İzçınar (2018) investigated the relationship between self-differentiation and ruminative thinking and difficulty in emotion regulation in a sample of 300 adults (182 women and 118 men). Emotional reactivity, emotional cut-off and fusion with others negatively predicted ruminative thinking. A negative correlation was found between the difficulty in emotion regulation and emotional reactivity, taking I position, emotional cut-off and fusion with others. In addition, it was observed that emotional reactivity subscale was higher in males than females, lower in primary school graduates than in high school / university graduates, and lower in individuals who have children in comparison to individuals who have no children.

Göçmen (2018) examined the relationship between self-differentiation, sexual satisfaction, and sexual self-schemas in a sample consists of 160 individuals aged 26 years old or over. The results indicated a positive and high correlation between the sexual dissatisfaction and emotional cutoff. A strong negative correlation was observed between the sub-dimension of taking I position and sexual satisfaction. Emotional cut-off and addiction to others were found to have strong positive relationships with the direct sub-dimension of the sexual self-scheme. It was found that there was a strong negative relationship between emotional reactivity and loving sub-dimension of the sexual self-scheme.

When the studies conducted in Turkey are examined, it can be seen that studies have mostly addressed the relationship between the determinants of marital relationship quality (e.g., relational adjustment, relationship satisfaction) and differentiation of self, and marital variables have significantly predicted by the differentiation of the self. In this regard, differentiation of self can be evaluated as necessary and essential for a high quality marital relationship.

#### **2.4 Summary of the Literature Review**

Basic self and pseudo-self appear to have a negative correlation, which indicates that as the level of basic self increases, pseudo-self diminishes. Highly differentiated people make decisions based on objectivity and intellect as opposed to emotion. According to Bowen (1978), highly differentiated people are defined as more self-determining, meaning that there is less emotional fusion in close relationships, less energy is needed to maintain self

in the fusions, more energy is allocated for goal-directed activity, and more gratification is attained from directed activity.

The people who possess high levels of differentiation can maintain self-control in intimate relationships without feeling deserted. Also, they can set up emotional ties without feeling flooded or smothered (Bowen, 1978). Besides, highly differentiated people are more supportive of their partner's beliefs, interests, or feelings despite their different viewpoints. They do so without feeling threatened and without the necessity to cut-off emotional ties or stay away from partner within the relationship.

Less differentiated people are more prone to make decisions based on subjective facts such as feelings, as opposed to objective facts. They will take action according to their instincts and what makes them feel right, albeit their cognition proposes vice versa. Also, they are willing to be dependent to their partners on their choices and use the partner's hypothesis, thinking, and judgments. Bowen (1978) defines such individuals as being mainly aimed to have love, happiness, comfort, and security.

The concept of self-differentiation, which is regarded as both an individual and a relational construct, has received researchers' attention for many years. Focusing on the differentiation of self these researches have showed that differentiation of self related is negatively to depression (Hooper & DePuy, 2010; Hooper & Doehler, 2011; Norasakkunkit & Kalick, 2002; Polat, 2014), high psychopathology and stress (Kim-Appel, Appel, Newman & Parr, 2007; Tuason & Friedlander, 2000), anxiety and stress level (Polat, 2014), attachment

anxiety (Skowron & Dendy, 2004), fear of insecure attachment (Thorberg & Lyvers, 2006), anxiety-related disorders (Xue et al., 2018), social anxiety (Peleg-Popko, 2002), state and trait anxiety (Işık & Bulduk, 2013; Peleg-Popko, 2002; Sarıkaya, Boyacı, İlhan & Aldemir, 2018; Skowron & Friedlander, 1998; Tuason & Friedlander, 2000), chronic anxiety and physical and psychological distress (Bohlander, 1999; Elieson & Rubin, 2001; Griffin & Apostol, 1993; Harvey & Bray, 1991; Harvey, Curry, & Bray, 1991; Skowron, Homes, & Sabatelli, 2003), extreme school stress (Skowron, Wester, & Azen, 2004), weak adult relationship quality (Skowron, 2000; Tuason & Friedlander, 2000), and excess health problems (Murray, Daniels, & Murray, 2006). In addition, the differentiation of self is positively correlated with relationship satisfaction (Lal, 2006; Lal & Bartle-Haring, 2011; Skowron & Friedlander, 1998), marital satisfaction (Bartle, 1993; Lim & Jennings, 1996; Skowron, 2000), marital adjustment (Peleg, 2008; Polat, 2014), psychological health (Sohrabi, Asadi, Habibollahzade, & Ali, 2013), psychological adaptation, and social problem-solving skills (Skowron, 2004).

While it seems that there is a robust correlation between stress, life satisfaction and dyadic satisfaction, questions regarding mediators, moderators and causal pathways of these relationships remain unanswered. Given that not all individuals, who experience stress, develop marital or life dissatisfaction, not all unstressed individuals experience relationship satisfaction or full life satisfaction. Or, not all individuals, who experience dissatisfaction with life and relationship, develop stress. There must be mediating or moderating variables that can better help us to understand this relationship. For example, Whisman (2001) examined causal pathways of depression and marital

satisfaction and concluded that "It is most likely that the associations between depression, marital dissatisfaction, and third variables are bidirectional (p. 16)." Davila et al. (2003) also found the bidirectional nature of this relationship. Whisman (2001) emphasized the importance of uncovering the causality of associations and instead focused on mediators, especially in case of marital satisfaction and depression. The same conclusion applies for marital satisfaction, life satisfaction and stress.

Relationships between marital satisfaction and perceived stress are not simple, and there are studies that highlight the importance of examining mediator variables such as reactivity (Neff & Karney, 2009), marital attributions (Graham & Conoley, 2009), and stress management training (Neff & Broady, 2011). It is considered that differentiation of self can be one of them since there are explicit relations between these variables. According to Baron and Kenny (1986), the mediating effect of a variable on the relationship between two other variables should be tested when there is a significant association between these variables, and when the proposed mediating variable is linked to other variables. In the case of this thesis, as already shown in the literature, marital satisfaction and life satisfaction are associated with stress, and differentiation of self is separately linked to these two variables. As Bowen (1978; Kerr & Bowen, 1988) and Skowron, Wester, and Azen (2004) assume, the negative linkage between marital satisfaction and perceived stress operate through one's level of differentiation. Therefore, it seems appropriate to treat differentiation of self as a mediator variable.

Bowen's theory forms the concept of self-differentiation as a mediator between perceived stress and dysfunction. That is, people with high levels of self-differentiation are well-equipped to cope with highly stressful situations and so experience less dysfunction. In this sense, it is asserted that self-differentiation and coping styles seem to be utilizing a similar construct with a similarly named label, but self-differentiation is a more complex concept that involves a coping style (Murdock & Gore, 2004). For instance, it becomes visible that highly differentiated people are more likely to use productive coping techniques (Murdock & Gore, 2004).

In summary, when several studies in the literature are examined, it can be concluded that the differentiation of the self predicts both the marital adjustment and psychological conditions such as depression, anxiety and stress. Individuals with high levels of differentiation show higher marital satisfaction, higher well-being, and less physical and psychological problems. Individuals with lower levels of differentiation show lower marital adaptation, high conflict, high chronic anxiety, and more physical and psychological problems. In this respect, the differentiation of self can be seen as an important predictor of the quality of individuals' relational and individual lives. In the literature, it can be observed that while marital adjustment and satisfaction of well differentiated individuals are high, individuals who cannot differentiate themselves have problems in their relationships (Bowen, 1978; Bowen & Kerr, 1988), and they may face some undesirable situations leading up to divorce (Skowron & Friedlander, 1998). Therefore, in this study, the concept of self-differentiation will be addressed through a group of married individuals, and in this context, the relationship

between dyadic satisfaction, life satisfaction and stress will be examined. Moreover, according to Bowen (1978; Kerr & Bowen, 1988), his theory is universal and generalizable to all cultures. Thus, this research will show whether Bowen's theory is applicable in a culture where autonomous-relational self-structure is relevant (Kağıtçıbaşı, 2007; Özdemir & İlhan, 2013).

## CHAPTER 3

### METHOD

This chapter introduces the methodological procedures to achieve the aims of the study. First, the correlational design of the study is briefly described. Second, the data collection procedure, sampling and participant characteristics of both pilot and main studies, are presented. Third, information on the measurement tools and pilot study, conducted to test the reliability and validity of measurement tools, are explained in detail. Fourth, descriptions of variables and data analysis of the main study are briefly explained. Finally, the limitations of the study are discussed.

#### 3.1 Research Design

The present study aims to test a model which consists of perceived stress, intradyadic stress and extradyadic stress, differentiation of self variables (I-position, emotional cut-off, fusion with others, emotional reactivity), dyadic satisfaction, and life satisfaction with a sample of Turkish married individuals. Since the purpose of the correlational study is to “determine the relationships between two or more variables and explore the implications for the causes and effects” (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2012, pp. 12) and the purpose of the current study is to investigate the relationships among stress, differentiation

of self and satisfaction variables, the correlational method is appropriate for the study.

Correlational research, a type of associational research, aims to study relationships among variables and mainly defines the degree of relationship between two or more quantitative variables. The correlational research defines the degree of relationship between variables by using a correlation coefficient (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2012) and requires sophisticated correlational techniques for analysis (e.g., structural equation modeling, hierarchical linear modeling) to investigate the associations among variables and predict the outcome variable. This study uses Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) techniques to test the correlational relationship among variables.

Correlational research examines the associations with no attempt to manipulate variables, and the purpose of correlational research can be twofold: explanatory and prediction. The current study is an attempt to explore the relationships among stress, satisfaction, and differentiation variables. The primary analyses of the study include (a) descriptive analysis of the study variables, (b) calculating the bivariate correlations among variables in the model, (c) testing the measurement model, and (d) testing the hypothesized structural model. This type of research design is commonly used in counseling research for identifying the underlying mechanisms which may be necessary for counseling interventions (Heppner et al., 2008).

### **3.2 Sampling Procedure and Participants**

Instead of random sampling, the convenient sampling method was used for data collection. Although convenient sampling limits the generalizability of the results, most counseling researchers use non-random samples due to the practical limitations (Heppner et al., 2008). Data for the present study were collected in a two-phased process, and two sets of data were obtained. Firstly, the data were collected in consideration of the pilot study for testing psychometric properties of the Multidimensional Stress Questionnaire for Couples and other instruments, and in the latter phase, data were collected for the main study.

In the first data set, there were six instruments including Demographic Information Form (see Appendix B), Multidimensional Stress Questionnaire for Couples (see Appendix C), Dyadic Adjustment Scale (see Appendix D), Perceived Stress Scale (see Appendix E), Differentiation of Self Inventory-Short Form (see Appendix F), and Satisfaction with Life Scale (see Appendix G). To be more specific, the first data set is used to test the validity and reliability of the questionnaires and adaptation of Multidimensional Stress Questionnaire for Couples. The second data set consisted of same six instruments and this data set were collected to test the measurement and structural models.

Married individuals who are living together as a nuclear family (i.e. only wife, husband, and at least one child, no extended family member) were determined

as the sample of this study. Inclusion criteria for participants were as follows: (a) partners who live together (b) married (c) having at least one child.

### **3.2.1 Sampling Procedure and Sample Characteristics of the Pilot Study**

In the first step, the researcher applied to Middle East Technical University (METU) Human Subjects Ethics Committee for the permission to conduct the study. After the approval was obtained, the paper-pencil forms were prepared in envelopes. The faculty, staff members and graduate students of METU were asked to participate in the study and other married individuals were recruited for participation through the social network of the researcher. An acquaintance of the researcher in different cities was contacted and the contact in each city received the scales in order to find volunteers to participate in the study using his/her personal acquaintances. Furthermore, snowball technique was followed and participants were encouraged to link the researcher to other married individuals. Participants who responded to the study were given an informed consent document including information regarding the purpose and confidentiality of the study (see Appendix J), a demographic information sheet, and copies of the instrument.

Before starting to fill out the questionnaires, the participants were asked to answer to some demographics (such as age, educational level, work status, duration of marriages, marriage type, number and age of children, monthly income, birth order) regarding themselves and their partners (husband or wife). At the beginning of each scale, a short instruction section was also written. It was guaranteed that the information collected from the participants

would be used for scientific purposes only. Participants were given all instruments in envelopes and were asked to answer alone and return them in sealed envelopes. The completion of the instrument took approximately 35-40 minutes for each participant.

The online version of the instrument was also created by using Googleforms, and couple oriented Internet mailing lists were searched and posted through e-mails and social media accounts, e.g., Facebook. However, only 35 participants responded to the instrument, and due to the low response rate, those individuals were not included in the study.

The target population of this study is Turkish adults who are married and have at least one child. Since the purpose was to understand stress, differentiation of self and marital and life satisfaction levels of married individuals in a Turkish sample, no other selection criteria were added. The sample for the pilot study was recruited through non-random, convenient sampling. After gathering the approval from Middle East Technical University Human Subjects Ethics Committee (Appendix A), the data were collected from volunteered individuals by the researcher in approximately one month.

The participants of the pilot study consisted of 384 individuals (57 %, 219 females and 43 %, 165 males) aged between 20 and 65 ( $M = 39.19$ ,  $SD = 8.58$ ) living in various cities in Turkey, mainly İstanbul, Ankara, and Kocaeli. Of the participants, 6% of them ( $n = 24$ ) have a master's or doctoral degree, 34.6 % of them ( $n = 133$ ) have a bachelor's degree, 40.9 % of them ( $n = 157$ ) have a high school degree, 8.9% of them ( $n = 34$ ) are middle school graduates, and 9.6 % of

them ( $n = 37$ ) are primary school graduates. Additionally, most of the participants reported that their spouses' were either university graduates ( $n = 175$ , 41.6 %) or high school graduates ( $n = 131$ , 31.1 %).

Participants' duration of marriage in years is  $M = 14.40$ ,  $SD = 8.85$ . Of the participants, 68 of them (17.7%) have prearranged marriages, 124 of them (32.3 %) have prearranged marriages but with their own decision, and 186 of them (48.4 %) have companionate marriages.

Of the participants, 115 of them (30 %) have one child, 156 of them (40.6 %) have two children, 70 of them (18.2 %) have three children, 25 of them (6.5 %) have four children, and 2 participants (.5 %) have five children.

### **3.2.2 Participants and Sampling Procedure for the Main Study**

Since there is no new instrument added to primary data analyses, the same ethical permission from METU Human Subjects Ethics Committee (Appendix A) was used to collect primary data. The data were collected from volunteered, married individuals with at least one child by the researcher in approximately three weeks only through paper-pencil forms of the questionnaire.

Questionnaires were distributed to 920 married individuals living in different cities of Turkey. In a similar way to the pilot study, individuals who work or are students in METU and did not participate in the pilot study were invited to the main study. Moreover, the researcher implemented the forms who work in different institutions (e.g. army, state schools, hospital, shopping center)

mainly in İstanbul and Ankara, and the rest of them were from other cities. The researcher's personal acquaintances helped to reach different work settings. Beside working individuals, people who do not work also reached. After careful examination of the data set, 38 cases were excluded due to improper way of responding to questionnaires (i.e. filling only the first and the last pages, filling questionnaires randomly and skipping some of them). Forty-one participants did not meet the inclusion criteria of having at least one child, and therefore, they were omitted too. Out of 841 participants, 16 of them were also dropped from the data set while running primary analysis, due to multivariate outliers.

The final data set of the study consisted of a total of 825 married individuals (405 males and 420 females) with an age range of 19 to 70 ( $M = 38.14$ ,  $SD = 8.91$ ) as shown in Table 3.1. Of the participants, 4.8% of them (40 individuals) did not report their ages. In terms of the level of education, the majority of the participants are either high school graduates (42.9 %) or have bachelor's degrees (33.9 %). There are also 71 primary school graduates (8.6%) and 63 middle school graduates (7.6 %). Finally, 56 (6.8 %) participants have a master's degree. Regarding the education level of the participants' spouses, 34.4 % of the participants' spouses ( $n = 284$ ) are high school graduates, 33.6% of the participants' spouses have a bachelor degree and 16 % of participants' spouses are elementary school graduates.

Table 3.1

Demographic Characteristics of the Participants of the Main Study (N = 825)

Variables	<i>f</i>	%
<b>Gender</b>		
Female	420	50.9
Male	405	49.1
<b>Educational Level</b>		
Elementary School	71	8.6
Middle School	63	7.6
High School	346	41.9
University	288	34.9
Master and/or Ph.D	56	6.8
<b>Spouse's Educational Level</b>		
Elementary School	132	16
Middle School	81	9.8
High School	284	34.4
University	277	33.6
Master and/or Ph.D	50	6
<b>Work status</b>		
Does not work	213	25.8
Worker	288	34.9
Civil servant	156	18.9
Self-employed	103	12.5
Retired	37	4.5
other	28	3.4
<b>Spouse's Work Status</b>		
Does not work	308	37.3
Worker	150	18.2
Civil servant	130	15.7
Self-employed	152	18.4
Retired	48	5.8
other	37	4.5
<b>Number of marriages</b>		
First marriage	794	96.2
Second marriage	21	2.5
Third marriage	3	0.4

Table 3.1 (cont'd)

Variables	<i>f</i>	%
<b>Spouse's number of marriages</b>		
First marriage	801	97.1
Second marriage	15	1.8
Third marriage	1	0.1
<b>Type of marriage</b>		
Companiate marriage	393	47.6
Prearranged marriage but with our own decision	275	33.3
Prearranged marriage	138	16.7
<b>Number of children</b>		
1	226	27.4
2	354	42.9
3	153	18.5
4	52	6.3
More than 4	10	1.1

In terms of number of marriages, 96.2 % ( $n = 794$ ) of the participants are in their first marriage, while 21 participants are in their second marriages and 3 participants are in their third marriages. Seven participants left this item as unanswered. In terms of spouse's number of marriages, 97.1 % ( $n = 801$ ) of them are in their first marriages. Participants' duration of marriage in years was  $M = 14.40$ ,  $SD = 8.85$ .

In terms of the type of marriage, 393 of marriages in the sample is companiate marriage (47.6 %), 275 of marriages are pre-arranged marriage but with their own decision (33.3 %), and 138 marriages are pre-arranged marriages (16.7 %). Nineteen participants (2.3 %) did not report their type of marriage. Of the

participants, 27.4 % ( $n = 226$ ) of them have only one child, 42.9 % of them ( $n = 354$ ) have two children, 18.5 % of the participants ( $n = 153$ ) have three children, 52 participants (6.3 %) have four children and 10 participants have more than 4 children. There were 30 participants who did not report their number of children.

### **3.3 Data Collection Instruments**

In order to collect data, Dyadic Adjustment Scale, Perceived Stress Scale, Differentiation of Self Inventory-Short Form, Satisfaction with Life Scale, Multidimensional Stress Questionnaire for Couples were utilized in addition to a demographic information form. Prior to the main study, a pilot study was conducted to test the factor structure of Multidimensional Stress Questionnaire for Couples and to assess the validity and reliability of the questionnaires that were used in the present study.

#### **3.3.1 Pilot Study**

The primary aim of the pilot study was to implement the Turkish adaptation process of the Multidimensional Stress Questionnaire for Couples, as well as to the psychometric properties of the Turkish version of already adapted instruments. Information regarding assumption checks and data analyses conducted for the instruments were presented in the following.

##### **3.3.1.1 Preliminary Analysis of the Pilot Data**

Before conducting validity and reliability analyses of the instrument adapted into Turkish and confirmatory factor analyses (CFA) of the rest of the

instruments, the original pilot data was screened for the accuracy of data entry. Incorrect or missing entries were detected, and incorrect ones were corrected based on the questionnaires' Likert type. After screening, there were a few incorrect entries, but there were some missing values.

Afterward, the pilot dataset was separated and screened for each instrument individually in order to conduct confirmatory factor analyses. In screening, cases in which the participants did not respond to the items of the given scale appropriately, unengaged or responded to the entire items with the same value etc. were primarily deleted from the dataset. Then the assumptions, sample size, normality, outliers, linearity, and multicollinearity (Kline, 2011) were checked. The same procedure was followed in the same order for each instrument in order to test the assumptions of missing values and sample size, univariate and multivariate normality and outliers, linearity, and multicollinearity (Kline, 2011; Ullman, 2013). The criteria for deciding the validation of each assumption was described and discussed for the first instrument adapted into Turkish and followed for each model estimation of the other instruments.

As it was mentioned, there were some cases with missing values, and the Little's MCAR test (Little & Rubin, 2002) was conducted to check whether missing values were at random or not, for each instrument. The Little's MCAR tests gave non-significant Chi-square values and indicated that missing values are distributed randomly (MAR) or entirely at random (MCAR). Then it was concluded that missingness in a given variable does not depend on any other variable. However, in MSQ-C, missing values were not at random, and the

pattern and the reason behind missingness were examined as it is suggested by Allison and his colleagues (2002). In the case of MSQ-C, in the sections of stress resulting from major life events, if individuals have not experienced those events, they did not rate the level of stress and left those items blank. In this case, series of comparisons were conducted in terms of study variables of the pilot study by using t-tests of mean differences on age, gender, and other key variables but there were no statistically significant differences between data set with and without missing values.

In case of the violation of missing at random assumption, Allison (2002) suggests listwise deletion, as a robust technique while Tabachnick and Fidell (2013) indicate that any technique will end up with similar results if the missing data rate is less than 5% for each case. In the pilot study, the rate of missing values was lower than 5% which allowed the researcher to select any technique, e.g., listwise deletion, pairwise deletion, dummy variable adjustment, or imputation (Allison et al., 2002; Little & Rubin, 2002) in order to handle the missing data. Therefore, considering the adequacy of sample size, Allison et al.'s (2002) suggestion, and the non-significant differences between cases with missing values and cases without missing values, the listwise deletion was conducted as the most appropriate technique for handling with missing data in the pilot study. After listwise deletion, sample size decreased to 395 which was still adequate in terms of Kline's (2011) suggestion of the adequate sample size of 200 and Tabachnick and Fidell's (2013) suggestion of 300 for adequate sample size to conduct CFA.

Second, the univariate normality assumption was checked through skewness and kurtosis, Kolmogorov-Smirnov & Shapiro-Wilk values, histograms, Q-Q plots, and boxplots. Kline (2011) indicates normality of the data, if skewness values are lower than 3 and kurtosis values are lower than 10. According to Tabachnick and Fidell (2013), significant skewness and kurtosis values are ignorable since they “do not deviate enough from normality” (pp. 80) if the sample size is large enough. Also, for CFA analysis Finney and Distefano (2013) suggest that when the skewness value is smaller than 2 and the kurtosis value is smaller than 7, the distribution can be named as moderately non-normal and maximum likelihood estimation can still be allowed to use through the analysis.

Regarding skewness and kurtosis values in data set, all skewness values range from .12 and 1.56, and kurtosis values range from .52 to 5.16, and these values indicate univariate normality of study variables. Moreover, the values of skewness and kurtosis are not significant for all items ( $p > .01$ ). Considering the Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests, all items give significant results, although non-significant results are expected to satisfy the normality assumption. Field (2009) states that these are sensitive tests to catch any minor deviation from normality, especially in large sample size. After visual inspection of histograms and Q-Q plots, it was concluded that very few variables presented non-normal patterns. The rest of them were either normal or close to normal distributions.

Following univariate normality, the multivariate normality of the data was checked through Mardia’s (1975) coefficient test (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013),

and Mardia's (1975) test was significant,  $p < .001$ , indicating that multivariate normality was not ensured for all variables. In the case of multivariate non-normal continuous data, instead of default Maximum Likelihood estimation, other estimation methods such as robust Maximum Likelihood (ML) (Satorra & Bentler, 1994) or Weighted Least Squares (WLS) (Browne & Cudeck, 1993) can be used. However, WLS requires a considerable sample size (Brown, 2015), and it could lead to poor results with the current sample size, which is less than 2.500 (Ullman & Bentler, 2013). As an alternative remedial strategy for non-normality in the current data in order to reduce the influence of non-normal data, bootstrapping was used in AMOS program (Browne, 1984; Byrne, 2016). Bootstrapping is a computer-based resampling procedure in which several samples are drawn from the original sample with the replacement procedure. Then, the model is estimated for each of the drawn samples, and the average of the outcomes is presented (Brown, 2014; Kline, 2016). Considering the present study, the benefit of bootstrapping is that it does not necessitate multivariate normality or large sample size (Yung & Bentler, 1996).

Next, both the univariate and multivariate outliers were checked. In order to detect the univariate outliers, z-scores were calculated for all variables. There were no cases out of the range of 3.29 and according to Tabachnick and Fidell (2013), they are not named as outliers. Then, to detect the multivariate outliers, Mahalanobis distances were calculated. For Mahalanobis distances, a critical Chi-square value was calculated with df (number of predictors) at .001 significance level (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013) and the cases exceeding this critical value were labeled as multivariate outliers. In the present data set, 11

cases (Mahalanobis Distances values would be higher than 21) were labeled as multivariate outliers because of their quite high Mahalanobis distance values than the critical value. Following the detection of outliers, two data sets were created as one with the outliers and one without the outliers. Analyses were conducted twice, separately, in these two data sets to check for any variation among the findings. Since the results of these separate analyses were significantly different, the researcher decided to remove the outlier cases in the data set, which resulted in a final sample size of 384 for the pilot study.

For the linearity assumption, scatterplots and partial regression plots were investigated. For linearity of residuals, partial regression residual plots of all study variables were used. The plots of study variables displayed relatively elliptic shapes, indicating no violation of the linearity assumption (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013).

Before starting to CFAs, as the final step of the assumption check, multicollinearity of the variables was examined through bivariate correlation coefficients. All of the correlations were less than  $\alpha = .90$ , thus there were no multicollinearity problems among the variables (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). To better investigate the multicollinearity, Kline (2011) also suggests to check the squared multiple correlations ( $R^2$ ), tolerances ( $1 - R^2$ ), and variance inflation factors (VIF) [ $1 / (1 - R^2)$ ]. According to Kline's suggestion, "all of the multiple correlations should be less than .90, tolerances should be higher than .10, and the variance inflation factors should be less than 10." (2011, pp. 53). In the data set, all the multiple correlations, tolerances, and variance inflation factors satisfied the criteria, and the multicollinearity assumption was not violated.

### 3.3.1.2 Confirmatory Factor Analysis Procedure

After checking assumptions, a series of CFAs were conducted in order to test the validity of the factorial structure of each instrument by AMOS Version 18 (Analysis of Moment Structures) (Arbuckle, 2009). In consideration of the model fit, the researcher utilized some of the approximate fit indices, which were classified into three categories: absolute, incremental (comparative), and parsimony-adjusted (Kline, 2011). In this study, fit indices representing each of three groups (absolute, incremental, and parsimony-adjusted) were selected and reported in order to evaluate the validity of the factorial structure for each instrument. The selected fit indices to interpret the results of CFA in the current study are Chi-square value,  $\chi^2/df$ , and Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) from absolute fit indexes group; The Bentler Comparative fit index (CFI) and Tucker-Lewis index (TLI, also known as Non-Normed-Fit Index, NNFI) from incremental (comparative) fit indices group; and Root Mean Square of Error Approximation (RMSEA) from parsimony-adjusted fit indices (Hooper, Coughlan, & Mullen, 2008; Hu & Bentler, 1999; Kline, 2011) with the confidence intervals (CI) (MacCallum, Browne, & Sugawara, 1996).

Before the analysis, the cut points of the fit indices are summarized to have a better understanding of the results. Starting with chi square value, Chi-square is defined to be small and non-significant in the perfect fit at the value of zero with a non-significant value (Kline, 2011; Schumacker & Lomax, 2010). But since chi-square calculation is sensitive to sample size, correlation among variables, and multivariate non-normality, as another alternative, normed

Chi-square (ratio of  $\chi^2$  by its expected value that is degree of freedom:  $\chi^2/df$ ) was suggested by Wheaton, Muthen, Alwin, and Summers (1977) to be less than 5 whereas Kline (2011) offers chi-square/ df-ratio to be less than 3 to evaluate the model fit. Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) is “a measure of the mean absolute correlation residual” and refers to “the overall difference between observed and predicted correlations” (Kline, 2011, p. 209). SRMR values range from 0 to 1 where the smaller ones present better fit. Hu and Bentler (1999) suggest the values less than .08 for an acceptable fit whereas Kline (2011) suggests values less than .10 as acceptable.

CFI and TLI values were reported to show incremental indices and the cut-off value for both of fit indices is .95 for Hu and Bentler (1999) and .90 is also acceptable according to Schumacker and Lomax (2010). Lastly, RMSEA values represent comparisons of the sample statistics to the population and show the fit of the current data to the population. Hu and Bentler (1999) suggest that a good fit for RMSEA values should be less than .06. In addition to this, Browne and Cudeck (1993) accept RMSEA less than .08 as a reasonable fit. RMSEA values between .05 and .08 indicate close fit (Schumacker & Lomax, 2010). Besides, MacCallum, Browne, and Sugawara (1996) suggest RMSEA values between .08 and .10 as a mediocre fit and values higher than .10 as a poor fit. MacCallum et al. (1996) also underline the significance of informing RMSEA values with confidence intervals (CI). Kline (2011) suggests  $CI \leq .05$  as the cut-off point of lower bound and  $CI \leq .10$  as the cut-off point of upper bound. Beyond CI, AMOS also produce the closeness of fit (PCLOSE) value which is suggested to be non-significant ( $pClose > .05$ ; Jöreskog & Sörbom, 1996).

### 3.3.1.3 Multidimensional Stress Questionnaire for Couples (MSQ-C)

The MSQ-C is the English version of the original German version of the Multidimensionaler Stressfragebogen für Paare (MSF-P) scale and developed to measure multidimensional aspects of stress (Bodenmann, 2007; Bodenmann, Schär, & Gmelch, 2008). Partners' internal and external stress are measured with the Multidimensional Stress Questionnaire for Couples (MSQ-C; Bodenmann, Schär, & Gmelch, 2008; Appendix C). The MSQ-C is an adaptation of the original Hassles Scale (Kanner, Coyne, Schaefer, & Lazarus, 1981) which includes minor and major stressors, both internal and external to the relationship (Bodenmann et al., 2006). They shortened and adapted the original version of the Hassles Scale (Kanner, Coyne, Schaefer, & Lazarus, 1981), consisting of the original 117 items. Bodenmann and his colleagues rephrased terms that seemed redundant (e.g., they relabeled hassles associated with "planning meals" and "caring for pet" as hassles with "task sharing in household"; they relabeled hassles over "smoking too much" and "use of alcohol" as hassles with "unhealthy behaviors"). The items reflected a range of daily hassles (i.e., irritating, frustrating, or distressing demands in everyday transactions) that participants rated with reference to the previous week and past 12 months. Factor analysis of these responses yielded one factor representing stress external to the dyad (internal consistency as measured by Cronbach's  $\alpha = .86$ ) and a second representing stress internal to the dyad (internal consistency as measured by Cronbach's  $\alpha = .75$ ) (Bodenmann, Ledermann, & Bradburry, 2007).

Multidimensional Stress Questionnaire for Couples has 29 items and two scoring columns. The participants are asked to rate each item twice (once for reporting acute stress experience on “burden/stress during the past seven days” column and once for reporting chronic stress experience on “burden/stress during the past twelve months” column) on a four point Likert scale (1 = *not at all*, 2 = *slightly*, 3 = *average*, 4 = *highly stressful*). Mainly there are four domains in the questionnaire: intradyadic stress (internal stress like different values and attitudes, troublesome habits, etc.), extradyadic stress (external stress like job, children, finances, daily hassles, etc.), macro stress and micro stress. Each part has both acute and chronic scores. In macro stress, before evaluating the burden/stress, there are two columns (yes or no) to indicate whether you have experienced those events or not.

The eight item extradyadic stress subscale is used to assess acute or chronic extradyadic stress, which stems from daily hassles, independent from spouse (Bodenmann et al., 2006; Bodenmann, Ledermann, & Bradbury, 2007). The 10-item intradyadic stress subscale from the MSQ-C is used to assess chronic or acute stress internal to the couple’s relationship. In other words, it determines how much stress exists within the dyad. Respondents are asked how stressful situations originating within the couple’s relationship (e.g., arguments, differences in attitudes, disturbing habits of the partner, feeling neglected by the partner) have been over the past 12 months and past seven days. One sample item reads as “Strong restrictions through relationship” (Appendix C). A higher score shows more stress within the dyad. The validity and reliability of the MSQ-C have been established in previous studies in German (Bodenmann et al., 2006).

The MSQ can measure the locus of control, the intensity of stress and the duration of stress simultaneously. Participants first report about experiences of intradyadic stress (e.g., differences of opinion with your partner, unsatisfactory distribution of duties and responsibilities) and then respond to questions about experiences of extradyadic stress (e.g., work stress, financial problems, social contacts with colleagues and friends, parenting) over the past seven days and past 12 months. An aggregated score (either eight items for external stress or 10 items for internal stress) represents an individual's external or internal stress level respectively. Studies using the MSQ have shown that internal stressors are positively correlated with neuroticism and negatively correlated with marital satisfaction, well-being and physical well-being in intimate relationships (Falconier, Nussbeck, Bodenmann, Schneider, & Bradbury, 2015; Merz, Meuwly, Randall, & Bodenmann, 2014).

The scale has different scoring options. First, there are intradyadic acute and chronic microstress items (items 1-10), assessing stress for both the last seven days and the last 12 months. Secondly, items measuring the external or extradyadic stress (items 15-22) assessing stress for both the last seven days and the last 12 months. Thirdly, you can obtain macrostress levels related to intradyadic domain (items 11-14) and extradyadic domain (items 23-29). In case of macro events, a sum value is acquired from whether event occurred or not (yes = 1 / no = 0). This value gives in the sense of summative stress approach (the more macro events experienced, the more stress levels out), how many macro events a person has experienced in the last year. The sum value of macro events inside and outside the relationship cannot be compared because the number of items are not identical. Since the participants rate their

stress/burden resulting from macroevents for past seven days and the last twelve months, this value represents how heavily a person is burdened by macroevents on average. This value can be compared with the burden loaded through micro events.

Based on a sample of  $N = 110$  pairs, internal consistency value of intradyadic microstress for acute is  $a = .87$  (women),  $a = .74$  (men); for chronic  $a = .84$  (women),  $a = .82$  (men). Internal consistency value of extradyadic macrostress for acute is  $a = .53$  (women),  $a = .66$  (men); for chronic  $a = .63$  (women),  $a = .58$  (men). The internal consistencies are high only for intra-microstress, as the items are homogeneous there. Couples' external stress is a much more heterogeneous construct. For macrostress, the internal consistency of macro events is not expected to be high since the items in the list can be highly independent of each other (Bodenmann, 2007).

Bodenmann has adapted the scale based on the taxonomy of stressors (acute/chronic; internal/external; micro/macro) as described in Randal and Bodenmann (2009). The scale has been used in this form during the last ten years in their laboratory with consistent results successfully and also applied in different countries such as USA, Germany, Japan, Indonesia, China; (Xu, Hilpert, Nussbeck, & Bodenmann, 2018). As it is a theoretically grounded scale and not factor analytically established, for macrostressors, as not all subjects experience these kind of stressors, psychometric properties do not have any meaning. As the macrostress and external stress measures cover different life domains, those subscales cannot be considered as a fully psychometric scale.

In order to assess external (extradyadic) and internal (intradyadic) stress, the English version of the Multidimensional Stress Questionnaire for couples was translated into Turkish. In the following paragraphs, translation process will be explained in details.

### **3.3.1.3.1 Translation and Adaptation Procedure of the Multidimensional Stress Questionnaire For Couples**

Before conducting translation and adaptation process of the MSQ-C, the permission was obtained from Prof. Dr. Guy Bodenmann who is one of the developers of the instrument. The researcher also obtained approval from the Middle East Technical University Human Subjects Ethics Committee prior to data collection (Appendix A). In the present study, MSQ-C developed to measure internal (related to partner) and external (related to daily life in general) stress was adapted to Turkish but in the main study only chronic stress scores (past 12 months) were used.

The Turkish adaptation of the MSQ-C was made by considering the International Test Commission (ITC) test translation and adaptation guidelines (Hambleton, 2001). The five steps were tracked in the adaptation procedure and they were summarized below.

As the first step, two bilinguals (Turkish and German) translated the published German version of the MSQ-C to Turkish. Additionally, five bilinguals (English and Turkish) translated the English version of the instrument to Turkish. Following the translation process, the best fitted

translations of items were selected by the researcher and her supervisor. Secondly, five English Language experts from school of foreign languages, faculty of education and department of psychology were identified and they worked on adequacy of expressions. They have checked discrepancies between the original form and the translated one. Then, back translation of the MSQ-C was conducted by two English Language Professor, one psychologist and one German Language Instructor to edit an accurate Turkish version. Since, the instrument was developed in German originally, the researcher has also worked on German version to compare the translations. The adequacy of the translated Turkish version was rated and through their last comments the translation was ensured. In order to get feedback, the researcher applied the questionnaire to five couples. During the cognitive debriefing conducted with them, four of them have mentioned about the similarity between item 3 (annoying habits of the partner) and item 6 (inadequacies of your partner's behavior) in their feedback. After asking for what they have understood from the items, their explanations were quite compatible with what the items mean. So the researcher decided not to change the expressions and examples in the parenthesis. Lastly, final version of MSQ-C was formed and sample items were given in Appendix C.

### **3.3.1.3.2 Validity and Reliability of The MSQ-C**

In the current study, assumptions were checked via SPSS 25 and Confirmatory Factor Analyses were conducted for eighteen MSQ-C items twice for acute and chronic forms separately via AMOS 18 software program. The assumptions of CFA were reported in the prior section.

Starting with the acute version, a confirmatory factor analysis with bootstrapping was conducted. In evaluation of goodness of fit of the model, fit indices of Chi-square value, normed Chi-square value, Goodness of fit index (GFI), Comparative fit index (CFI), Tucker-Lewis index (TLI), Root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), and Standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) were interpreted as criterion indices for model fit.

A total of 18 items were tested but Item 15 (job/education concerns) was eliminated from the chronic stress subscale because of its low loading. The reason of lower loading may lie in the sample characteristics. Since the mean age for the sample is 37, the concerns related to job and education may not be valid for them

Results showed poor fit for the two-factor structure,  $\chi^2(129) = 376.14$ ,  $p = .000$ ,  $\chi^2/df = 3.36$ ,  $GFI = .90$ ,  $SRMR = .08$ ,  $RMSEA = .06$  [90% CI = .06, .07],  $CFI = .89$ ,  $TLI = .87$ ). After checking modification indexes, error terms of Item 8 and Item 10, and Item 20 and Item 15 were freely estimated and the results showed better fit. Finally, although the results of CFA for MSQ-C acute showed that Chi-square statistic was statistically significant ( $\chi^2(132) = 296.57$ , Bollen-Stine corrected  $p = .001$ ) (indicating poor fit of the model), the normed Chi-square value ( $\chi^2/df$ ) of 2.23 was below the cut off value of 3 (Kline, 2016). Brown (2015) states that  $\chi^2$  value is easily inflated by large sample size, thus produce significant results even if the differences between measurement model and sample model is indeed negligible. Other model fit indices also indicated acceptable model fit between target model and the observed data ( $\chi^2(132) = 296.57$ , Bollen-Stine corrected  $p = .001$ ,  $\chi^2/df = 2.23$ ,  $GFI = .93$ ,  $SRMR = .05$ ,

*RMSEA* = .06 [90% CI = .06, .07], *CFI* = .94, *TLI* = .93). All standardized estimates were above .40 and all the regression weights were significant.

Standardized factor loadings ranged between .49 and .74., above the cut-off value of .30 (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2014).  $R^2$  values ranged from 24% to 62% with significant t-values for all items. After all, it could be concluded that the majority of model fit indices and parameter estimates supported the two-factor model solution of MSQ-C for the current data. In Table 3.2, unstandardized and standardized regression weights, standard error values, squared multiple correlations, and t-values are presented.

Secondly, two-factor structure of chronic extradyadic stress resulting from daily hassles were tested by using CFA. Results showed that Chi-square statistic was statistically significant ( $\chi^2(116) = 345.95$ ,  $p = .001$ ) and  $\chi^2/df$  ratio was 2.98 which was above the threshold value of 3, suggested by Kline (2011). Comparative indexes of fit indicated poor fit *CFI* = .90, *TLI* = .89, whereas *RMSEA* value showed .09, mediocre fit (MacCallum et al., 1996).

Table 3.2

## Unstandardized and Standardized Parameter Estimates for MSQ-C Acute

Construct	Item	Unstandardized factor loadings	Standardized factor loadings	SE	<i>t</i>	<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>
Intradynamic	Item_1	1.08	.69	.09		.62
	Item_2	1.05	.68	.09	11.16	.46
	Item_3	1.14	.77	.10	12.41	.59
	Item_4	1.17	.75	.09	12.13	.56
	Item_5	.92	.61	.09	10.09	.37
	Item_6	1.11	.73	.08	11.89	.53
	Item_7	.64	.49	.09	9.12	.24
	Item_8	1.02	.66	.09	11.21	.44
	Item_9	.97	.63	.10	10.28	.40
	Item_10	1.09	.74	.09	12.02	.55
Extradynamic	Item_15	1.00	.51	.09		.26
	Item_16	.78	.69	.09	8.68	.62
	Item_17	1.07	.72	.10	10.06	.52
	Item_18	.88	.55	.10	8.20	.30
	Item_19	.77	.56	.09	8.28	.31
	Item_20	.85	.64	.10	7.97	.41
	Item_21	.74	.49	.10	7.44	.24
	Item_22	.69	.51	.09	7.70	.26

Note. All *t* values were significant,  $p < .001$ .

All standardized regression weights were found to be above .40 and significant. Item 15 and Item 16 were below .40 but significant. Although, .30 as the cut-off value of item-factor loadings (Hair et al., 2014) is acceptable, since Item 15 also decreased the reliability of the factor, it was eliminated from the factor but Item 18 will be checked again in the main study. In this case, a new CFA was conducted excluding Item 15. Based on modification indices, Item 10 and Item 8 estimated freely. Then, the model fit indices improved ( $\chi^2(102) =$

301.29, Bollen-Stine corrected  $p = .001$ ,  $\chi^2/df = 3.02$ ,  $GFI = .92$ ,  $SRMR = .06$ ,  $RMSEA = .07$  [90% CI = .02, .04],  $CFI = .94$ ,  $TLI = .91$ ). According to Schumacker and Lomax (2010) RMSEA between .05 and .08 shows close fit and  $CFI > .90$  is an acceptable cut-off value. In Table 3.3, standardized and unstandardized factor loadings of each item are shown.

Table 3.3

Unstandardized and Standardized Parameter Estimates for MSQ-C Chronic

Construct	Item	Unstandardized factor loadings	Standardized factor loadings	SE	t	R <sup>2</sup>
Intradynamic	Item_1	.94	.71	.07	13.91	.50
	Item_2	1.05	.76	.07	14.96	.58
	Item_3	.99	.69	.07	13.55	.48
	Item_4	1.15	.81	.07	15.91	.66
	Item_5	.93	.68	.07	13.29	.46
	Item_6	1.04	.73	.07	14.07	.53
	Item_7	.70	.61	.06	11.76	.37
	Item_8	.86	.65	.06	15.12	.42
	Item_9	.94	.65	.08	11.69	.42
	Item_10	1.07	.75	.09	18.91	.56
Extradynamic	Item_16	.50	.44	.07	7.67	.19
	Item_17	.95	.66	.09	11.17	.44
	Item_18	.64	.38	.09	6.50	.14
	Item_19	1.06	.65	.09	10.80	.42
	Item_20	1.01	.65	.09	10.90	.42
	Item_21	1.02	.59	.10	10.13	.35
	Item_22	1.00	.67	.09	11.67	.45

Note. All t values were significant,  $p < .001$ .

In their studies, Falconier and Nussbeck et al. (2015) did not calculate Cronbach's alpha for external stressors and the researchers proposed that

external stressors might not be considered as fully psychometric scale since the measure covers various life domains. Construct validity in the present study and Japanese adaptation study (Kurosawa & Yokotani, 2018) is good but it is important to remind that external stressors might reflect differences according to life stages of the couple or other demographic factors.

In order to examine the internal consistency coefficient of the MSQ-C, Cronbach's alpha coefficient, indicating the correlations between items of the scale, was computed in the pilot study. Cronbach's alpha values were  $a = .89$  for acute intradyadic stress,  $a = .91$  for chronic intradyadic stress,  $a = .78$  for acute extradyadic stress, and  $a = .75$  for chronic extradyadic stress. As a rule of thumb, Cronbach's alpha coefficient values above .70 are accepted as satisfactory for reliability (Nunnally, 1978). After eliminating Item 15 from both acute and chronic extradyadic stress subscales Cronbach's alpha values increased. However, in order to check those items in the main study, no elimination was done and that Item was kept in the data set. The reliability of the subscales was acceptable in this sample.

#### **3.3.1.4 Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS)**

The Dyadic Adjustment Scale was developed by Spanier (1976), and it measures the adjustment and quality of marital or any couple relationship as perceived by couples and partners. DAS can be utilized in assessing various types of committed couple relationships, including unmarried cohabitation. Dyadic satisfaction, dyadic consensus, dyadic cohesion, and affectional expression are four subscales of the instrument. DAS is a 32-item scale and items are marked on a Likert type response format. The scale primarily utilizes

2-,5-,6- and 7-point Likert type response formats. The majority of the items use 6-point format, with options scored from 0 to 5. The items are rated on dimensions where extreme ends represent different responses as always agree to always disagree, all the time to never, never to more than once a day, yes and no, or extremely unhappy to perfectly happy, depending on the question structure. Scores can be calculated as a total score for total dyadic adjustment score as well as for four subscales separately: dyadic consensus (thirteen items), dyadic satisfaction (ten items), dyadic cohesion (five items) and affective expression (four items). Total DAS score ranges from 0 and 151 where the higher score demonstrates perceptions of higher marital quality.

Dyadic consensus captures the tendency of partners to agree on issues such as finance, friends, leisure, religion and domestic organization. Dyadic cohesion taps the tendency to share objectives and experiences. Dyadic satisfaction is related to affective and emotional investment in the couple relationship and happiness in the relationship. Affective expression measures the satisfaction with affective and sexual expression in the relationship.

In Spanier's (1976) study, Cronbach's alphas were reported as .96 for the overall scale. Moreover, reliabilities of the subscales were calculated as .90, .94, .86, and .73 for dyadic consensus, dyadic satisfaction, dyadic cohesion, and affectional expression, respectively. Content, criterion-related and construct validity were also assessed. For content validity, items in the scale were evaluated by three judges. Criterion-related validity of the scale was obtained through applying the scale to both married and divorced sample to demonstrate whether the scale distinguished those groups. Construct validity

was examined by assessing the correlation between the scores of DAS and the scores of Locke-Wallace Marital Adjustment Scale ( $r = .86$ ). Therefore, it was shown that DAS is both a valid and reliable scale.

The instrument was adapted into Turkish by Fıfılođlu and Demir (2000). For the evaluation of reliability, Cronbach's alphas were computed. The internal consistency was found as .92 and the split half reliability as .86. Cronbach's alphas were reported as .83 for dyadic satisfaction, .80 for affectional expression, .75 for dyadic cohesion, and .75 for dyadic consensus. Criterion validity was obtained by the correlation between adapted DAS and adapted Locke-Wallace Marital Adjustment Test ( $r = .82$ ). Findings supported that Turkish DAS has sufficiently high reliability and validity to justify its use as a measurement of marital adjustment. Sample items from the scale are "Ne sıklıkta eşinizi öpersiniz?", "Evlendiđiniz için pişmanlık duyar mısınız?", and "Ne sıklıkta eşinizle olan ilişkinizin iyiye gittiđini düşünürsünüz?". In the present study, dyadic satisfaction subscale of the scale was used and it covers the Items 16 – 23, Item 31, and Item 32.

#### **3.3.1.4.1 Validity and Reliability of the DAS**

In the main study, dyadic satisfaction subscale of the instrument was used but overall, proposed four-factor solution was tested for DAS through CFA. Results showed a mediocre fit of the four-factor model for the data. After the modification indexes were checked, the error covariance of Item 26 and Item 27; Item 16 and Item 17; Item 21 and Item 22 were freely estimated. These items measured similar behavior and there is theoretical justification for relating the covariance of errors of these items. Conducted modification improved the

model fit. Standardized estimates ranged between .66 and .85 for dyadic satisfaction, between .49 and .83 for dyadic cohesion, between .65 and .91 for dyadic consensus, and between .53 and .87 for affective expression. All standardized regression weights were found to be above .40 and significant. Goodness of Fit Indexes for the four factor model of DAS is  $\chi^2(194)=529.56$ ,  $\chi^2/df = 2.79$ , CFI = .94, TLI = .92, RMSEA = .08, SRMR= .06 and pClose was above .05.

Cronbach's alpha coefficient was computed to examine the internal consistency coefficient of DAS and its subscales. Cronbach's alpha coefficient was found to be .96 for the total score, .91 for dyadic satisfaction, .71 for dyadic cohesion, .96 for dyadic consensus and .76 for affective expression subscales.

### **3.3.1.5 The Perceived Stress Inventory (PSS-10)**

The PSS-10, (Cohen, Kamarck, & Mermelstein, 1983) measures an individual's appraisal of their life as stressful (i.e. unpredictable, uncontrollable and overloading). Item examples include, "How often have you felt nervous or stressed?" and "How often have you felt confident about your ability to handle your personal problems?" People rated how often they had experienced these feelings in the last month on a five-point Likert scale, from 0 "never" to 4 "very often". PSS-10 scores are obtained by reversing the scores on the four positive items; items were 4, 5, 7, and 8 (Item 4: In the last month, how often have you felt confident about your ability to handle your personal problems?, Item 5: In the last month, how often have you felt that things were

going your way?, Item 7: In the last month, how often have you been able to control irritations in your life? And Item 8: In the last month, how often have you felt that you were on top of things?). Total scores range from 0 to 40, with higher scores indicating greater overall distress. Its structure consists of short and simple expressions.

There are three separate forms of 14 items, 10 items and 4 items. In the various studies performed in different languages, the PSS-14 item and the PSS-10 item forms demonstrated similar psychometric characteristics (Cohen & Williamson, 1988). As a result, the 10-item form, which can be carried out in a shorter period of time, has been preferred for the Turkish reliability - validity study. Turkish version of PSS-10 was adapted by Çelik-Örücü and Demir (2009) and the inventory is a reliable and valid instrument to be used in Turkish. Test-retest reliability was .88 over four weeks and Cronbach Alpha was .82. Sample items from the inventory are "Geçen ay içinde, hangi sıklıkta yaşamınızdaki önemli şeyleri kontrol edemediğinizi hissettiniz?" and "Geçen ay içinde, hangi sıklıkta kendinizi stresli hissettiniz?".

#### **3.3.1.5.1 Validity and Reliability of the PSS-10**

Çelik-Örücü (2005) evaluated one factor model (one factor to account for all items) for Perceived Stress Scale and fit indices for one factor structure of the scale showed acceptable values. Çelik-Örücü and Demir (2009) investigated the applicability of the scale and results revealed a two-factor structure measuring perceived helplessness and perceived self-efficacy. Therefore, starting with one factor model, two CFAs were run for PSS-10.

Table 3.4

Goodness-of-Fit Indicators of CFA for PSS-10

	$\chi^2$	<i>df</i>	$\chi^2/df$	<i>GFI</i>	<i>SRMR</i>	<i>RMSEA</i>	<i>CFI</i>	<i>TLI</i>
Model1	557.55	35	15.93	.79	.07	.14	.77	.70
Model2	118.05	25	4.72	.94	.05	.06	.96	.94

Firstly, one factor structure of Perceived Stress Inventory was tested through CFA but it did not fit. Except Item 4, the factor loads were above .40 but it was concluded that for this sample, one-factor structure of PSS is not appropriate to use. As can be seen in Table 3.4., for the second, two factor model, results showed that Chi-square statistic was statistically significant ( $\chi^2(25) = 118.05$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and  $\chi^2/df$  ratio was 4.72 which was above the threshold value of 3, suggested by Kline (2011). Comparative indexes of fit indicated good fit  $CFI = .96$ ,  $TLI = .94$ , and  $RMSEA$  value showed .06, which is an indicator of a good fit (Hu & Bentler, 1999). All standardized regression weights in Table 3.5 were found to be above .40 and significant.

For reliability of the scale, internal consistency indicator of Cronbach's alpha value was found to be .83 for the total scale, .90 for helplessness subscale and .76 for self-efficacy subscale. It was above cut-off value of .70 for acceptable reliability (Nunnally, 1978). Deletion of Item 4 from self-efficacy subscale improved the Cronbach alpha value to .85.

Table 3.5

## Unstandardized and Standardized Parameter Estimates for PSS-10

Construct	Item	Unstandardized factor loadings	Standardized factor loadings	SE	<i>t</i>	<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>
Perceived helplessness	ASO-1	1.00	.80	.07		.64
	ASO-2	1.06	.81	.06	17.71	.66
	ASO-3	1.13	.84	.06	18.56	.71
	ASO-6	.98	.71	.06	14.77	.50
	ASO-9	1.15	.79	.06	17.17	.62
	ASO-10	1.24	.80	.07	16.92	.64
Self Efficacy	ASO-5	.71	.72	.03	15.16	.52
	ASO-7	.93	.86	.05	20.19	.74
	ASO-8	.99	.89	.04	15.75	.79

*Note.* All *t* values were significant,  $p < .001$ .

### 3.3.1.6 Differentiation of Self Inventory-Short Form (DSI-SF)

The scale was developed by Drake, Murdock, Marszalek, and Barber (2015) and adapted into Turkish by Sarıkaya, Boyacı, İlhan, and Aldemir (2018). This short form has is based on a 46-item DSI-R. DSI-SF consists of 20 items that are divided into four subscales and rated on a 6-point Likert type scale, from 1 (not at all true of me) to 6 (very true of me) . Four subscales are Emotional Reactivity, "I" position, Emotional Cutoff and Fusion with Others. Higher scores indicate more differentiation of self. Sample items from the instruments are "Eleştiriye karşı son derece hassasımdır.", "Baskı altındayken bile oldukça kararlı davranırım.", "Hayatımdaki neredeyse herkesten onay almam gerektiğini hissederim." and "Eşimle/partnerimle tartıştığımda bu beni günlerce rahatsız eder.". The two-week interval test-retest reliability

coefficients were .86 for the DSI-SF total score, and for the subscales they range from .80 (emotional reactivity) to .70 (fusion with others).

### **3.3.1.6.1 Validity and Reliability of the DSI-SF**

Results of CFA for the Differentiation of Self Inventory-Short form showed that Chi square test was significant  $X^2(84) = 339.36, p = .01$ , which indicated that model did not fit to the data. The value of  $X^2/df$  ratio was 4.04, which was lower than the recommended value of 5 (Schumacker & Lomax, 2010). For the model, CFI = .93, TLI = .91 and NNFI = .923, which is above the cut value of Schumacker and Lomax (2010). SRMR = .08 and since number of participants are above 250 and CFI is .93, it can be an acceptable cut-off value (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2010). RMSEA value of .08 also shows mediocre fit (Maccallum et al., 1996). In table 3.6, t values related to the scale items were examined and it was seen that all of the values were significant. In the adaptation study of Sarıkaya et al. (2018), as a result of analysis,  $\chi^2(163) = 558.98, (p < .001), \chi^2/df = 3.43, RMSEA = .07, CFI = .91, IFI = .91, NFI = .88, NNFI = .90, GFI = .89, AGFI = .86; SRMR = .07$  were found and they concluded that the values obtained from the results of confirmatory factor analysis were interpreted as a confirmation of the four-component structure in Turkish form like in the original form of DSI-SF. Similar cut-off values occurred in the present study and four factor structure will be used in the main study.

Table 3.6

## Unstandardized and Standardized Parameter Estimates for DSI-SF

Construct	Item	Unstandardized factor loadings	Standardized factor loadings	SE	<i>t</i>	<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>
I-position	DSI-1	1.00	.65	.05		.42
	DSI-3	1.05	.84	.03	15.93	.71
	DSI-10	.73	.60	.06	11.19	.36
	DSI-12	.99	.87	.05	16.71	.76
	DSI-19	.66	.48	.06	10.42	.23
	DSI-20	1.00	.76	.05	16.09	.58
Cut-off	DSI-4	.96	.81	.07	12.42	.66
	DSI-7	.82	.71	.07	10.76	.50
	DSI-15	1.00	.86	.06		.74
Emotional Reactivity	DSI-6	.85	.76	.05	16.10	.58
	DSI-9	.73	.53	.06	16.72	.28
	DSI-11	.85	.77	.05	16.72	.59
	DSI-14	.99	.82	.05	17.59	.67
	DSI-16	.98	.82	.05	18.95	.67
Fusion with others	DSI-18	1.00	.81			.66
	DSI-2	1.06	.84	.05	19.32	.71
	DSI-5	.94	.62	.05	19.23	.38
	DSI-8	1.11	.89	.04	22.81	.79
	DSI-13	.55	.36	.07	10.13	.13
	DSI-17	1.00	.85			.72

*Note.* All *t* values were significant,  $p < .001$ .

In the current study, Cronbach's alpha coefficient value for the total items were .85. Cronbach's alpha values for each subscale were .86 for cut-off, .93 for emotional reactivity, .93 for fusion with others, and .91 for I position.

### 3.3.1.7 Satisfaction With Life Scale

The Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) was developed by Diener, Emmons, Larsen, and Griffin (1985). This scale is a tool to evaluate global cognitive judgments of one's life satisfaction, rather than measuring either positive or negative affect. Applicants specify how much or to what extent they agree or disagree with each of the 5 items using a 7-point scale that ranges from 7 = strongly agree to 1 = strongly disagree. The scale does not assess satisfaction with life domains separately nevertheless allows subjects to integrate and weight these domains and shows individuals' conscious evaluative judgment of his or her life by using their own criteria (Pavot & Diener, 2009). Sample item from the scale is "In most ways, my life is close to my ideal".

Diener et al.'s (1985) factor analysis study yielded a single factor structure that explained 66% of the total variance. The internal consistency was calculated by the Cronbach alpha coefficients by Diener et al. (1985). The Cronbach alpha coefficient was found to be .87 for the scale. Additionally, test-retest correlation in an eight week interval was found to be .82 for the scale.

Köker (1991) conducted the adaptation study of SWLS to Turkish and tested the validity of the adapted scale by its face validity. Additionally, Köker (1991) found item-test correlation to range between .71 and .80 and a test-retest correlation of .85 in three-week interval. Moreover, consistent with the original single factor structure, Yetim (1991) reported a single factor structure for the Turkish adaptation of SWLS.

### 3.3.1.7.1 Validity and Reliability of the Satisfaction with Life Scale

Consistent with the original one-factor structure, one-factor model was tested for the Satisfaction with Life Scale through CFA. Results presented a good fit of the one factor model to data,  $\chi^2(5) = 19.85$ ,  $p = .01$ ,  $\chi^2/df$ -ratio = 3.17, CFI = .99, TLI = .98, RMSEA = .07 [90% CI = .00, .17], pClose > .05, and SRMR = .01). As shown in Table 3.7, all standardized regression weights were found to be above .40 and significant. Standardized estimates ranged between .79 and .90.

Table 3.7

Unstandardized and Standardized Parameter Estimates for Satisfaction with Life Scale

Construct	Item	Unstandardized factor loadings	Standardized factor loadings	SE	<i>t</i>	<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>
Life satisfaction	LS-1	1.00	.79	.06		.62
	LS-2	1.13	.84	.06	18.45	.71
	LS-3	1.26	.90	.06	19.63	.81
	LS-4	1.17	.81	.08	17.35	.66
	LS-5	1.11	.79	.07	16.80	.62

*Note.* All *t* values were significant,  $p < .001$ .

For reliability of the scale, internal consistency indicator of Cronbach alpha value was found to be .92 and deletion of any item did not increase the reliability value.

### 3.3.1.8 Demographic Information Form

In order to gain relevant information from the participants, the researcher prepared a demographic information form in Appendix C . This form included

several questions about participants' background information such as gender, age, level of education, occupational status, work type, number of children, and sibling positions. Besides background information, they were also asked questions regarding their marriage such as the way how they get married, duration of marriage, whether they got married before, and if so, how many times they got married before. Age, years of marriage, number of marriages, occupational status, and level of education of the spouse were also asked.

### **3.4 Description of Variables**

The variables investigated in the study are described and operationalized in this section. Variables are given under three categories: exogenous variables (marital stress and perceived stress), mediator variable (differentiation of self) and endogenous variables (marital satisfaction and life satisfaction). Exogenous variables are identical to independent variables while endogenous variable is identical to dependent variable. Exogenous variables affect endogenous variable through the mediator variable.

#### **3.4.1 Exogenous Variables**

*Perceived Stress* was measured by 10- item Perceived Stress Scale and *intradyadic stress* was measured by a subscale of Multidimensional stress Questionnaire for Couples with ten, chronic internal stress items.. *Extradyadic stress* was measured by a subscale of Multidimensional Stress Questionnaire for Couples with eight, chronic external stress items. Each of the variables refers to the sum of the item scores and they are continuous variables

### **3.4.2 Mediator Variables**

*Differentiation of self* was measured by 20-item Differentiation of Self Inventory-Short Form including 4 sub-scales, namely I position, Emotional cut-off, Emotional reactivity and fusion with others. They refer to the sum of item scores and they are continuous variables.

### **3.4.3 Endogenous Variables**

*Marital satisfaction* was measured by 32-item Dyadic Adjustment Scale and refers to the sum of item scores of dyadic satisfaction sub-scale. It is a continuous variable.

*Life satisfaction* was measured by Global Life Satisfaction Questionnaire and refers to sum of five items. It is also a continuous variable.

## **3.5 Data Analyses**

The main purpose of this study was to test a mediation model of life satisfaction and marital satisfaction with regard to stress variables via the mediator role of differentiation of self variables. For this purpose, Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was used to test the model through the use of AMOS 18 and 22 software and Assumptions of SEM were evaluated by using AMOS 22 and SPSS 25. Analysis was carried in the following order:

1. Data screening on the raw data was completed.
2. Assumptions of SEM was evaluated by using AMOS 22 and SPSS 25 (missing data, sample size, outliers, normality, linearity, homoscedasticity and multicollinearity).

3. Descriptive statistics was run by means, standard deviations and percentages etc. to describe participants' demographics and relationship characteristics.
4. Confirmatory Factor Analyses were conducted in order to support for the identified factor structures of instruments and testing validity.
5. The measurement model was evaluated through SEM.

### **3.6 Limitations of the Study**

The present study has some limitations. While reading the findings and designing research, these limitations should be taken into consideration.

The first limitation was related to design of the study. The reliance on cross-sectional designs in stress and satisfaction research weakens the ability to conclude that relationships exist between variables. Stress is a dynamic process that develops and changes over time and it might be the same for satisfaction too. Cross-sectional studies do not address these facts. Furthermore, variables that predict stress at any one point in time may not significantly predict it at a subsequent point in time. Longitudinal designs are essential to enable the temporal relationships between the predictor variables and subsequent stress to be identified. Given the cross-sectional nature of the study, inferences about causality among the variables cannot be made.

Secondly, selection bias (Kazdin, 1992) can be apparent for this study due to the sampling method since it is not random sampling. Participants selected for this study are similar in many characteristics due to their association with each other. Most of the subjects were also from a middle class background who live

in western part of Turkey. The range of marital length was also large and the mean of marriage duration in years (more than fourteen years) indicate that participants are mostly in long-term marriages. Since participants generally live in cities and metropolis, and since they are only from 5 different regions, the representation of individuals, who are particularly involved in arranged marriages, decreases. In addition to selection bias, the order in which instruments were given to the participants may have affected the responses. For example, some of the differentiation items were directly related to couple relationships, which in turn may affect the responses on the satisfaction scale.

Since the study is about marriage, participants might be unwilling to give true information about their marital relationships. Also, because of social desirability effect, participants probably wonder how their spouses perceive their marriage and they may become anxious and not give the right information.

Additionally, since the researcher was not present while administering each instrument, there is the possibility that results were contaminated (Kazdin, 1992) due to lack of adherence to testing procedure. Furthermore, questions that participants may have about the instruments may not be answered, thus participants are left to self interpret. Although couples were warned to fill the instrument separately, there is a possibility of completing instruments together. Due to the possibility of one of the spouse's seeing the responses before returning the answers, participants' responses may have been influenced.

The present study relies solely upon the use of self-report measures and the instrumentation used also presents a potential limitation for this study. Although self-report measures of internalizing symptoms appear to be less problematic (Craig, 1998), sole reliance on self report measures allows for confounding of shared method variance. Response bias could be a limitation because participants may respond to the questions in a favorable way. Thus, it would be useful for future research to include the reports of others (e.g., spouses, off- spring), which could allow for multiple informant comparisons (Ollendick & Hersen, 1993). Furthermore, in present study, only one spouse of a dyad was included and they were asked to report their stress level, satisfaction with life and marriage and differentiation of self; yet, their partners' reports were not considered.

This study relied heavily on retrospective self-report data. Also, Bowen never intended for his differentiation of self scale to be a paper-pencil inventory (Kerr & Bowen, 1988) and he clearly stated that his scale was hypothetical. It is the contention of Kerr (1981) and others that in order to obtain one's true level of differentiation one must collect a large amount of historical information, which would necessitate lengthy personal interviews. Such interviews with clients and their nuclear and family-of-origin would provide more accurate details about the family systemic emotional processes.

## CHAPTER 4

### RESULTS

In this chapter, results of the main study are depicted. This study has two phases mainly, one is the pilot study and the other one is main study. Results of the pilot study regarding validity and reliability of the instruments were given in the previous chapter. Then, the results of the main analyses with the second data set will be presented in this chapter. The first section of this chapter presents preliminary analyses and descriptive analyses. The second section shows the results of the Structural Equation Modeling and measurement invariance. Finally, the third section presents a summary of the results.

#### **4.1 Preliminary Analyses**

Before proceeding to further analyses, the dataset was screened by the researcher to explore any mis-entries prior to conducting SEM analyses. Minimum and maximum values of each items were checked in order to ensure that there were no unexpected values in the dataset using frequency tables. All preliminary analyses were conducted using SPSS 25 (IBM Corp., 2017).

##### **4.1.1 Sample Size and Missing Data**

Although there is no consensus on the minimum sample size criteria among SEM researchers, general useful rule of thumb regarding sample size is minimum 200 cases (Gürbüz, 2019; Byrne, 2016; Kline, 2016). The final dataset

of the current study comprised of 825 cases which met the sufficient sample size criterion ( $N > 200$ ) to conduct (Kline, 2016). Out of 920 participants, 41 cases were deleted due to not meeting inclusion criteria. 38 participants had extreme missing values and they were also eliminated from the study. For three cases mean imputation was conducted.

#### **4.1.2 Influential Outliers**

In the current study, both the univariate and multivariate outliers were checked. The researcher checked the univariate outliers by using z-scores of the study variables. According to Tabachnick and Fidell (2013), threshold value of  $\pm 3.29$  indicates the existence of potential univariate outliers for large samples. In the data set, there were only a few cases that exceed the cut-off value of  $\pm 3.29$ . Therefore, the researcher decided to keep these cases in the study. The reason is that the existence of a few z scores in large sample sizes is acceptable (Gürbüz & Şahin, 2018). Mahalanobis distances values were used in order to explore multivariate outliers. The critical  $\chi^2$  value was 174.816 for  $df = 121$ ,  $p < .001$  (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013), and 161 cases were identified as outlier based on their Mahalanobis distance scores. As Tabachnick and Fidell (2013) suggest, Mahalanobis distances values can be misleading and masking data and that is why it should be used by caution. Thus, the researcher decided to produce two different datasets: one with the outliers, labeled dataset A, and one without the outliers, labeled dataset B to conduct SEM with the two datasets to examine if any differences occur. Results indicated no differences between the dataset A and B; hence, the outliers were kept in the dataset and the reported results were obtained from the dataset with outliers.

### **4.1.3 Assumptions of SEM**

After screening of the data set and examining the missing values and the outliers, prior to conducting SEM analyses, the assumptions of SEM were tested respectively. Below, results of normality, influential outliers, linearity, and homoscedasticity, normality of residuals, and multicollinearity assumptions are reported for the main study.

#### **4.1.3.1 Normality**

Both the univariate and multivariate outliers were checked before the main analyses. To explore the univariate outliers, skewness and kurtosis values for the items were calculated. The skewness and kurtoses indices were ranged between the cut-off value of  $\pm 3$  (Kline, 2016); however, there was only two items exceeding the cut-off value of 3 kurtosis indicating a moderate non-normality (See, Table 4.1). It important to note that skewness and kurtosis values are ignorable values if the sample size is large enough (Gürbüz & Şahin, 2018; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). On the other hand, Kline (2016) and Gürbüz (2019) suggest that a skewness value lower than 3 and kurtosis value lower than 10 can be analyzed with maximum likelihood (ML) estimation in SEM.

Table 4.1

Mean, Standard Deviations, Skewness, and Kurtosis Values for Items

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Skewnesss</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>Kurthosis</i>	<i>SE</i>
MSQ_1	2.47	.88	.26	.09	-.67	.17
MSQ_2	2.25	.90	.36	.09	-.62	.17
MSQ_3	1.92	.94	.82	.09	-.20	.17
MSQ_4	1.94	.94	.60	.09	-.71	.17
MSQ_5	1.69	.90	.99	.09	-.18	.17
MSQ_6	2.06	.93	.49	.09	-.68	.17
MSQ_7	1.63	.82	1.10	.09	.28	.17
MSQ_8	1.70	.88	.99	.09	-.02	.17
MSQ_9	2.08	1.00	.43	.09	-.99	.17
MSQ_10	1.67	.87	1.12	.09	.34	.17
MSQ_15	2.29	1.07	.11	.09	-1.30	.17
MSQ_16	1.89	.73	.53	.09	.11	.17
MSQ_17	2.19	.90	.34	.09	-.67	.17
MSQ_18	2.11	.98	.42	.09	-.88	.17
MSQ_19	1.94	.97	.76	.09	-.44	.17
MSQ_20	1.74	.90	.99	.09	.03	.17
MSQ_21	2.19	1.01	.40	.09	-.92	.17
MSQ_22	2.12	.91	.20	.09	-1.03	.17
LS_1	5.35	1.31	-.58	.09	-.03	.17
LS_2	5.11	1.42	-.45	.09	-.52	.17
LS_3	5.10	1.41	-.50	.09	-.41	.17
LS_4	4.69	1.78	-.35	.09	-.88	.17
LS_5	4.91	1.47	-.41	.09	-.23	.17
DSI_1	3.79	1.67	-.11	.09	-1.24	.17
DSI_2	3.17	1.82	.18	.09	-1.41	.17
DSI_3	4.52	1.72	-.99	.09	-.34	.17
DSI_4	3.37	1.60	-.06	.09	-1.18	.17
DSI_5	3.24	1.67	.17	.09	-1.22	.17
DSI_6	3.44	1.69	.04	.09	-1.20	.17
DSI_7	3.13	1.61	.05	.09	-1.28	.17
DSI_8	2.68	1.81	.69	.09	-1.01	.17
DSI_9	3.43	1.73	.23	.09	-1.27	.17
DSI_10	3.77	1.69	-.11	.09	-1.30	.17

Table 4.1 (cont'd)

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Skewnesss</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>Kurthosis</i>	<i>SE</i>
DSI_11	3.43	1.66	-.07	.09	-1.19	.17
DSI_12	4.42	1.59	-.75	.09	-.61	.17
DSI_13	3.37	1.89	.08	.09	-1.49	.17
DSI_14	3.62	1.79	-.15	.09	-1.32	.17
DSI_15	2.81	1.58	.49	.09	-.87	.17
DSI_16	4.02	1.71	-.42	.09	-1.14	.17
DSI_17	3.09	1.76	.32	.09	-1.27	.17
DSI_18	3.61	1.84	-.18	.09	-1.39	.17
DSI_19	4.20	1.71	-.51	.09	-1.08	.17
DSI_20	3.87	1.77	-.40	.09	-1.22	.17
DAS_1	3.90	1.16	-.76	.09	-.36	.17
DAS_2	3.72	1.14	-.55	.09	-.53	.17
DAS_3	4.18	.94	-1.05	.09	1.20	.17
DAS_4	4.05	.95	-.74	.09	-.09	.17
DAS_5	3.88	.99	-.54	.09	-.21	.17
DAS_6	4.04	1.00	-.92	.09	.44	.17
DAS_7	3.96	.98	-.74	.09	.47	.17
DAS_8	3.81	1.01	-.63	.09	.16	.17
DAS_9	3.70	1.03	-.34	.09	-.78	.17
DAS_10	3.87	1.04	-.59	.09	-.60	.17
DAS_11	3.72	1.15	-.83	.09	.17	.17
DAS_12	4.02	1.14	-1.09	.09	.43	.17
DAS_13	3.77	1.18	-.91	.09	.26	.17
DAS_14	3.61	1.14	-.44	.09	-.54	.17
DAS_15	4.00	1.10	-1.13	.09	1.26	.17
DAS_16	4.39	.99	-1.71	.09	2.65	.17
DAS_17	4.61	.80	-2.51	.09	6.75	.17
DAS_18	3.72	1.16	-1.02	.09	.79	.17
DAS_19	4.38	1.14	-2.16	.09	4.16	.17
DAS_20	4.00	1.30	-1.20	.09	.55	.17
DAS_21	3.24	1.07	-.97	.09	1.21	.17
DAS_22	3.16	1.04	-1.07	.09	.76	.17
DAS_23	3.23	.91	-.85	.09	-.13	.17
DAS_24	2.61	.90	-.06	.09	-.69	.17

Table 4.1 (cont'd)

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Skewness</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>Kurtosis</i>	<i>SE</i>
DAS_25	2.93	1.36	-.29	.09	-.67	.17
DAS_26	2.06	1.92	.39	.09	-1.35	.17
DAS_27	2.45	1.51	.11	.09	-.93	.17
DAS_28	2.52	1.57	-.18	.09	-.94	.17
DAS_29	.68	.48	-.62	.09	-1.26	.17
DAS_30	.75	.44	-1.04	.09	-.66	.17
DAS_31	3.90	1.35	-.01	.09	-.86	.17
DAS_32	3.40	1.12	-.14	.09	-.54	.17
PSS_1	1.74	.90	-.14	.09	-.39	.17
PSS_2	1.72	.97	-.37	.09	-.51	.17
PSS_3	2.22	.99	-.38	.09	-.01	.17
PSS_4	1.84	1.06	.36	.09	-.67	.17
PSS_5	1.84	.99	.12	.09	-.54	.17
PSS_6	1.74	1.01	-.13	.09	-.82	.17
PSS_7	1.93	1.10	.01	.09	-.52	.17
PSS_8	1.84	1.13	.28	.09	-.51	.17
PSS_9	2.15	1.07	.04	.09	-.65	.17
PSS_10	1.84	1.17	.15	.09	-.74	.17

Note. MSQ = Multidimensional Stress Questionnaire for Couples, LS = Life Satisfaction, DFI = Differentiation of Self Inventory, DAS = Dyadic Adjustment Scale, PSS = Perceived Stress Scale

Then, multivariate normality of the data was checked via Multivariate Kurtosis Index. According to Kline (2016) and Gürbüz (2019), Multivariate Kurtosis Index should be below 10 for ML in SEM. The critical  $\chi^2$  value was 89.454 for  $df = 12$ ,  $p < .001$  (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013) and there were cases exceeding the critical value thus to be named as multivariate outliers. Since Mahalanobis distances values were extremely high, the researcher tried to eliminate more than 100 cases from the data set. However, despite the deletion, the Mahalanobis critical  $\chi^2$  value was 78.454, indicating that multivariate normality assumption was violated. Thus, the researcher decided

to keep the data set as it was. As it is very common to find non-normal results in survey research (Byrne, 2016), the researcher decided to perform bootstrapping procedure as a remedy for the non-normal data (Gürbüz, 2019; Kline, 2016). The results of Mardia's test (1985) for multivariate normality also showed non-normal patterns for all study variables.

#### 4.1.3.2 Linearity, Homoscedasticity and Normality of Residuals

The researcher explored the histograms, normal P-P plots, scatterplots, and partial regression plots of residuals to provide further evidence for linearity, multivariate normality, and homoscedasticity. According to Tabachnick & Fidell (2013), a straight line between two variables indicates linearity assumption while the variability in scores in the two variable shows homoscedasticity. A series of regression plots were created through the separate regression analyses via SPSS 25 and visual inspection of the plots showed no violation for the assumptions of linearity and homoscedasticity. Scatterplots of dependent variables of the study (Life Satisfaction and Dyadic Satisfaction) are presented below in Figure 4.1 as an example.

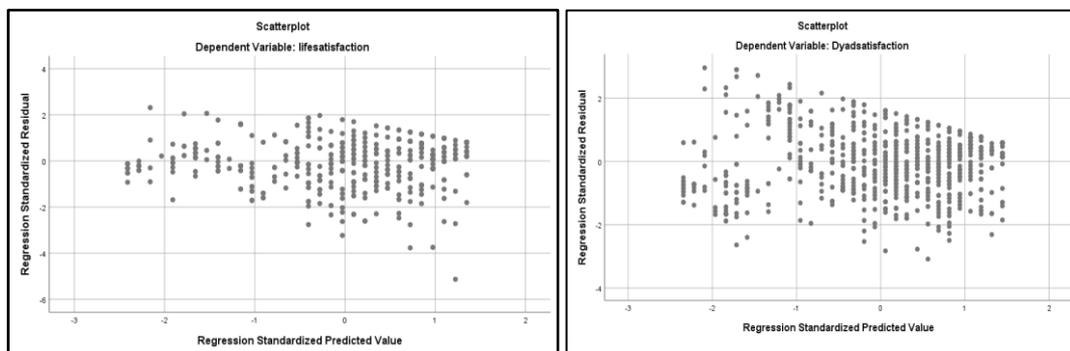


Figure 4.1 Scatterplots for Life Satisfaction and Dyadic Satisfaction Variables

For linearity of residuals, partial regression residual plots of all study variables were checked. The plots of study variables displayed relatively elliptic shapes, indicating no violation of linearity assumption (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013) and they are demonstrated below in Figure 4.2.

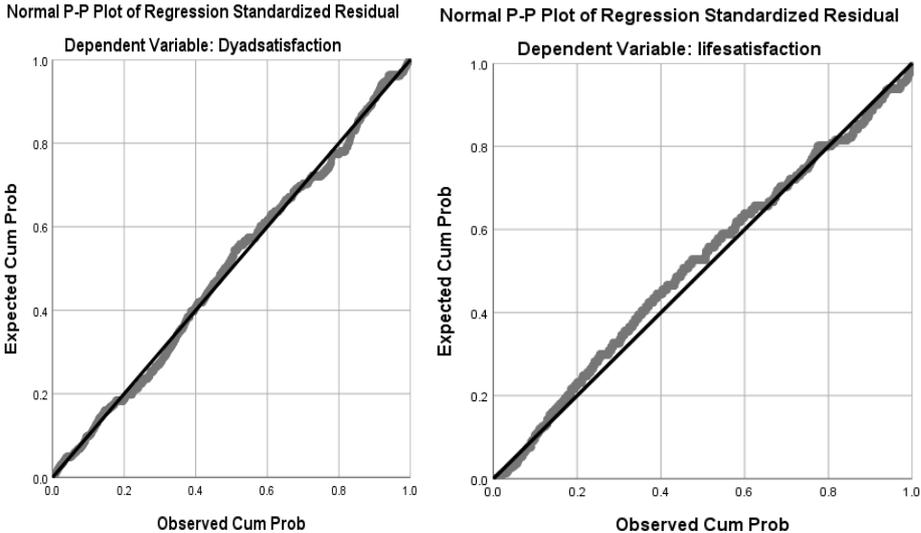


Figure 4.2 Partial regression residual plots for study variables

Normality of residuals were checked through histogram and normal probability plot (P-P plot). The shape of the histograms approximately followed the shape of normal curve and there was slight deviation of plotted residuals from the normality line on P-P plot (see Figure 4.3.), referring no violation of normality of residuals (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013).

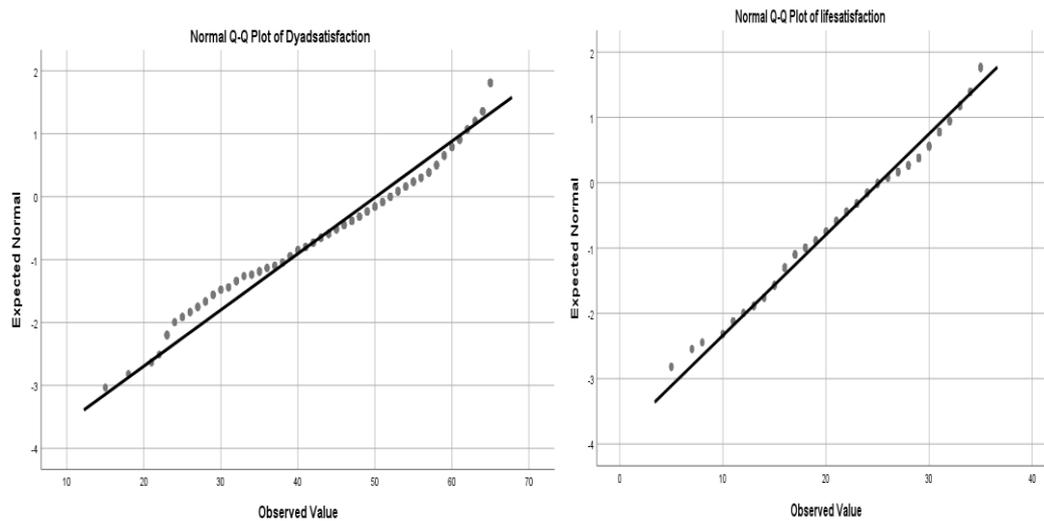


Figure 4.3 Normal P-P plot of residuals for life Satisfaction and Dyadic Satisfaction

#### 4.1.3.3 Multicollinearity

Lastly, multicollinearity among study variables were examined through Pearson's bivariate correlations. The bivariate correlations among the variables were presented in Table 2. All the inter-correlations among the variables were less than the threshold value of .90 (Kline, 2016). The maximum correlation is between emotional reactivity and fusion with others ( $r = .84$ ). To provide further evidence for the multicollinearity, the cut-off values for tolerance ( $1 - R^2 < .10$ ) and variance inflation factor (VIF) which equals  $1/(1 - R^2) > 10.0$  were checked as suggested by Kline (2016). Since the current data set has the tolerance (ranged from .18 and .82) and VIF (ranged from 1.22 to 5.37) values, the multicollinearity assumption is not violated.

Table 4.2

## Inter-correlations among Variables

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Perceived stress	-							
2. Intradynamic Stress	.60**	-						
3. Extradynamic Stress	.59**	.65**	-					
4. I-position	-.22**	-.21**	-.15**	-				
5. Cut-off	.09*	-0.03	0.04	-.43**	-			
6. Emotional reactivity	.13**	.10**	.13**	-.61**	.61**	-		
7. Fusion with others	.18**	.16**	.19**	-.74**	.62**	.84**	-	
8. Life satisfaction	-.28**	-.36**	-.36**	.52**	-.32**	-.45**	-.48**	-
9. Dyadic satisfaction	-.40**	-.48**	-.41**	.67**	-.36**	-.58**	-.61**	.69**

*Note.* \*\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

#### 4.1.4 Reliability of the Data Collection Instruments

In order to explore the internal consistency coefficients of the questionnaires before the model testing, Cronbach's alpha coefficients were computed. Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the all scales are exceeding the cut-off point of .70 (Nunnally, 1978).

Cronbach's alpha coefficients were  $\alpha = .89$  for Perceived Stress Scale,  $\alpha = .88$  for internal dyadic stress subscale of the MSQ-C, and  $\alpha = .75$  for external dyadic stress subscales of the MSQ-C. Internal consistency coefficients were  $\alpha = .86$  for I-position,  $\alpha = .83$  for emotional cut-off,  $\alpha = .87$  for fusion with others and  $\alpha = .91$  for emotional reactivity subscales of DSI-S. Finally,

Cronbach's alpha coefficients were  $\alpha = .92$  for Satisfaction with Life Scale and  $\alpha = .89$  for dyadic satisfaction in Dyadic Adjustment Scale.

#### 4.2 Descriptive Analyses

Before conducting main analysis, descriptive statistics were performed. For this purpose, inter-correlations among the variables were presented in Table 4.2. As can be seen in Table 4.2 above, the results of correlations among the study variables indicate that the Life Satisfaction is negatively and significantly related to Perceived Stress ( $r = -.276, p < .01$ ), Intradynamic Stress ( $r = -.356, p < .01$ ), Extradynamic Stress ( $r = -.358, p < .01$ ), Cutoff ( $r = -.315, p < .01$ ), Emotional Reactivity ( $r = -.451, p < .01$ ), and Fusion ( $r = -.475, p < .01$ ), while it is positively and significantly related to I-position ( $r = .524, p < .01$ ). Dyadic Satisfaction is negatively and significantly related to Perceived Stress ( $r = -.401, p < .01$ ), Intradynamic Stress ( $r = -.480, p < .01$ ), Extradynamic Stress ( $r = -.665, p < .01$ ), Cut-off ( $r = -.356, p < .01$ ), Emotional Reactivity ( $r = -.576, p < .01$ ), and Fusion ( $r = -.607, p < .01$ ), while it is positively and significantly related to I-position ( $r = .665, p < .01$ ). The pattern of these correlations is substantially consistent with hypothesized relationships.

Regarding mean values of variables, as seen in Table 4.3, the mean of perceived stress of participants is 18.85 with a standard deviation of 7.36. The scores ranged from 2 to 38. The lowest and highest scores which can be obtained from perceived stress measurement are 0 and 40, respectively. The higher scores indicate higher perceived stress. It can be said that average stress level of the sample is close to moderate level. For intradyadic stress variable, the mean is 19.41 with a standard deviation of 6.45. The minimum and

maximum scores of participants are 10 and 39 respectively. The total score obtained from extradyadic stress measurement can be between 8 and 32, and higher scores refer to higher chronic, extradyadic stress. The mean and standard deviation values for extradyadic stress are 16.47 and 4.55, respectively. The average stress level of the sample for intradyadic and extradyadic stress is below the moderate level.

Table 4.3

Means, Standard Deviations, and the Range of Study Variables

Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Range</i>	
			<i>Potential</i>	<i>Actual</i>
1. Perceived Stress	18.85	7.36	0-40	2-38
2. Intradyadic Stress	19.41	6.45	10-40	10-39
3. Extradyadic Stress	16.47	4.55	8-32	8-30
4. I-position	4.09	1.32	1-6	1-6
5. Cut-off	3.10	1.38	1-6	1-5.67
6. ER	3.59	1.44	1-6	1-6
7. Fusion	3.11	1.46	1-6	1-6
8. Life Satisfaction	25.15	6.48	5-35	5-35
9. Dyadic Satisfaction	31.37	7.46	0-50	6-46

The higher scores in I-position, emotional cut-off, emotional reactivity and fusion with others indicate higher I-position, emotional cut-off, emotional reactivity and fusion with others. For the I-position variable, the mean score is 4.09 with a standard deviation of 1.32, for emotional cut-off, the mean score is

$M = 3.10$  ( $SD = 1.38$ ); for emotional reactivity the mean score is  $3.59$  ( $SD = 1.44$ ); for fusion the mean score is  $3.11$  ( $SD = 1.46$ ). The minimum and maximum scores that can be obtained from differentiation of self-variables are 1 and 7. Among differentiation of self variables, emotional reactivity and I position have the highest mean scores for the sample.

The score, which can be obtained from life satisfaction measurement change, is between 7 and 35, and higher scores point to higher life satisfaction. The scores ranged between 5 and 35 for life satisfaction and the mean score is  $M = 25.15$  ( $SD = 6.48$ ). Lastly for dyadic satisfaction variable, participants' mean score is  $31.37$  with a standard deviation of  $7.46$ . The scores ranged from 6 to 46 in the sample. The score which can be obtained from dyadic satisfaction scale, is between 0 and 50, and higher scores refer to higher level of dyadic satisfaction. The sample reported nearly high level of life satisfaction and marital satisfaction.

### **4.3 Results of Model Testing**

In this study, SEM analysis, which allows investigating both direct and indirect relationships among a set of variables simultaneously, was used to test the hypothesized structural model seen in *Figure 1.1*.

#### **4.3.1 Measurement Model**

Prior to the testing hypothesized structural measurement model, a measurement model, basically a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) defining the relationships among the latent and the observed variables was tested with

AMOS 24 (Arbuckle, 2016). In line with the research hypotheses in this study, the measurement model was tested with the latent variables of perceived stress, marital stress, chronic stress, emotional cut-off, I-position, emotional reactivity, fusion with others, life satisfaction, and dyadic satisfaction.

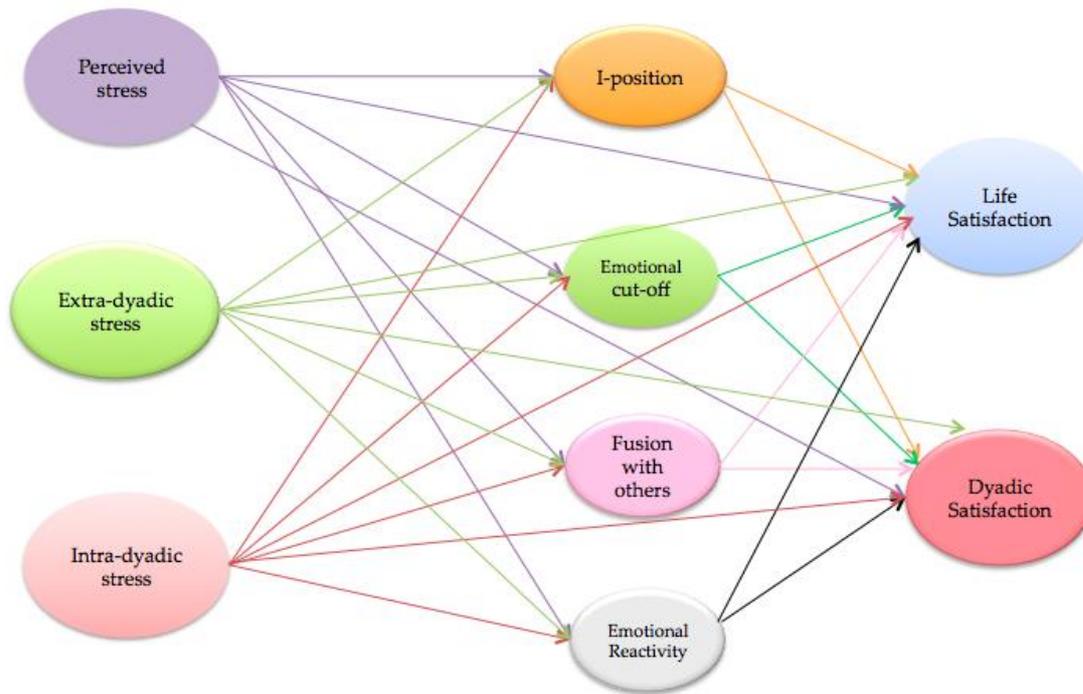


Figure 1.1 Hypothesized Structural Model

Results of the first CFA did not show good fit of the measurement model ( $\chi^2(1733) = 9499.795, p < .001, \chi^2/df\text{-ratio} = 5.48, CFI = .77, RMSEA = .074$  [90% CI = .072,.075], and SRMR = .08). The researcher, then, checked standardized factor loadings of each item and cross-loaded items based on modification indices among co-variances. Items having factor loadings below .40 and cross-loading items (i.e., items have extremely higher MI scores) were removed from the measurement model one by one (Gürbüz, 2019; Kline, 2016).

With this final step, revised and modified measurement model was tested again. Results of the CFA for the final model indicated a marginally good fit  $\chi^2(943) = 3318.393$ ,  $p = .00$ ;  $\chi^2/df$ -ratio = 3.52, CFI = .90, SRMR = .06, and RMSEA = .065 (90% CI = .063, .067). All the standardized estimates were significant and ranged between .53 and .89. The standardized regression weights, unstandardized regression weights, squared regression weights, upper and lower bounds, and  $t$  values were shown in Table 4.4, while the correlations among the latent variables were presented in Table 4.5. The final revised and modified measurement model with standardized estimates and latent factor correlations was shown in Figure 4.4.

Table 4.5

Latent Correlations in the Measurement Model

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Perceived stress	1							
2. Marital stress	.68**	1						
3. Chronic stress	.77**	.80**	1					
4. I-position	-.24**	-.23**	-.28*	1				
5. Cut-off	-.03	-.04	.02	-.45**	1			
6. Fusion with others	.25**	.17**	.32**	-.78**	.63**	1		
7. Emotional reactivity	.14**	.06	.16*	-.62**	.71**	.87**	1	
8. Life satisfaction	-.33**	-.37**	-.42**	.56**	-.36**	-.55**	-.50**	1
9. Dyadic satisfaction	-.45**	-.56**	-.50**	.72**	-.42**	-.68**	-.59**	.73**

\*\*  $p < .001$ , \*  $p < .05$ , two tailed.

Table 4.4

Standardized Regression Weights (SRW), Unstandardized Regression Weights (URW), Confidence Intervals (CI), Squared Multiple Correlations (SMC), and p Values for the Final Measurement Model

	<i>SRW</i>	<i>USW</i>	<i>SMC</i>	<i>CI</i>	<i>t</i>	
<b>Perceived Stress</b>						
PSS_10	.77	1.00	.59	.73	.81	
PSS_6	.75	.84	.56	.71	.79	22.15
PSS_3	.80	.88	.65	.77	.83	24.05
PSS_2	.82	.88	.68	.79	.86	24.30
PSS_1	.78	.78	.61	.74	.82	22.74
PSS_9	.72	.71	.51	.69	.75	20.34
<b>Intra-dyadic Stress</b>						
MSQC_10	.69	1.00	.48	.65	.74	
MSQC_6	.72	1.11	.51	.68	.76	18.77
MSQC_5	.59	.88	.35	.54	.64	15.63
MSQC_4	.80	1.25	.64	.77	.83	20.71
MSQC_2	.74	1.12	.55	.70	.78	19.41
MSQC_1	.72	1.06	.52	.68	.76	18.88
<b>Extra-dyadic Stress</b>						
MSQC_22	.58	1.00	.34	.53	.63	
MSQC_20	.58	.97	.34	.52	.63	13.04
MSQC_19	.68	1.24	.46	.63	.73	14.55
MSQC_17	.66	1.12	.43	.61	.71	14.23
<b>I-position</b>						
DSI_20	.79	1.00	.63	.76	.82	
DSI_12	.84	.95	.71	.80	.87	25.59
DSI_10	.59	.70	.34	.53	.64	16.81
DSI_3	.79	.97	.63	.75	.83	23.90
<b>Cut-off</b>						
DSI_15	.78	1.00	.61	.74	.82	
DSI_7	.81	1.05	.65	.76	.85	22.48
DSI_4	.79	1.02	.62	.74	.83	22.08

Table 4.4 (cont'd)

	<i>SRW</i>	<i>URW</i>	<i>SMC</i>	<i>CI</i>	<i>t</i>	
Fusion with others						
DSI_17	.85	1.00	.72	.72	.82	
DSI_8	.84	1.02	.70	.70	.81	29.48
DSI_2	.81	.99	.66	.66	.78	28.02
Emotional Reactivity						
DSI_18	.79	1.00	.62	.75	.82	
DSI_16	.76	.89	.57	.72	.79	23.01
DSI_14	.75	.93	.57	.71	.79	22.81
DSI_11	.77	.88	.60	.74	.80	23.65
DSI_6	.83	.96	.68	.79	.86	25.72
Life Satisfaction						
LS_5	.79	1.00	.63	.76	.82	
LS_4	.79	1.20	.62	.75	.82	28.80
LS_3	.87	1.05	.75	.84	.90	28.24
LS_2	.90	1.09	.80	.88	.92	29.43
LS_1	.85	.95	.72	.82	.87	27.24
Dyadic Satisfaction						
DAS_20	.70	1.00	.49	.64	.76	
DAS_19	.57	.71	.32	.49	.64	15.38
DAS_22	.75	.86	.56	.71	.79	20.22
DAS_23	.54	.53	.29	.47	.60	14.51
DAS_31	.82	1.21	.67	.79	.84	21.89
DAS_32	.68	.84	.46	.64	.72	18.43
DAS_18	.67	.85	.45	.61	.74	18.20
DAS_17	.60	.52	.43	.54	.65	16.15
DAS_16	.78	.84	.61	.74	.81	20.90
DAS_21	.68	.79	.46	.63	.73	18.36

Note: PSS : Perceived Stress Scale, MSQC: Multidimensional Stress Questionnaire for Couples, DSI: Differentiation of Self Inventory, LS: Life Satisfaction, DAS:Dyadic Adjustment Scale.

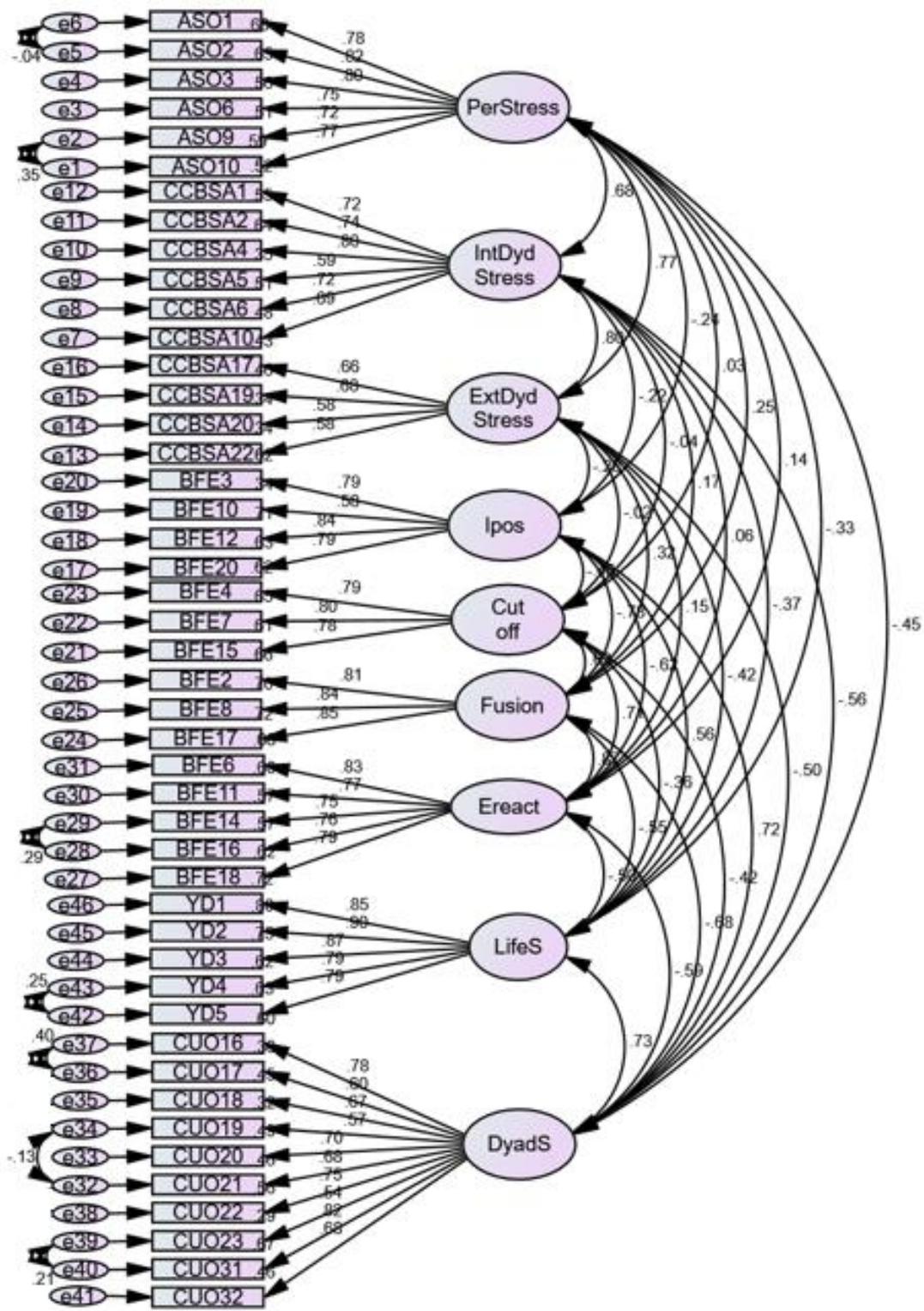


Figure 4.4 Standardized estimates of the final measurement model

### 4.3.2 Measurement Invariance

In order to explore the gender differences (if any) on the hypothesized model, measurement invariance test was conducted using multi-group analyses in AMOS. Recent research on measurement invariance have suggested that configural, metric, and scalar invariance models are adequate for most cases (Gürbüz, 2019; Putnick & Bornstein, 2016; van de Schoot, Lugtig, & Hox, 2012). To evaluate the results obtained from the analysis,  $\Delta X^2$  between compared models should be non-significant ( $p > .05$ ), indicating that equivalence is achieved (Byrne, 2016; Gürbüz, 2019; Kline, 2016). However, since the  $\Delta X^2$  test might give biased results for larger samples,  $\Delta$  CFI test gives more reliable results in measurement equivalence tests (Kline, 2016; Putnick & Bornstein, 2016). Thus, the most liberal approach is that the hypothesis of equivalence can be supported if the  $X^2$  difference test is non-significant ( $p > .05$ ) or if the CFI difference between the two models is less than .01 ( $\Delta$ CFI  $< .01$ ) (Byrne, 2016; Cheung & Rensvold, 2002; Gürbüz; 2019; Putnick & Bornstein, 2016).

To test these models, a multi-group CFA was conducted with AMOS 24. In this analysis using three models, a researcher may see the difference across groups using some specific information like latent variables (configural variance), factor loading across the groups (metric invariance), and intercepts of items (scalar invariance). Results are presented in Table 4.6. A closer look at Table 4.6, the CFI differences scores were smaller than the cut-off value of .01 revealing that configural, metric, and scalar invariance based on gender were met. Thus, the measurement model did not vary based on gender, indicating

that using a single-sample structural model testing will be sufficient for forthcoming analyses.

Table 4.6

The Results of Measurement Invariance Test

Models	$X^2$	$df$	$X^2/df$	CFI	SRMR	RMSEA	$\Delta X^2$ ( $\Delta df$ )	$\Delta$ CFI
1. Configural								
invariance	5583.851*	1886	2.96	.857	.046	.049	-	-
2. Metric								
invariance	5636.031*	1923	2.93	.856	.056	.050	vs. 52.181 1 (37)	.001
3. Scalar								
invariance	5808.258*	1969	2.95	.852	.059	.049	vs. 172.227 2 (46)	.004

Note: \* $p < .05$ .  $N = 824$ ; Female  $N = 419$ ; Male  $N = 405$ ; CFI = Comparative fit index; SRMR = Standardized Root Mean Square Residual; RMSEA = Root mean square error of approximation.

### 4.3.3 The Hypothesized Structural Model

Structural Equation Modeling with latent variables was conducted to investigate the direct and indirect relationships among the study variables using AMOS 24 (Arbuckle, 2016) with robust ML estimation. As explained earlier, a bootstrap approach with 5000 samples to obtain 95% bias-corrected confidence intervals (CI) was used as a remedy for non-normal data (MacKinnon, Lockwood, & Williams, 2004). Furthermore, bootstrapping also

overcomes the shortcomings of Baron and Kenny's (1986) traditional approach and Sobel's (1982) test, yielding more reliable and robust results in testing indirect effects (Gürbüz, 2019; Hayes, 2018; Preacher, Rucker & Hayes, 2007; Zhao, Lynch, & Chen, 2010). In order to interpret the results of structural models, the researcher reported commonly used fit indices ( $\chi^2$  /df-ratio, CFI, SRMR, and RMSEA) suggested by Kline (2016) and Gürbüz (2019).

#### **4.3.3.1 Results of the Hypothesized Structural Model**

The hypothesized (proposed) model tested the direct and indirect associations of the latent variables of independent variables (perceived stress, marital stress, chronic stress), the mediator variables (cut-off, I-position, emotional reactivity, and fusion), and the dependent variables (life satisfaction, and dyadic satisfaction). The proposed model is presented in Figure 4.4. Only the latent variables were included in the figure in order to make the model simple. Results of the first structural model showed a marginally good fit,  $\chi^2$  (958) = 3566.459,  $p = .00$ ;  $\chi^2$  /df-ratio = 3.72, CFI = .92, TLI = .91, SRMR = .05, and RMSEA = .06 (90% CI = .06, .07). Hypothesized structural model was presented in Figure 1.1. According to the structural part of the model, 19 paths out of 20 direct paths (from the exogenous variables to mediators, from the exogenous variables to endogenous variable, and from the mediators to endogenous variable) were found significant.

Significant direct paths were from perceived stress to I-position, cutoff, emotional reactivity, and fusion, (4 paths); from internal dyadic stress to I-position, fusion and emotional reactivity (3 paths); from I-position to life

satisfaction and dyadic satisfaction (2 paths); from emotional reactivity to life satisfaction and dyadic satisfaction (2 paths); from fusion with others to dyadic satisfaction and life satisfaction (2 paths); from cutoff to life satisfaction and dyadic satisfaction (2 paths) and from perceived stress to life satisfaction and dyadic satisfaction (2 paths); and from internal dyadic stress to life satisfaction and dyadic satisfaction (2 paths).

#### 4.3.3.2 Results of Direct Effects

To test the direct effects, first, the impacts of exogenous variables on mediator variables were assessed. However, there were multicollinearities between internal dyadic stress and external dyadic stress ( $r = .93$ ) and between perceived stress and external dyadic stress ( $r = .87$ ). Considering the multicollinearity issue, external dyadic stress was eliminated from the study.

In Figure 4.5, standardized estimates for the structural model with significant paths were given. As can be seen, perceived stress has a direct effect on I-position ( $\beta = -.29, p < .01$ ), cutoff ( $\beta = .09, p < .05$ ), fusion with others ( $\beta = .31, p < .01$ ), and emotional reactivity ( $\beta = .20, p < .01$ ). These results show that when the perceived stress increases, I-position scores decrease. On the other hand, when the participants experience higher stress their cut-off, fusion, and emotional reactivity scores tend to increase.

Internal dyadic stress has a direct effect on I-position ( $\beta = -.26, p < .01$ ), fusion ( $\beta = .21, p < .01$ ), and emotional reactivity ( $\beta = .11, p < .01$ ). However, the direct effect of internal dyadic stress on cut-off is not significant ( $\beta = -.00, p = .93$ ).

These results show that when the internal dyadic stress increases, I-position score decreases. On the other hand, when the participants experience higher internal dyadic stress, their fusion with others and emotional reactivity scores also increase.

The mediators, I-position ( $\beta = .38, p < .01$ ), cut-off ( $\beta = -.08, p < .05$ ), fusion ( $\beta = -.10, p < .05$ ), and emotional reactivity ( $\beta = -.22, p < .01$ ) had significant direct paths on life satisfaction. In other words, higher scores on emotional cut-off, fusion with others and emotional reactivity result in decrease of life satisfaction whereas higher score on I-position result in increase of life satisfaction.

The mediators, I-position ( $\beta = .52, p < .01$ ), emotional cut-off ( $\beta = -.09, p < .05$ ), fusion with others ( $\beta = -.12, p < .05$ ), and emotional reactivity ( $\beta = -.23, p < .01$ ) have significant direct paths on dyadic satisfaction. These results reveal that higher scores on I-position, result in increases of dyadic satisfaction, while higher scores on cut-off, fusion with others and emotional reactivity result in decreases of dyadic satisfaction.

Lastly, when the direct paths between exogenous variable and endogenous variables were examined, perceived stress has direct negative effects on life satisfaction ( $\beta = -.21, p < .01$ ) and dyadic satisfaction ( $\beta = -.32, p < .01$ ). These findings reveal that when participants experience higher stress, they reported to experience less life and dyadic satisfaction in their lives. Internal dyadic stress has also direct negative effects on life satisfaction ( $\beta = -.33, p < .01$ ) and dyadic satisfaction ( $\beta = -.51, p < .01$ ). These findings revealed that when

participants experience higher marital stress, they report to experience less life and dyadic satisfaction in their lives.

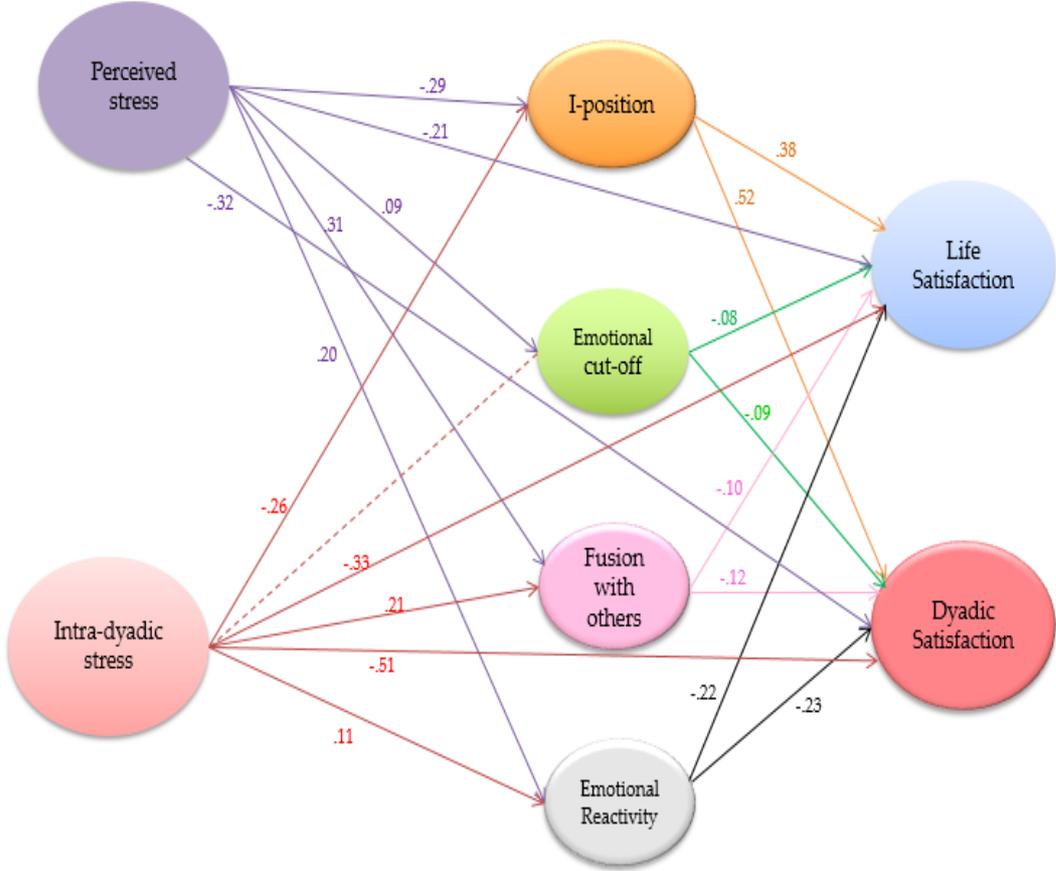


Figure 4.5 Standardized estimates for the structural model with significant paths

**4.3.3.3 Indirect Effects for the Hypothesized Structural Model**

As can be seen in Table 4.7, some of the indirect effects are significant in the model, in addition to direct effects. First, the indirect effects of perceived stress on life satisfaction and dyadic satisfaction will be discussed and then the

indirect effects of internal dyadic stress on life satisfaction and dyadic satisfaction will be addressed.

The indirect effects of perceived stress and internal dyadic stress on life satisfaction and dyadic satisfaction through the four mediators (I-position, emotional cut-off, fusion with others, and emotional reactivity) were tested with a bootstrap approach with 5000 samples to obtain 95% bias-corrected confidence intervals (CI) (Gürbüz, 2019; Hayes, 2018; Preacher, Rucker & Hayes, 2007; Zhao, Lynch, & Chen, 2010). In more detail, the indirect effects of perceived stress on life satisfaction through I position and emotional reactivity are significant ( $\beta = -.14, p < .01$ ;  $\beta = .05, p < .05$ , respectively). However, the indirect effects of perceived stress on life satisfaction through cut-off and fusion with others are not significant ( $\beta = -.01, p = .37$ ;  $\beta = -.03, p = .36$ ). Perceived stress indirectly predicts life satisfaction through I-position and emotional reactivity. In other words, I position and emotional reactivity mediated the relationship between perceived stress and life satisfaction. This means that as the perceived stress level of the participants' increases, their I-position score decreases, which in turn decreases life satisfaction of the participants. On the other hand, as the perceived stress level of the participants increases, their emotional reactivity score also increases, which in turn decreases life satisfaction of the participants.

The indirect effects of the perceived stress on dyadic satisfaction through I position and emotional reactivity are found to be significant ( $\beta = -.15, p < .01$ ;  $\beta = -.04, p < .05$ , respectively). However, the indirect effects of perceived stress on dyadic satisfaction through cut-off and fusion were not significant ( $\beta = -.00,$

$p = .37$ ;  $\beta = -.03$ ,  $p = .15$ ). That is, as the perceived stress level of the participants increase, their I-position score decreases, which in turn decreases dyadic satisfaction of the participants. However, as the perceived stress level of the participants increases, their emotional reactivity score increases, which in turn decreases dyadic satisfaction of the participants.

As can be seen in Table 4.7, the indirect effects of internal dyadic stress on life satisfaction and dyadic satisfaction through the four mediators (I-position, cutoff, fusion, and emotional reactivity) were tested in the same model. In more detail, only the indirect effects of the internal dyadic stress on life satisfaction through I position is significant ( $\beta = -.15$ ,  $p < .01$ ). However, the indirect effects of the marital stress on life satisfaction through cut-off, emotional reactivity, and fusion with others are not found to be significant ( $\beta = -.00$ ,  $p = .94$ ;  $\beta = -.04$ ,  $p = .10$ ;  $\beta = .04$ ,  $p = .24$ , respectively). Internal dyadic stress indirectly and negatively predicts life satisfaction through I-position. In other words, as the internal dyadic stress level of the participants' increases, their I-position score decreases, which in turn decreases life satisfaction of the participants.

Regarding dyadic satisfaction, only the indirect effects of the marital stress on dyadic satisfaction through I position is found to be significant ( $\beta = -.16$ ,  $p < .01$ ). However, the indirect effects of internal dyadic stress on dyadic satisfaction through cut-off, emotional reactivity and fusion were not significant ( $\beta = -.00$ ,  $p = .94$ ;  $\beta = -.03$ ,  $p = .09$ ;  $\beta = .03$ ,  $p = .07$ , respectively). That is, as the internal dyadic stress level of the participants increases, their I-position score decreases, which in turn decreases dyadic satisfaction of the participants.

#### **4.3.3.4 Squared Multiple Correlations ( $R^2$ ) of the Hypothesized Structural Model**

In order to find out how much variance in dyadic satisfaction and life satisfaction was explained by latent variables in structural model,  $R^2$  values were calculated. All squared multiple correlation coefficients ( $R^2$ ) for mediator and outcome variables were given. Perceived stress, marital stress and mediator variables explained 37 % of the variance in life satisfaction and 63 % of the variance in dyadic satisfaction. Perceived stress and marital stress explained 10 % of the variance in fusion with others, 8 % of the variance in I-position, 4 % of the variance in emotional reactivity, and only 1% of the variance in cut-off. This result revealed that the final revised model explains dyadic satisfaction better than life satisfaction.

#### **4.3.3.5 Hypothesis Testing**

In this section, hypotheses stated in introduction section will be evaluated. Most of the hypotheses for direct effects in the hypothesized model were supported, while most of the hypothesis for indirect effects in the hypothesized structural model were not supported. Due to the multicollinearity issue, hypotheses regarding chronic extradyadic stress (Hypothesis 3a, Hypothesis 3b, Hypothesis 3c, Hypothesis 12a, Hypothesis 12b, Hypothesis 12c, Hypothesis 12d, Hypothesis 13a, Hypothesis 13b, Hypothesis 13c, Hypothesis 13d) were not tested in this model.

Table 4.7

## Direct, Indirect and Total Effects of the Model

<b>Direct Effects</b>	$\beta$	BC Interval
Perceived stress → life satisfaction	-.21**	-.28, -.21,
Perceived stress → dyadic satisfaction	-.32**	-.38, -.32
Perceived stress → I position	-.29**	-.39, -.19
Perceived stress → cut-off	.09*	-.02, .19
Perceived stress → fusion	.31**	.20, .40
Perceived stress → emotional reactivity	.20**	.19, .28
Intradyadic stress → life satisfaction	-.33**	-.38, -.21
Intradyadic stress → dyadic satisfaction	-.51**	-.58, -.32
Intradyadic stress → I position	-.26**	-.39, -.19
Intradyadic stress → cut-off	-.00	-.02, .19
Intradyadic stress → fusion	.21**	.20, .40
Intradyadic stress → emotional reactivity	.11**	.19, .08
I position → life satisfaction	.38**	.25, .49
I position → dyadic satisfaction	.52**	.41, .61
Cut-off → life satisfaction	-.08*	-.15, .04
Cut-off → dyadic satisfaction	-.09*	-.13, -.02
Fusion → life satisfaction	-.10*	-.28, .09
Fusion → dyadic satisfaction	-.12**	-.25, .04
Emotional reactivity → life satisfaction	-.22**	-.34, -.05
Emotional reactivity → dyadic satisfaction	-.23**	-.33, -.09
<b>Indirect Effects</b>	$\beta$	BC Interval
Perceived stress → I position → L satisfaction	-.14**	-.21, -.01

Table 4.7. (cont'd)

<b>Indirect Effects</b>	$\beta$	BC Interval
Perceived stress → cut-off → L satisfaction	-.01	-.02, .01
Perceived stress → ER → L satisfaction	.05*	-.10, .06
Perceived stress → fusion → L satisfaction	-.03	-.11, .04
Perceived stress → I position → D satisfaction	-.15**	-.21, -.09
Perceived stress → cut-off → D satisfaction	-.004	-.02, .00
Perceived stress → ER → dyadic satisfaction	-.04**	-.07, .01
Perceived stress → fusion → D satisfaction	-.03	-.08, .01
Intra stress → I position → L satisfaction	-.15**	-.23, -.07
Intra stress → cut-off → L satisfaction	.00	-.02, .02
Intra stress → ER → L satisfaction	-.04	-.10, .00
Intra stress → fusion → L satisfaction	-.04	-.12, .02
Intra stress → I position → D satisfaction	-.16**	-.23, -.09
Intra stress → cut-off → D satisfaction	.00	-.02, .02
Intra stress → ER → D satisfaction	-.03	-.07, .00
Intra stress → fusion → D satisfaction	-.03	-.08, .00
<b>Total Effects</b>	$\beta$	BC Interval
Perceived stress → life satisfaction	-.397**	-.48, -.29
Perceived stress → dyadic satisfaction	-.549**	-.62, -.45
Intradynamic stress → life satisfaction	-.46**	-.58, -.29
Intradynamic stress → dyadic satisfaction	-.67**	-.72, -.45

*Note.* Reported BC intervals are the bias corrected 95% confidence interval of estimates resulting from bootstrap analysis. Intra stress = Intradynamic stress, ER = Emotional reactivity, L satisfaction = Life satisfaction, D satisfaction = Dyadic satisfaction.

#### 4.3.3.5.1 Hypotheses for the Direct Effects in the Structural Model

The main hypothesis of the study was confirmed since a statistically significant amount of variance in life satisfaction and marital satisfaction is explained by differentiation of self, intradyadic stress and perceived stress. Regarding the hypothesis, following sub-hypotheses were created to examine direct paths proposed in the hypothesized structural model.

*Hypothesis 1a:* (Perceived stress to life satisfaction) Perceived stress will be related to life satisfaction directly (*Path 1*). The hypothesis was confirmed and there was a significant negative relationship between perceived stress and life satisfaction,  $\beta = -.21, p < .05, [CI -.28, -.21]$ .

*Hypothesis 1b:* (Perceived stress to dyadic satisfaction) Perceived stress will be related to dyadic satisfaction directly (*Path 2*). The hypothesis was confirmed and there was a significant negative relationship between perceived stress and dyadic satisfaction,  $\beta = -.32, p < .05, [CI -.28, -.32]$ .

*Hypothesis 1c:* (Perceived stress to differentiation of self variables) Perceived stress will be related to differentiation of self variables (I position, cut-off, fusion with others, and emotional reactivity) directly (*Path 3, Path 4, Path 5, Path 6, respectively*). The hypothesis was confirmed and there was a significant positive relationship between perceived stress and cut-off,  $\beta = .09, p < .05, [CI -.02, .19]$ , fusion with others  $\beta = .31, p < .05, [CI .20, .40]$  and emotional reactivity,  $\beta = .20, p < .05, [CI .19, .28]$ . However, perceived stress was found to be significantly, and negatively linked to I position,  $\beta = -.29, p < .05, [CI -.39, -.19]$ .

*Hypothesis 2a:* (Intradyadic stress to life satisfaction) Dyadic will be related to life satisfaction directly (*Path 7*). The hypothesis was confirmed and there was a significant negative relationship between intradyadic stress and life satisfaction,  $\beta = -.33, p <.05, [CI -.38, -.21]$ .

*Hypothesis 2b:* (Dyadic stress to dyadic satisfaction) Dyadic stress will be related to dyadic satisfaction directly (*Path 8*). The hypothesis was confirmed and there was a significant negative relationship between intradyadic stress and dyadic satisfaction,  $\beta = -.51, p <.05, [CI -.58, -.32]$ .

*Hypothesis 2c:* (Dyadic stress to differentiation of self variables) Dyadic stress will be related to differentiation of self variables (I position, cut-off, fusion with others, and emotional reactivity) directly (*Path 9, Path 10, Path 11, Path 12, respectively*). The hypothesis was partially confirmed since the relationship between intradyadic stress and emotional cut-off was not significant. However, there was a significant negative relationships between dyadic satisfaction and I position,  $\beta = -.26, p <.05, [CI -.39, -.19]$ , and positive relationship between fusion,  $\beta = .21, p <.05, [CI .20, .40]$  and emotional reactivity,  $\beta = .11, p <.05, [CI .19, .08]$ .

*Hypothesis 4a:* (I position to life satisfaction) I position will be related to life satisfaction directly (*Path 19*). The hypothesis was confirmed and there was a significant positive relationship between I position and life satisfaction,  $\beta = .38, p <.05, [CI .25, .49]$ .

*Hypothesis 4b:* (I position to dyadic satisfaction) I position will be related to dyadic satisfaction directly (*Path 20*). The hypothesis was confirmed and there

was a significant positive relationship between I position and dyadic satisfaction,  $\beta = .52, p < .05, [CI .41, .61]$ .

*Hypothesis 5a:* (Cut-off to life satisfaction) Cut-off will be related to life satisfaction directly (*Path 21*). The hypothesis was confirmed and there was a significant negative relationship between cut-off and life satisfaction,  $\beta = -.08, p < .05, [CI -.15, .04]$ .

*Hypothesis 5b:* (Cut-off to dyadic satisfaction) Cut-off will be related to dyadic satisfaction directly (*Path 22*). The hypothesis was confirmed and there was a significant negative relationship between cut-off and dyadic satisfaction,  $\beta = -.09, p < .05, [CI -.13, -.02]$ .

*Hypothesis 6a:* (Fusion with others to life satisfaction) Fusion with others will be related to life satisfaction directly (*Path 23*). The hypothesis was confirmed and there was a significant negative relationship between fusion and life satisfaction,  $\beta = -.10, p < .05, [CI -.28, .09]$ .

*Hypothesis 6b:* (Fusion with others to dyadic satisfaction) Fusion with others will be related to dyadic satisfaction directly (*Path 24*). The hypothesis was confirmed and there was a significant negative relationship between fusion and dyadic satisfaction,  $\beta = -.12, p < .05, [CI -.25, .04]$ .

*Hypothesis 7a:* (Emotional reactivity to life satisfaction) Emotional reactivity will be related to life satisfaction directly (*Path 25*). The hypothesis was confirmed and there was a significant negative relationship between emotional reactivity and life satisfaction,  $\beta = -.22, p < .05, [CI -.34, -.05]$ .

*Hypothesis 7b:* (Emotional reactivity to dyadic satisfaction) Emotional reactivity will be related to dyadic satisfaction directly (*Path 26*). The hypothesis was confirmed and there was a significant negative relationship between emotional reactivity and dyadic satisfaction,  $\beta = -.23$ ,  $p < .05$ , [CI  $-.33$ ,  $-.09$ ].

#### **4.3.3.5.2 Hypotheses for the Indirect Effects in the Structural Model**

*Hypothesis 8a:* (Perceived Stress to I-position to life satisfaction). Perceived Stress will be related to I position, which in turn, will be related to life satisfaction (*Path 3 & Path 19*). The hypothesis was confirmed and the mediation effect was significant and partial  $\beta = -.14$ ,  $p < .05$ , [CI  $-.21$ ,  $-.01$ ]. The relationship between perceived stress and life satisfaction is mediated through I position.

*Hypothesis 8b:* (Perceived Stress to cut-off to life satisfaction). Perceived Stress will be related to cut-off, which in turn, will be related to life satisfaction (*Path 4 & Path 21*). The hypothesis was rejected.

*Hypothesis 8c:* (Perceived Stress to fusion to life satisfaction). Perceived Stress will be related to fusion, which in turn, will be related to life satisfaction (*Path 5 & Path 23*). The hypothesis was rejected.

*Hypothesis 8d:* (Perceived Stress to emotional reactivity to life satisfaction). Perceived Stress will be related to emotional reactivity, which in turn, will be related to life satisfaction (*Path 6 & Path 25*). The hypothesis was accepted and the mediation effect was significant and partial  $\beta = .05$ ,  $p < .05$ , [CI  $-.10$ ,  $.06$ ]. The

relationship between perceived stress and life satisfaction is mediated through emotional reactivity.

*Hypothesis 9a:* (Perceived Stress to I-position to dyadic satisfaction). Perceived Stress will be related to I position, which in turn, will be related to dyadic satisfaction (*Path 3 & Path 20*). The hypothesis was accepted and the mediation effect was significant and partial  $\beta = -.15, p < .05, [CI -.21, -.09]$ . The relationship between perceived stress and dyadic satisfaction is mediated through I position.

*Hypothesis 9b:* (Perceived Stress to cut-off to dyadic satisfaction). Perceived Stress will be related to cut-off, which in turn, will be related to dyadic satisfaction (*Path 4 & Path 22*). The hypothesis was rejected.

*Hypothesis 9c:* (Perceived Stress to fusion to dyadic satisfaction). Perceived Stress will be related to fusion, which in turn, will be related to dyadic satisfaction (*Path 5 & Path 24*). The hypothesis was rejected.

*Hypothesis 9d:* (Perceived Stress to emotional reactivity to dyadic satisfaction). Perceived Stress will be related to emotional reactivity, which in turn, will be related to dyadic satisfaction (*Path 6 & Path 26*). The hypothesis was accepted and the mediation effect was significant and partial  $\beta = -.04, p < .05, [CI -.07, .01]$ . The relationship between perceived stress and life satisfaction is mediated through I position.

*Hypothesis 10a:* (Dyadic Stress to I-position to life satisfaction). Dyadic Stress will be related to I position, which in turn, will be related to life satisfaction

(*Path 9 & Path 19*). The hypothesis was accepted and the mediation effect was significant and partial  $\beta = -.15, p < .05, [CI -.23, -.07]$ . The relationship between perceived stress and life satisfaction is mediated through I position.

*Hypothesis 10b: (Dyadic Stress to cut-off to life satisfaction)*. Dyadic Stress will be related to cut-off, which in turn, will be related to life satisfaction (*Path 10 & Path 21*). The hypothesis was rejected.

*Hypothesis 10c: (Dyadic Stress to fusion to life satisfaction)*. Dyadic Stress will be related to fusion, which in turn, will be related to life satisfaction (*Path 11 & Path 23*). The hypothesis was rejected.

*Hypothesis 10d: (Dyadic Stress to emotional reactivity to life satisfaction)*. Dyadic Stress will be related to emotional reactivity, which in turn, will be related to life satisfaction (*Path 12 & Path 25*). The hypothesis was rejected.

*Hypothesis 11a: (Dyadic Stress to I-position to dyadic satisfaction)*. Dyadic Stress will be related to I position, which in turn, will be related to dyadic satisfaction (*Path 9 & Path 20*). The hypothesis was accepted and the mediation effect was significant and partial  $\beta = -.16, p < .05, [CI -.23, -.09]$ . The relationship between dyadic stress and dyadic satisfaction is mediated through I position.

*Hypothesis 11b: (Dyadic Stress to cut-off to dyadic satisfaction)*. Dyadic Stress will be related to cut-off, which in turn, will be related to dyadic satisfaction (*Path 10 & Path 22*). The hypothesis was rejected.

*Hypothesis 11c: (Dyadic Stress to fusion to dyadic satisfaction)*. Dyadic Stress

will be related to fusion, which in turn, will be related to dyadic satisfaction (*Path 11 & Path 24*). The hypothesis was rejected.

*Hypothesis 11d:* (Dyadic Stress to emotional reactivity to dyadic satisfaction). Dyadic Stress will be related to emotional reactivity, which in turn, will be related to dyadic satisfaction (*Path 12 & Path 26*). The hypothesis was rejected.

#### **4.4 Summary of the Results**

The purpose of the study was to understand the nature of the relationships among stress experiences (perceived, chronic intradyadic and chronic extradyadic stress), differentiation of self variables, and life satisfaction satisfaction and marital satisfaction variables. Chronic extradyadic stress was eliminated from the study because of the high multicollinearity values, thus intradyadic stress and perceived stress, and the differentiation of self variables were the endogenous variables, while dyadic satisfaction and life satisfaction were the exogenous variables of the study.

Results of the descriptive analyses demonstrated that the sample reported nearly high level of life satisfaction and marital satisfaction and moderate level of perceived stress and intradyadic stress compared to the possible range of scores. In terms of differentiation of self variables, mean values of I position and emotional reactivity seem to be higher in comparison to fusion with others and cut-off values. Bivariate correlations among the variables were all significant and in the expected direction, except for the non-significant correlation between cut-off and intradyadic and extradyadic stress.

Regarding the model testing, effect of gender was considered as a significant factor and thus multi-group structural equation modeling was selected for further analysis. However, the measurement model did not differ according to gender based on configural, metric, and scalar invariance tests. Then, the model was tested with a single sample after eliminating the chronic extradyadic stress variable and the results of the test model showed that among the variables, I position was the strongest predictor of life satisfaction and intradyadic stress and I position were the strongest predictor of marital satisfaction. Besides, perceived stress had a direct effect on all the mediator variables (I-position, cut-off, fusion, and emotional reactivity). The mediators, I-position, fusion with others, cut-off and emotional reactivity had significant direct paths on both life satisfaction and dyadic satisfaction. Perceived stress had direct negative effects on both life satisfaction and dyadic satisfaction. The indirect effects of perceived stress on both life satisfaction and dyadic satisfaction through I position and emotional reactivity were significant.

Regarding internal dyadic stress, internal dyadic stress had direct effects on I-position, fusion, and emotional reactivity. Internal dyadic stress had direct negative and significant effects on both life satisfaction and dyadic satisfaction. Only the indirect effects of the internal dyadic stress on both life satisfaction and dyadic satisfaction through I position were significant. Multiple correlation coefficients revealed that perceived stress and internal dyadic stress explained 37 % of the variance in life satisfaction and 63 % of the variance in dyadic satisfaction.

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION

In this chapter, first, an overall discussion about the findings is presented. Second, the findings of the direct and indirect effects are discussed in relation to the literature. Finally, implications for practice, theory and research are highlighted.

#### 5.1 Discussion of the Findings

The aim of this study was to investigate the predictors of life satisfaction and marital satisfaction in Turkish married individuals within a proposed model, including differentiation of self variables, perceived stress and internal stress. In particular, it was explored (a) to what extent marital satisfaction and life satisfaction were predicted by differentiation of self variables and stress factors, and (b) how the interactions among these variables led to life satisfaction and marital satisfaction. Theoretically, according to Bowen (Bowen, 1978; Kerr & Bowen, 1988), the differentiation of self is the basis of long-term intimacy and unity in marriage. It is closely related to the differentiation of the self that the individual establishes a balance between two life forces (individuality and togetherness) and maintains the sense of self, that is the position of the self. Individuals with high levels of differentiation achieve better balance and do not lose their sense of self in case of stressful and

conflictual situations. On the other hand, individuals with lower levels of differentiation find it difficult to balance and lose their sense of self. As a result of inability to maintain balance, they exhibit emotional responsiveness, emotional retreat and intertwining behavior with others (Bowen, 1976, 1978; Kerr & Bowen, 1988; Skowron, 2000). The present study sheds light on several notions of Bowen's theory, supports these assertions and reinforces the importance of differentiation of self to individual and relational well-being.

There has been no study assessing simultaneous multiple associations among the stress and differentiation of self factors in a conceptual model of life satisfaction and marital satisfaction in our country. Therefore, especially mediation effect findings of this study were compared with previous studies conducted in international literature.

According to the preliminary findings, there were moderate relationships among exogenous, mediator, and endogenous variables in the present study. Specifically, the highest significant association was between I position and dyadic satisfaction, while the weakest significant association was between cut-off and perceived stress. There was no significant correlation between cut-off and intradyadic stress. In terms of direct effects in the proposed model, the best predictor of life satisfaction was I-position, followed by intradyadic stress, perceived stress, emotional reactivity, fusion with others and emotional cut-off. The best predictor of dyadic satisfaction was taking I position, followed by intradyadic stress, perceived stress, emotional reactivity, fusion with others and emotional cut-off. Regarding indirect effects in the model, life satisfaction was best predicted by intradyadic stress via I position, and marital satisfaction

was best predicted by intradyadic stress via I position. Directions of correlations between differentiation of self and perceived stress were all in the expected direction. Perceived stress, intradyadic stress, and differentiation of self were significant predictors of life satisfaction and marital satisfaction. I position was positively related to life satisfaction and marital satisfaction while remaining differentiation of self and stress variables were negatively related to life and marital satisfaction.

Interpretation of these findings suggests that the association between perceived and spouse-related stress and level of life and dyadic satisfaction are accounted for, in part, by one's capacity to regulate emotional reactivity, and to take I positions in important relationships. Cut-off and fusion with others did not function as a mediator in the model. Moreover, no gender differences were observed within this model, suggesting that differentiation of self mediates the relationship between stress and satisfaction in both husbands and wives. These results are merely consistent with the hypothesis that differentiation operates as a vehicle through which stress influences satisfaction with life and romantic relationship.

One of the most interesting findings in this study that also triggers the need for further exploration is that the proposed theoretical model did not differ in terms of gender based on measurement invariance tests. In addition, for both husband and wife sample, an increase in I-position and a decrease in emotional reactivity which are signals of higher differentiation of self increase life satisfaction and marital satisfaction. Since there are studies emphasizing the gender differences especially in case of marital satisfaction (Lim &

Lennings, 1996; Peleg, 2008) and they revealed that as the differentiation of self increase, women's satisfaction from the marriage decrease or makes no difference. The Bowenian Family Systems Theory has been developed in the 1950's and it has been more likely that traditional gender roles are observed in marriages. This has put women in less differentiated position and they have been discouraged from being independent and assertive. Therefore, this gender difference is explained by traditional gender roles and women's expectations from the marriage (e.g. need for more dependency, seeking approval) in those studies. This finding contributes to re-energizing the theory that may signal the expansion in women's roles and expectations of equality in marriage (Kwon, 2000). This study becomes one of the studies that has replicated the finding that women who scored higher on differentiation of self tend to be less satisfied with the marriage.

Additionally, an adaptation study of an instrument, named as Multidimensional Stress Questionnaire for Couples was conducted and the results indicate that except for major stressor events, acute and chronic, intradyadic and extradyadic stress subscales of MSQ-C Turkish version have appropriate psychometric properties. Validation of the Multidimensional Stress-Questionnaire for Couples indicated its suitability for measuring marital stressors and external stressors. According to relational framework, simultaneous measurement of internal and external, major and minor, acute and chronic stressors is important (Kurosawa & Yokotani, 2018) and these aspects have different effects on adult psychological states (Randall & Bodenmann, 2017). The MSQ-C is an advantageous measurement tool for measuring stress to see its impacts on intimate, coupling relationships. The

MSQ-C can be used to assess stress in both married couples or unmarried partners. Furthermore, the MSQ can clarify the presence or absence of significant life events and the extent to which these life events affect the psychological state of individuals in an intimate relationship. Since the validation was conducted in heterogenous couples in terms of life cycle, number of children, and age, other researchers may also benefit from assessing couples from various backgrounds and at different stages of life.

### **5.1.1 Discussion of the Direct Effects**

In the present study, results of life satisfaction and marital satisfaction model testing showed significant relationships between all dimensions of differentiation of self and marital satisfaction and life satisfaction, which is worth comparing with previous studies. Starting with the direct effect of differentiation of self variables on life satisfaction and marital satisfaction, according to findings of the current study, an increase in I-position score has a direct positive effect on both life satisfaction and marital satisfaction of married couples. However, emotional reactivity, fusion with others and emotional cut-off has significant negative direct effects on marital satisfaction and life satisfaction.

To begin with the direct effects on marital satisfaction regarding differentiation of self variables, literature presents consistent results with this finding. Direct effects of differentiation of self variables on marital satisfaction has led to a general conclusion that the higher the level of differentiation, the more satisfied the spouses are with their relationship. In accordance with this finding of the study, many studies in the literature reveal a positive

relationship between the concept of self-differentiation and marital adjustment. According to these studies, high differentiation is related to higher dyadic adjustment, dyadic satisfaction, and sexual satisfaction; lower differentiation is related to lower marital adjustment, dyadic satisfaction, and high marital conflict (Arpita, 2006; Bhatt, 2001; Birditt & Antonucci, 2008; Campos, Keltner, Bech, Gonzaga, & John, 2007; Hollander, 2007; Patrick, Sells, Giordano, & Tollerud, 2007; Timm & Keiley, 2011). In the study conducted by Harrison (2003) and Kruse (2007), it was found that couples with low differentiation and higher fusion characteristics have decreased marital quality. This consistent finding can be explained by following interpretations.

Higher differentiation of self means that higher marital satisfaction may be due to the more explicit and satisfying communication between spouses and open feedbacks of spouses to each other regarding critical issues for them. For example, this open communication provides more explicit dialogues regarding their sexuality which increases their sexual satisfaction and marital satisfaction indirectly (Timm & Keiley, 2011). As much as they feel comfortable while communicating with their partner and talk about the issues comfortably, they can work together to increase of their marital quality.

Individuals with high levels of differentiation are also comfortable about intimacy in close relationships, do not lose their I-position in relationships by correctly establishing the balance between togetherness and individuality, maintain their emotional commitment with determination without fear of losing their identities, and do not experience feeling of isolation and loneliness due to intense feelings associated with emotional interruption (Skowron, 2005;

Skowron & Schmittland, 2003; 2000). In this context, it may be argued that individuals who are in a relationship without being dependent on others and have a functional and independent self-perception will have a higher chance of having a higher quality marital relationship. It can be said that the person's behaving according to the expectations of their wife or husband by suppressing the need for autonomy and consuming himself by being constantly influenced by his or her emotions will negatively affect the quality of the marriage relationship. However, in either case, as they sustain their I position in the relationship, they experience more satisfaction in the relationship.

There is a significant negative link between emotional reactivity and marital satisfaction in the present study. There are similar findings in the literature. While dealing with the demands of daily and family life, higher arousals accompanying strong emotions experienced during interactions between spouses is a strong predictor of decreased marital satisfaction (Levenson & Gottman, 1983; Gottman & Levenson, 1992). In case of disagreements and misunderstandings between couples, lower level of emotional flooding is, on the other hand, related to higher satisfaction with their relationship (Gubbins, Perosa, & Bartle-Haring, 2010). Therefore, excessive emotional arousal and marital satisfaction reduce one another.

It can be interpreted from the above that couples with an increased reactivity, changes and tensions in the dyad elicit strong feelings and end up with accompanying arousal, which in turn, lead to obstinate and excessive evaluations of marriage, as a result, making it difficult to function properly in

the relationship in a stable and satisfactory manner. It is crucial that over reaction essentially involves reacting with fear (Skowron & Friedlander, 1998; Tuason & Friedlander, 2000), and as revealed by Gottman and Krokoff (1989), wives' frequent reactions with fear and sadness are especially unfavorable for long-lasting relationships. This is not valid only for anger. In contrast, expressing anger or contempt is a prerequisite for dealing with fear of rejection and expression of constructive anger is part of the differentiation of self. Being able to express anger toward the partner help them recover from the situation before turning into conflict.

In addition, emotional cut-off and fusion with others were found to have a direct negative influence on satisfaction of marriage in the current study. According to Bowen, being dissatisfied within the relationship results from extreme ways of functioning which are form of defense against fear and in the long run, being dissatisfied creates frustration (Gubbins, Perosa, & Baretle-Haring, 2010). Fusion may create problems in the marital relationship. Fusion with others makes reference to people who feel totally independent from their social environment and insistently expect to be satisfied and supported emotionally in their close relationships (Kerr & Bowen, 1988). Fused partners suppose that they are responsible of spouses' happiness, hardships, sufferings, or faults due to lack of autonomy. This situation leads to continuous accusation of each other and holding responsible for the inability to satisfy reciprocal expectations in a satisfactory way (Peleg, 2008). Furthermore, fusion impairs sense of personal identity, and marital relation may be regarded as a threatening remark to sense of self. Fusion also signals not having healthy boundaries between spouses. As a result of this type of

codependency, one is not able to tell the difference between their thoughts and feelings and those of the partner under whatever emotions dominate the family.

Bradbury, Fincham, and Beach (2000), Gottman and Krokoff (1989), and Leggett, Roberts-Pittman, Byczek, and Morse (2012) studied range of negative behaviors and emotions in unsatisfied marriage and they have concluded that negative behaviors in marriage include high level of criticism, complaining, engaging in serious quarrels, regular disagreements, avoiding confrontations with the spouse and withdrawal from the interaction. They resemble the behaviors included in emotional reactivity and cut-off. Since the result of this study showed that they decreased the satisfaction in marriage, it can be said that results are in accordance with each other. Emotional cut-off is an essentially important predictor of emotional availability in case of forming and maintaining a satisfactory relationship (Skowron & Friedlander, 1998; Skowron, 2000).

Gottmann and Krokof (1989) found that the prominent factor in decline of marriage quality is related to being away from interaction, defensiveness, and stubbornness. These negative attitudes are included in emotional cut-off and this situation creates obstacles to negotiation of problems and searching new ways to overcome with stress in marriage (Peleg, 2008). Withdrawal from reciprocal action, which is one of the sources of support with partner (Neff & Broady, 2011; Landis et al., 2013), triggers feelings of loneliness (Gottman, 1999), and accordingly, the person lacks the support of his/her spouse. In turn, this kind of loneliness may lead to decrease in marital satisfaction.

Similar to findings of the literature (Anderson & Sabatelli, 1992; Aryamanesh et al., 2012; Gubbins et al., 2010; Lampis, 2016; Lampis, Busonera et al., 2017; Lampis, Cataudella et al., 2017; Peleg, 2008; Skowron, 2000; Skowron & Dendy, 2004), current research confirmed Bowen's theory in the notion that individuals with a greater capacity to take an I- position in their relationships with others experience and are able to undergo better dyadic adjustment, probably due to being better at creating functional affective relationships and responding to their partners' emotions empathically.

Self-awareness is advanced by empathy and positioned at the center of higher levels of differentiation. The more a person has a high-levels of self-awareness and able to recognize his/her own personal emotions, the more they are able to approach with empathy to others' emotions and in turn this ability to read and to respond to emotions may increase satisfaction of marriage. Well differentiated individuals able to figure out that people might make mistake, however, truly pivotal thing is not whether errors will be made, rather how couples or families cope with them when they occur. The issue of emotional intelligence and the ability to bring an empathic understanding have utmost importance, and as Beavers (1985) suggests, a tolerance for ambivalence is essential. These might cover the characteristics of highly differentiated individuals because empathy requires self-awareness and it lies at the heart of higher levels of differentiation.

Kaletka (2014) also found similar conclusion in a women sample. In an Israeli study (Peleg, 2008), marital satisfaction in women is related to only cut-off in women, whereas in men, it is related to both emotional reactivity and I

position. In an Iranian study, Yousefi et al. (2009) found that each dimension of differentiation of self resulted in positive correlations with marital satisfaction. So it can be concluded that findings of only women samples also resemble to the results of the present study. In Polat and İlhan's study (2018), they concluded that being able to take I position and cut-off were significant predictors while fusion with others and emotional reactivity were not significant predictors of marital adjustment.

Positive impact of differentiation of self on marital satisfaction can also be explained from intimacy perspective. In most common definitions of intimacy, commonalities are couple's level of closeness, sharing ideas and values, shared activities, sexuality, frequency of agreements and behaviors showing affection to each other (Heller & Wood, 1998; Moss & Schwebel, 1993). Nevertheless, it can also be suggested that since intimacy is a very subjective experience, this phenomenological experience may mean differently to each individual. Beside focusing solely on behaviors and interactions between spouses, self-based definitions can be possible. For instance, Malone and Malone (1987) describe intimacy as knowing oneself and indicate self-awareness in the presence of another. This model of intimacy emphasizes being able to be authentic in a relationship and communicate own needs more effectively with the partner. Differentiation of self may include this aspect of intimacy and thus increase marital satisfaction.

Regarding life satisfaction, differentiation of self variables had a significant direct effect on life satisfaction. Except I position, emotional reactivity, cut-off and fusion with others had negative direct effects on life satisfaction. These

findings support previous studies, showing positive connections between differentiation of self and emotional well-being, (Skowron, Stanley, & Shapiro, 2009) and satisfaction with life (Oishi, 2006). Kim and Jung (2015) investigated the relationship between life satisfaction and differentiation of self and higher differentiation of self was significantly related to higher life satisfaction. The results of the present study revealed that I-position had a direct positive effect on life satisfaction. This capability to take an I position is a positive quality for life in general since individuals in this manner may speak their minds and defends themselves against pressures from family and peers. Being less approval seeking and less anxious about experiencing what you really desire increase the meaning in one's life.

Parallel to findings, Skowron, Holmes, and Sabatelli (2003) surveyed 221 individuals and found well-being for both men and women is predicted by differentiation of self was in their sample. Bohlander (1995b) also found that differentiation of self explained significant variance in married women's psychological well-being. Similarly, for Arab women, positive correlations were found between I-position and satisfaction with life (Biadsky-Ashkar & Peleg, 2013).

Ross and Murdock (2014) found that as one's level of differentiation of self increases, that individual's life satisfaction also increases. I position has the highest correlation, followed by emotional reactivity, emotional cut-off and fusion with others with life satisfaction. Similarly, the present study found that higher differentiation of self was positively correlated with satisfaction with

life and accounted for a significant portion of the variance in satisfaction with life.

Individuals with a high level of differentiation are able to apprehend that human behavior is not simple, but complex and have various dynamics rather than one single reason of act. They have learned not to take human weakness and inappropriate human behaviour personally. This situation protects them from emotional reactivity and to stay away from detrimental conformity, upheaval, control struggles, or emotional distancing (Beavers, 1985), hence, this type of emotionally mature people may experience higher satisfaction with their lives.

The association between satisfaction with life and I-position relies on Bowen's theoretical approach (Kerr & Bowen, 1988) indicating that higher level of differentiation of self permits higher psychological adaptation, emotional well-being, and physical and mental health. This is because a well-differentiated person is better able to guard his or her intimacy and autonomy, and functions more efficiently, while taking a stand in inter-personal relationships. In addition, well-differentiated individuals are better in problem solving and the center of their attention is given to life goals crucial to him/her. Probably, possessing all these abilities related to higher level of differentiation of self might allow men and women to feel stronger and more substantial. Furthermore, it might have contribution to strive for their self-fulfillment and self-appreciation as well as to create the basis for agreeable and satisfactory familial and intimate relations (Hawkins, Letcher, Sanson, Smar, & Toumbourou, 2009).

The findings of the present study in terms of the relationship between stress and differentiation of self supported the previous literature. Murray, Daniels and Murray (2006) conducted a study with patients with fibromyalgia syndrome and concluded that fibromyalgia syndrome were significantly correlated with higher levels of perceived stress, evaluation of disease severity, lower levels of differentiation of self, and higher levels of emotional cutoff. In addition, perceived stress was significantly negatively correlated with differentiation of self-total score. The current study also supported this finding since indicators of the differentiation of self was correlated in the same direction with aforementioned study.

In consideration with the results regarding stress and differentiation of self, Murdock and Gore (2004) found that differentiation of self was significantly and negatively correlated with perceived stress. Subsequently, Krycak, Murdock, and Marszalek (2012) asserted the significant role of actual and perceived stress on differentiation of self. In the case of actual stress, individuals experience a real stressful and specific event. For example, breast cancer or colorectal cancer cases were examined and differentiation of self was found to be negatively correlated with experienced stress and level of intrusive thoughts (Bartle-Haring & Gregory, 2003). Academic stress is also negatively linked with level of differentiation of self. To be able to take I position and decreased tendency to emotional reactivity, fusion and cut-off decrease the stress related to study (Skowron, Wester, & Azen, 2004).

While many studies have focused on the relationship between differentiation of self and stress and found significant relationship between the two, there are

also studies showing that no significant relationship between exposure to stressful life events and the level of differentiation of self (Tuason & Friedlander, 2000). In subsequent analyses, the authors (Krycak, Murdock, Marszalek, 2012) explained that the measured type of stress plays a significant role in these different results. Actual stress and perceived stress may result in different conclusions. Furthermore, individuals with different levels of differentiation perceive the amount of stress differently and they apply for different strategies to cope with stress. Murdock and Gore (2004) also demonstrated that individuals from different levels of differentiation reported different coping styles. Individuals who were lower in taking I position and higher in emotional reactivity reported higher perceived stress.

I position was negatively linked to both marital and perceived stress while emotional reactivity and fusion with others were positively linked in the present study. In the instrument of differentiation of self, there are items such as "No matter what happens in my life, I know that I'll never lose my sense of who I am.", "I tend to feel pretty stable under stress.", "There's no point getting upset about things I cannot change.", and "When I am having an argument with my partner, I think about this all day." The wordings of these items suggest that individuals who cannot separate their feelings and thoughts, cannot remain calm under stress and lose sense of self, will experience deleterious impact of stress on their lives.

Results of the present study showed that both perceived stress and intradyadic stress had negative direct effects on marital satisfaction. A series of studies have revealed the fact that various forms of stress, such as work stress or

economic strains, have a negative effect on quality of marriage and marital satisfaction (Bodenmann, 2000; Howe, Levy, & Caplan, 2004; Karney & Bradbury, 1995; Leidy, Parke, Cladis, Coltrane, & Duffy, 2009; Neff & Karney, 2004; 2007).

Intradyadic stress refers to relationship stress and tension that become apparent in the relationship, in the form of varying attitudes and needs or disturbing habits of one partner. Studies conducted by Bodenmann et al. (2000, 2007; Bodenmann, Ledermann, Blattner, & Galluzo, 2006) have revealed that marital satisfaction is more affected by stress occurring inside the relationship rather than by outside based stress resources, stress originating outside of the relationship (Bodenmann, 2007). In the present study, intradyadic stress predicts marital satisfaction better than perceived stress. Furthermore, studies of daily stress and critical life events have indicated that in community samples, marital satisfaction is more negatively associated with microstress than with macro events (Bodenmann et al. 2007; Williams, 1995; Karney, Story, & Bradbury, 2005). In another study conducted with couples, Bodenmann (2005) concludes that chronic stressors (stress is experienced over the past twelve months) have greater impact on marital satisfaction. Since perceived stress measures the perception regarding the experiences of last one month and intradyadic stress measures past twelve months, Bodenman's finding supports the finding that intradyadic stress is a better predictor of marital satisfaction in comparison to perceived stress.

Both intradyadic and perceived stress have negative direct effects on life satisfaction. Parallel to this finding, ample of research results has established

a link between increased stress and reduced life satisfaction (e.g., Anders et al., 2012; Bailey & Miller, 1998; Buser & Kearney, 2017; Malinauskas, 2010; Saklofske et al., 2012; Simons et al., 2002; Weinstein & Laverghetta, 2009). For instance, Anders, Frazier, and Shallcross (2012) studied 1,084 college students and concluded that as the numbers of stressful events experienced increases, life satisfaction decreases. Present study results aligned with these findings, in that increased level of stress was linked to decreased life satisfaction among the participants. Likewise, it has been found that life satisfaction is predicted by stress (Barnes & Lightsey, 2005; Hamarat et al., 2001).

### **5.1.2 Discussion of the Indirect Effects**

In the current study, it was found that there were significant indirect relationships among the variables, as well as the direct relations. In the following paragraphs, they were discussed separately.

In the marital satisfaction and life satisfaction model, it was assumed that the relationship between stress (dyadic and perceived stress) and satisfaction (life and marital) variables would be mediated by differentiation of self variables (emotional reactivity, taking I position, fusion with others and emotional cut-off). The analysis confirmed this hypothesis partially, and the results were in line with the literature, especially considering the predictive power of being able to take I position on life satisfaction and marital satisfaction.

Studies examining the differentiation of self variables have found similar results. Starting with life satisfaction, both I position and emotional reactivity mediate the relationship between perceived stress and life satisfaction. Since

an increase in I position and a decrease in emotional reactivity indicate higher differentiation of self, higher differentiation of self functions as a buffer impact of stress on life satisfaction. Skowron et al. (2004) revealed that college stress is significantly predicted by emotional reactivity, I Position, and emotional cut-off separately. Greater emotional reactivity, cut-off, and problems in taking an I position predicted higher stress. Their results indicated that differentiation of self mediated the relationship between exogenous stress and psychological symptoms and adjustment. Stress was negatively related to greater levels of differentiation of self, and in turn, differentiation of self was positively related to psychological adjustment (Skowron, Wester, & Azen, 2004). Similar to this finding, as the perceived stress increases and as an increase in emotional reactivity and a decrease in I position result in lower level of life satisfaction in the present study.

The result of the present study confirming the mediating role of I position and emotional reactivity in the relationship between stress and life satisfaction provided support for Bowen's prediction; the effects of perceived stress in prediction of psychological functioning is mediated by self-differentiation. According to Murdock and Gore (2004), the interaction of differentiation of self and stress predicted variance in psychological functioning. The conducted moderation analysis and their results showed that individuals who were not well-differentiated and experience higher stress reported more dysfunction in comparison to well-differentiated individuals who experienced similar levels of stress. In a sample of Filipinos, Tuason and Friedlander (2000) examined the relationships among differentiation, anxiety, and psychological symptoms and found that the differentiation of self was inversely related to psychological

distress and construct appeared applicable across cultures. As the present study indicated results in line with Bowen's theory, differentiation of self constructs can be evaluated as working independent of cultures.

Stress resulting from the spouse and from being able to protect healthy distance with your partner interact together and have a significant impact on one's life satisfaction. These results may suggest that quality of relations between spouses are important factors which determine individual well being and there are studies supporting this conclusion in the literature (Alayi et. al., 2011; Peterson-Post, et al., 2014; Trudel & Goldfarb, 2010).

Additionally, coping theories emphasized that rather than the nature and magnitude of stress, it is more important to know how to cope with it (Murdock & Gore, 2004). Murdock and Gore (2004) examined the interplay of coping, stress and differentiation of self through Bowenian lenses and concluded that differentiation of self moderated the effects of perceived stress in predicting psychological functioning. The relationship between differentiation of self and stress predicted variance in functioning beyond what was accounted for by coping styles, indicating that even though coping and differentiation of self are linked, and they are not same terms. There was also significant negative correlation between differentiation of self and perceived stress. To put it into another way, people with a poor level of self-differentiation that experiences high levels of stress are more prone to have psychological dysfunction than well-differentiated people who experienced equivalent stress levels.

I position mediates the impact of perceived and intradyadic stress on life satisfaction maybe because those with higher levels of differentiation will not misperceive daily hassles or major life events as stressful (Kerr & Bowen, 1988). Therefore, the fact that one's level of differentiation has an impact on both how to perceive and cope with stress is consistent with the theory.

The way individuals keep balance between thinking and emotion systems in close relationships may have different influences on their ability to see the world as comprehensible, manageable and meaningful (Vaziri, Jomehri, & Farrokhi, 2014). Sense of coherence means an enduring feeling of confidence so stimuli driving from one's internal and external environments such as perceived stress and intradyadic stress, do not break the structure and predictability of their life. They continue to perceive that there are resources available to meet demands of these stimuli and these demands are worthy of investment. Greater differentiation provides people this thoughtful and reflectful experience of situations, awareness of one's emotions and shifting from strong affect to logical reasoning. Antonovsky (1987), asserts that these are important characteristics to deal with stressful situations and defines individuals with strong sense of coherence. Rogers et al.'s findings (2012) also support that differentiation of self is strongly associated with sense of coherence with life. From this sense of coherence perspective, function of differentiation of self in case of stress is about experiencing and modulating emotions, being able to remain calm in the relationships, and not being vulnerable to stress.

As for the connection between taking I position and emotional reactivity and satisfaction with life, it is likely that a vicious circle emerges. Individuals with high levels of emotional reactivity find it difficult to regulate their emotions when they experience intimate relationships and intense feelings. In such cases, they also experience difficulty in protecting I position. Given that they start to feel higher levels of tension and anxiety, they may even emotionally distance themselves in order to cope with feelings of anxiety. The distance from others may in turn increase feelings of loneliness and anxiety (Borzumato-Gainey, Kennedy, McCabe & Degges-White, 2009; Degges-White & Myers, 2006; Jankowski, & Hooper, 2012), thus decreasing their satisfaction with life. As much as an individual cannot function efficiently and focus on their own important life goals, they will feel weak and perceive their life as less satisfied.

Well-differentiated individuals have the ability to cope with stress and anxiety more successfully, which reduces emotional reactivity during emotionally charged periods (Framo, 1992). Greater differentiation leads adults to live healthier and happier lives. To be able to take an I position and emotional reactivity mediated the relationship between perceived stress and marital satisfaction while cut-off and fusion with others were not significant mediators in perceived stress and marital satisfaction relationship. As Bowenian theory asserts, individual's degree of differentiation reflects itself in the marital or any other close relationship and while functioning under stress. Differentiation allows flexible boundaries in close relationships. Flexibility of boundaries between husband and wife increases as differentiation of self increases, or vice versa (Kaleta, 2011). However, low-differentiated

individuals respond to stress and the crisis in the dyad with withdrawal from interaction, keeping distance or seeking excessive intimacy with the spouse or other individuals, and this decreases the quality of relationship.

Kerr and Bowen (1988) assert that individuals with high differentiation of self level are more resilient to stress and develop fewer dysfunctional symptoms. Parallel to this finding, in case of stress, being able to take stronger I position and less emotional reactivity are indicators of highly differentiated individuals who are more satisfied with their marriages. Also, in the case of stress if a husband or wife loses his/her I-position and increases emotional reactivity, his/her relationship satisfaction decreases in turn.

Gubbins, Perosa, and Bartle-Haring (2010) defined differentiation as lower emotional reactivity and triangulation in the family of origin and linked differentiation of self with the actual marital function. They have also found that more differentiation is related to higher satisfaction in the dyad and less emotional flooding during quarrels. Controlling emotional flooding, being less emotionally reactive and having less problems in developing their own objective ideas help them to remain as themselves in the relationship and does not decrease their marital satisfaction. Researchers have also shown that emotional reactivity is related to daily life stressors and to what extent such daily life stressors elicit negative emotions (Mroczek & Almeida, 2004; Uchino, Berg, Smith, Pearce, & Skinner, 2006). The effect of emotional reactivity on negative emotions as a result of stressor may explain the decrease in marital satisfaction.

A large body of literature shows that egalitarian couples have more satisfaction in their relationships (Larson, Hammond, & Harper, 1998; Rabin, 1996; Rabin, Tsai, & Kohlenberg, 1996; Schwartz, 1994). Advances in tolerance in difficult world view between partners and acceptance of each other, even though they do not approve the ideas may create more perception of equality in the relationship. When individuals find themselves participating in an unequal relationship, where they give more from the self and cannot remain authentic to themselves and their partner (means low differentiation), they will become more distressed. According to equity theory, in order to eliminate distress resulting from inequality in intimate relationship, the partners should try to restore equity.

It can be argued that, in case of stress, especially resulting from the partner, spouses' perception of equity from the relationship may be destroyed and they may evaluate their partners as overwhelming to themselves. If their respect and trust to their partners decrease, and along with the decrease in differentiation of self then their marital satisfaction may also decrease. If they are well-differentiated then they may quickly repair their relationship. One's keeping sense of self and capacity to stay in an intimate relationship are related to one's self of self (Bowen, 1978) and this maintenance of autonomy and caring less for approval of others in case of decision making are important to develop healthy intimate relationships. It seems that these conditions are related to the level of satisfaction in marriages. For instance, one of the spouses' experience of stress is directly related to one's partner (i.e. different attitudes concerning life, difficult behavior of partner, too much distance to the partner or neglect on the part of the partner etc.) and if s/he is not well-differentiated, they are

not able to negotiate solutions and look for new ways of relating because of the lack of ability to differentiate each other's self. This can be due to the fear of separation from a partner or fusion. However, in case of blockers that impact the quality of relationship in a negative way, higher differentiation of self provides better capacity to rise satisfaction.

The following empirical studies have not been conducted by using the same variables of the present study but rationale behind the mechanism supports the findings. Specifically, according to the results of Ledermann and Macho's study (2009), relationship communication partially mediates the effect of marital problems on quality of marriage. Further, Conger et al. (1990) showed similar results and found that the relationship between economic problems or financial strains and marital quality is explained through both warm/supportive and hostile behaviors that act as parallel mediators. Emotional processes occurring in the relationship have mediation power on the relationship between stress and marital outcomes.

In a series of studies by Gottman and colleagues (Carrere, Buehlman, Gottman, Coan, & Ruckstuhl, 2000; Gottman & Levenson, 1992), Rogge and Bradbury (1999) and Rogge, Bradbury, Hahlweg, Engl, and Thurmaier (2006), marital communication has been identified as a major predictor of marital outcomes. Communication behavior in interpersonal situations is a very sensitive domain and can be easily affected by stress (Crouter, Perry-Jenkins, Huston, & Crawford, 1989; Cutrona et al., 2003). Studies conducted by Repetti and colleagues (Repetti, 1989; Repetti & Wood, 1997), and Schulz, Cowan, Cowan, and Brennan (2004) and Bolger, DeLongis, Kessler, and Wethington,

(1989) indicated that work stress can spill over into relationships by increasing social withdrawal and hostility. This can be comparable with the findings of the present study since emotional reactivity mediated the relationship between perceived stress and marital satisfaction; and increase in emotional reactivity and decrease in I-position can be considered as a harmful component in communication. Though, they have a negative direct effect on marital satisfaction. In other words, stress may increase emotional reactivity and decrease I position, and which in turn decrease marital satisfaction.

Robinson and Blanton (1993) investigated fifteen couples who were married for more than thirty years and asked them to name the important qualities they saw at themselves in the case of tension in their relationship. Among the identified characteristics, autonomy and balanced intimacy were the two of the key characteristics as a secret of long-term marriages (Robinson & Blanton, 1993). Similarly, in the present study taking I position, as a signal for autonomy, was found to be the most effective variable which mediated each path.

Craddock (1991) found that flexible and compatible individuals' marital satisfaction was higher in comparison to individuals whose marriages were chaotic and rigid. It can be speculated that individuals, who are able to take I position, mainly highly differentiated individuals, have more flexibility in their thinking in case of conflict and stress in the relationship.

Another explanation for the current findings may lie with the role of emotion regulation, as a critical intrapsychic element of differentiation, in facilitating

personal and relational adjustment under stress. Of the four components of differentiation examined, current findings indicate that I-position and emotional reactivity scores together are responsible for the majority of the mediated effect observed. Emotional regulation from a Bowen (1978) family systems perspective is described as an ability to differentiate fact from feeling and choose to “be thoughtful about the facts that stimulate feelings and ...think through actions, despite powerful feelings” (Meyer, 1998, p. 90). According to Bowen (Kerr & Bowen, 1988), “a successful effort to improve one’s level of differentiation and reduce anxiety strongly depends on a person’s developing more awareness of and control over his emotional reactivity” (p. 127). Indeed, this research has demonstrated that the capacity to regulate one’s emotional states under stress to remain more satisfied with life and marriage is mediated by emotional reactivity and I position in the expected direction of higher differentiation. To clarify, lower differentiation qualities decreased both life satisfaction and marital satisfaction in case of stress. It might be concluded then that differentiation of self involves the capacity for both rational thinking and deep emotional experiencing, and in this regard, one might hypothesize that well-differentiated individuals are better able to demonstrate and experience coping skills.

In this study, fusion with others did not mediate the relationship between perceived and intradyadic stress and between life satisfaction and dyadic satisfaction. Bowen (Kerr & Bowen, 1988) suggest that the impact of fusion with others on marriages and on psychological well-being is negative, and the concept of fusion with others is described as loss of self-limit and cohesion with individuals’ own emotional functioning. In cultures showing

collectivistic characteristics such as Turkey, (Markus & Kitayama, 1991) and cultures where autonomous-related self constructs are common (Kağıtçıbaşı, 2005), the boundaries of self are not clear and fusion with others do not seem as mediating the relationship between stress and satisfaction in negative or positive way. This conclusion specific to this sample might be related to the characteristics of the sample. Mean age of the sample is 38.14, the mean of years of marriage is 14, only minority of them married by pre-arranged marriage and majority of them have at least high school graduate. It can be considered that they are more autonomous and differentiated individual. They may need less dependency on others and have clear boundaries with their husbands or wives.

There are no consistent findings regarding the fusion with others in the existing the literature. For instance, a study in South Korea (Kim et al., 2014) investigated the relationship between differentiation of self constructs (I-position, emotional reactivity, fusion with others, and emotional cut-off) and family functioning (family adaptability and cohesion). According to the hypothesis of Bowenian theory, high self-differentiation was associated with high family functioning rates, improved family happiness, and more positive family communication. Yet fusion with others predicted balanced levels of family cohesion and a healthy degree of family unity. These results suggested that in the same cultural context, high fusion and high self-differentiation could coexist and promote better functioning of the family. In another study with Filipino couples and their adult children (Tuason & Friedlander, 2000), lower differentiation of self total scores predicted both psychological distress and trait anxiety among family members, but fusion with others was not

associated to either aspects of functioning. These mixed and inconsistent findings have shown that fusion with others may not always relate to overall differentiation, psychological, and family functioning in the direction originally proposed in the theory (Erdem & Aiman Safi, 2018).

Finally, it can be concluded that intrapsychic traits of the differentiation of self construct (I position and emotional reactivity) became significant mediators in the model, rather than interpersonal domains (fusion with others and emotional cut-off). Intra-psyche dimensions of differentiation of self include self-regulation and coping strategies as levels of emotional reactivity and of I-position and describe the ability to balance emotional and intellectual logic processes. Interpersonal dimensions of differentiation of self include interactive regulation strategies as levels of emotional cut-off and fusion with other and describe the ability to maintain a balance between dependency and autonomy (Choi & Murdock 2017; Işık & Bulduk 2015; Lam & Chan-So, 2015; Murdock & Gore 2004; Peleg 2008; Skowron & Schmitt 2003). It can be said that intrapsychic traits regarding self-regulation and balancing the emotionality and logic becomes more important traits in coping with stress.

Individuals with lower level of differentiation of self are more prone to respond stress through great amount of emotional flooding and concentrate on emotional incidences, rather than on carrying out their roles, requirements, or tasks. They are likely to form relationships with combination of fusion and/or emotional cut-off in response to unpleasant occasions; they encounter unsteady feelings and temperament swings, finding it difficult to keep

themselves on track for the goals of certain objectives in a reasonable manner (Peleg, Halaby, & Whaby, 2006). Conversely, profoundly differentiated individuals are able to embrace a position in inter-personal connections, regulate their feelings, along with holding their individual character inside within intimate connections, reason, sense and act for themselves (Tuason & Fiedlander, 2000). They are able to recognize differences between emotional and rational forms of processes and respond proficiently and adaptively to unpleasant and stressful conditions (Gushue & Constantin, 2003). They experience true closeness without tending to act as if they are one.

Explained variance was 37 % in life satisfaction and 63 % for dyadic satisfaction in the proposed stress and satisfaction model. The measures used in the study assessed the degree to which perceptions regarding the situations in general or spouse's qualities and characteristics are appraised as being stressful. Bowen's concept of differentiation of self and stress variable explained relational satisfaction better than individual life satisfaction. However, differentiation of self is thought to form a basis for how individuals cope with life challenges in direction of life satisfaction and marital satisfaction.

Life satisfaction can be explained better with different mediator variables which emphasize cognitive domain more. For example, self-efficacy can be a mediator variable in the present stress and satisfaction model. Since self-efficacy indicates cognitive appraisals of stressful situations and individual's ability to manage coping resources (Lee, Kim, & Wachholtz, 2016), interactions of perceptions regarding external environment (stress variables) and internal

resources (self-efficacy) might explain life satisfaction better. Individuals' negative or positive primary cognitive appraisals stress is also another important factor might affect life satisfaction. In other words, viewing stress as a challenge or harming and threatening might effect the level of life satisfaction. Resilience, coping, personality variables, negative affect and self-esteem can be other individual factors that can mediate the relationship between intra-dyadic stress, perceived stress and life satisfaction. Differentiation of self was also considered as one of the key indicators of adaptive functioning which may affect life satisfaction, however aforementioned variables can also be other important psychological factors to increase explained variance in life satisfaction.

## **5.2 Implications of the Findings**

The current study gives information and insight for practice, theory and research regarding life satisfaction, marital satisfaction, stress, and differentiation of self. In the following paragraphs, implications in terms of theory and practice are discussed.

Starting with the implications for the theory, the findings of this study supported several assumptions of Bowen Family Systems Theory. The current findings added to the extant literature demonstrating that differentiation of self is an important factor, which may influence emotional well-being in all cultures, thus providing validity to Bowen's intergenerational theory as well as to its universality. According to Kerr and Bowen (1988), we tend to react to situations better when we can become autonomous and independent and at the same time remain connected to the family. For a Bowenian, differentiation

is the level at which we acknowledge our own emotions, feelings and intellect. Perception and impact of stress and stressful experiences depend on one's differentiation of self level. Individuals who have poor levels of differentiation are expected to be less able to manage stressful events than those have higher levels of differentiation.

Competing perspectives can be found in the literature on the cross-cultural relevance of the differentiation of self concept (Essandoh, 1995; Tamura & Lau, 1992) arguing that differentiation is a culturally bound construct while others (Boyd-Franklin, 1989; Carter & McGoldrick, 1999; Gushue & Sicalides, 1997) have praised Bowen's theory for the importance it places on the role of connection for mature functioning universally. Although support for a mediational model of differentiation was observed herein, cross-validation of these findings in different samples from various regions of Turkey is needed to determine whether differentiation of self operates in similar ways across diverse ethnic-cultural groups.

Besides the theoretical implications, the findings of this research may inform the clinical practitioners of family therapists and counselors and others who treat stressed individuals and their families. To start with, participants of this study were adults whose age ranged between 19 and 70, with different educational backgrounds and employment statuses. Thus, all counselors working with individuals may make use of the results of the current study. In terms of practices, the evaluation and understanding of mediation processes in psychology are important as they can reveal information about the significance of direct and indirect associations among multiple variables and

provide clues about where it is appropriate to intervene. The mediation results reported in the previous chapters allow the following conclusions. To improve or enhance marital functioning, people should try to reduce and cope with both high levels of external and internal stress that tend to spill over into the relationship and high levels of relationship dissatisfaction via increasing differentiation of self. In order to create more long lasting changes in life satisfaction levels of stressed individuals, besides altering stress levels or coping styles, increasing their differentiation levels may have more preventive function in the long run and may impact individuals' general adaptiveness in the face of life stressors.

It is suggested that highly differentiated individuals are more satisfied with life and with their marriage. An exploration of the mediating role of the differentiation of self between stress and satisfaction variables might lead to a deeper understanding of intimate relationship problems. Therefore, it is strongly recommended that when individuals experience dissatisfaction, the intervention should be a priority, or at least should include improvements in their levels of differentiation of self in certain parts. Interventions with couples could be focused to improve partners' ability in emotional and relational regulation, help people facilitating stress and anxiety tolerance, and to create a positive emotional climate in couple relationship. As examples, we can mention about engaging a partner's emotion to facilitate a new relational experience based on security and dependency, to manage the dilemma of keeping one's self differentiated in the context of intimate relationships.

According to studies and several other attempts, assessing the level of stress in the life of a person is a vital task for the counselors. However, present study suggested that differentiation interacts with stress levels to affect life satisfaction and marital satisfaction. Understanding this relationship may help the puzzled counselor to understand, for example, the very different reactions to similar stress levels demonstrated by two clients. One individual may go out on a limb, displaying a range of psychological dysfunction, and the other client remains fairly adaptive. Even though the obvious intervention is to help both clients decrease stress levels, recognizing the mediating effect of differentiation of self provides the counselor with a meaningful and clear conceptualization of the perception of the client that may point to other useful interventions and approaches (e.g., family of origin work).

Couples who experience high intra-dyadic stress may consult a couple therapist or a counselor to improve their levels of differentiation. In light of the fact that good communication and effective coping strategies are essential for a healthy intimate relationship, couples should be aware of how important differentiation of self is to achieve active coping and to have open and honest communication for a long-lasting relationship and improving their marital skills. A good understanding of the Bowen differentiation of self (togetherness and individualism) will help Turkish married individuals to master their emotional reactions in the face of stressful daily life.

By using instruments such as the Differentiation of Self Inventory-Short Form, clinicians may identify potentially problematic aspects of family emotional functioning (e.g., fusion with others, emotional reactivity, and emotional cut-

off) that may be linked to symptoms. After assessing individual's differentiation of self level, counselors and therapists may then focus on prevention programs rather than intervention programs and by this way they can become proactive to address the issues of marriage and daily life. This may help adults to become role models for future generations in terms of having enjoyable lives and more intimate relationships with their spouses. For instance, perceived stress was mediated through emotional reactivity and clinicians could help clients to manage stress and develop healthier relationships with their spouses through intervening to emotional reactivity. It is important to emphasize that the instruments such as DSI-short form should be used as supplement to complete assessment including family histories, genograms, and timelines.

Although the differentiation of self construct comes from a specific theory called as Bowenian Family Systems Theory, its usefulness extends beyond those seeking to only practice Bowenian lenses. Establishing emotional connections without significant loss of self is present for individuals regardless of intervention approach. Differentiation of self and stress can be considered as components of the client factor that client brings to counseling or therapy and can be regarded as under the umbrella of common factors approach (Wampold & Imel, 2015) to therapeutic alliance. It has a potential impact on the intervention outcome, as findings indicate especially in interventions for increasing life and marital satisfaction.

The results may also encourage clinicians to adapt a system view of individuals' relational and individual well-being issues. Married individuals

do not occur in isolation but are also influenced by factors of emotional functioning in the family. Individuals referred to counseling centers with stress reactions may benefit from individual, family-of-origin therapy. Throughout the counseling process, facilitating insight into the life forces operating in the family system (McGoldrick & Carter, 2001); teaching principles of differentiation of self and emotional systems; decreasing emotional reactivity and encouraging to maintain regular contact with family members will help client to progressively accept responsibility for their role in the development of his or her life problems, rather than blaming the principles in order to fit in with family members and approval of others (Meyer, 1998). After stimulating client's interest in early sessions, as the individual starts to formulate his or her own life principles, differentiation of self is expected to be reinforced. Though several counselors may hesitate to practice family systems approach with individual clients, Bowen (1978) advocates that when an individual raises his or her level of differentiation and remains in contact with family, the level of differentiation in the family system, in turn, increases. Therefore, it can be asserted that working with individuals can still be beneficial for the whole family.

Application of Bowen theory and work with clients should proceed carefully because the research on this perspective makes minimal inferences on causal relationships due to the commonly used correlation design. With this caution in mind, this research suggests that those who work with partners, couples and/or families have multiple options when assessing and intervening with their clients from a family systems perspective. Clearly, the first step in such interventions is to assess the individual's or both partners' current stress level.

In the interest of efficiency, therapists should take the immediate steps of working to reduce client's stress or teach clients new coping strategies.

All in all, support for the mediation model suggests that one's differentiation of self skills and capacity are applicable at all levels of the stress continuum and specifies that differentiation may be an important goal of preventive interventions as well as traditional counseling for married individuals. It might be a good idea to introduce the concept of differentiation of self and its role in influencing marital adjustment and life satisfaction under stress for clients who attend counseling sessions for stress or attend general stress management training. It is a desirable therapeutic goal of Bowenian family therapy to increase a person's differentiation of self and these findings supported assumptions that an increase in differentiation of self may provide greater flexibility in coping with stress. Besides, interventions targeting to increase the level of differentiation of self might create more longlasting changes in individuals in comparison to interventions to change coping strategies or alter stress levels. Real steps toward expressing individuality and replacing complaining, blaming and criticizing the partner can be seen as critical progressions toward improving relationships.

### **5.3 Recommendations for Further Research**

The results of this study are promising, though preliminary, and indicate a need for continued research on family systems theory and the role of differentiation of self in marital and individual outcomes over time. Researchers might test whether the extent of differentiation of self would

predict satisfaction and longevity of relationships over time. Likewise, experimental studies of psychotherapeutic interventions are needed to test Bowen's (1978; Kerr & Bowen, 1988) assertion that psychotherapy can produce an increase in differentiation levels and substantially improve the quality of marital life and strengthen individuals' ability to achieve both intimacy and independence. These assertions await future testing to further clarify the role of differentiation of self in designing and implementing effective marital and individual counseling interventions.

In the sample of the study, participants are coming from eastern regions where arranged marriages are not common. People from more strict and closed communities should have been included in the study to represent more of arranged marriages. The sample should have been chosen from various regions where arranged marriages and more traditional values are common in further studies.

Internal stress (marital stress) is originated within the couple and comprises tensions and conflicts arising between partners due to expressed different goals, attitudes, needs, desires, and habits of one of the partner that disturbs the other. Internal stress also includes worries and sorrow about the partner due to his/her well-being (Bodenman et al., 2006). When an interest in understanding the impact of stress on close relationships exists, there is a need to study individual and dyadic stressors holistically and interplay of stress level of two spouses should be examined in order to understand relationship functioning. The interaction between the variables is extremely important and has received increased attention in studies where the impact of stress on close

relationships have been examined (Bodenmann, Ledermann, & Bradbury, 2007; Repetti, 1989; Story & Repetti, 2006). In this study, only married individuals were examined in the study but dyadic data (each husband and wife would be matched and analyzed as a unit of analysis) would give richer conclusions.

This study was the first attempt to translate Multidimensional Stress Questionnaire for Couples to Turkish and test its psychometric properties in a sample of married individuals. For minor intra-dyadic stress (internal) and minor extra-dyadic stress (external) dimensions, the factor structure was confirmed. Nonetheless, internal and external major stress parts were not considered as fully psychometric sub-scales. There is no other marital stress inventory existing in Turkish therefore; by taking this instrument as a basis, new studies should be designed to develop a culture-specific marital stress instrument.

Several research questions arise based on the findings of this study for further studies, including to find out whether systems-based therapy approaches improve differentiation of self in the long run; whether an increase in the client's level of differentiation result in changes in individual and family system functioning, and what are the manifestations of differentiation of self variables in the functioning of the couple. In order to find plausible answers to these research questions mixed method, experimental or qualitative research designs should be used, along with associational studies. Future research may use a mixed-method research design combining quantitative and qualitative approaches such as interviews in order to develop more

sophisticated self-report instrument to measure Bowen's constructs. In-depth interview protocols may also be created to assess Bowen constructs. This approach may produce a better understanding of the nuances that occur within families and their complexities. Moreover, given that a family can manifest cut-off, emotional reactivity and fusion in many different ways, a qualitative approach may allow for more diversity through a range of open-ended questions, which would be impossible to capture using only quantitative methods.

Heppner et al.'s (2008) conceptualization of coping suggests that individuals at different levels of differentiation of self might employ different styles of coping. While testing a stress model with regard to differentiation of self, adding coping styles to the model might explain more variance in satisfaction variables. By this way, both theoretically and practically, differentiation of self and coping constructs can be compared and their interactions can be explored clearly. Reflection of the level of differentiation of self on the used type of coping may provide a broader perspective. This study showed that differentiation of self indicators, mainly emotional reactivity and I position functioned as coping mechanisms between stress and satisfaction. There is more research needed to find the links between coping styles and differentiation of self. This study can be accounted as a basis for those studies.

More research is also needed to understand the mediating role of differentiation of self on the partners at certain family life-cycle. Does differentiation of self also account for successful adjustment in the face of being newlywed, being family with younger children or adolescent stressors.

Moreover, intradyadic stress and its interaction with marital satisfaction over time can be better observed in longitudinal studies. In such a longitudinal design, asking couples to keep daily diaries regarding their relationship satisfaction and stress levels can provide additional rich data besides using self-report instruments.

In the current study, explained variance in life satisfaction is lower in comparison to explained variance in marital satisfaction. Not assessing life satisfaction with its potential elements may be misleading since individuals place a different value on factors, such as physical health concerns, work issues, family problems etc. To clarify, a person may have serious problems with health conditions but still might be satisfied with life since he or she prioritizes other aspects of life. In future studies life satisfaction can be measured by its possible elements.

Specifically, Bowen theory suggests that the interaction of chronic anxiety and differentiation level would account for the greatest amount of variance associated with symptoms and well-being (Kerr & Bowen, 1988). Stress can be replaced with anxiety and the same design can be replicated in further studies.

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## APPENDICES

### A. APPROVAL OF METU HUMAN SUBJECTS ETHICS COMMITTEE

UYGULAMALI ETİK ARAŞTIRMA MERKEZİ  
APPLIED ETHICS RESEARCH CENTER



ORTA DOĞU TEKNİK ÜNİVERSİTESİ  
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Sayı: 28620816 / 167

26 MART 2019

Konu: Değerlendirme Sonucu

Gönderen: ODTÜ İnsan Araştırmaları Etik Kurulu (İAEK)

İlgi: İnsan Araştırmaları Etik Kurulu Başvurusu

Sayın Prof. Dr. Ayhan DEMİR

Danışmanlığını yaptığınız Ayşe Ulu YALÇINKAYA'Nın "Benlik Ayrışmasının Stres ile Bireysel İyi Oluş ve Evlilik Doyumu Arasındaki Aracı Rolü" başlıklı araştırması İnsan Araştırmaları Etik Kurulu tarafından uygun görülmüş ve 156-ODTÜ-2019 protokol numarası ile onaylanmıştır.

Saygılarımızla bilgilerinize sunarız

Prof. Dr. Talin GENÇÖZ

Başkan

Prof. Dr. Ayhan SOL

Üye

Prof. Dr. Ayhan Gürbüz DEMİR

Üye

Prof. Dr. Yaşar KONDAKÇI (4.)

Üye

Doç. Dr. Emre SELÇUK

Üye

Doç. Dr. Pınar KAYGAN

Üye

Dr. Öğr. Üyesi Ali Emre TURGUT

Üye

## B. DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION FORM (FIRST PAGE)

**Açıklama:** Bu çalışma, Orta Doğu Teknik Üniversitesi'nde Prof. Dr. Ayhan Demir'in danışmanlığında doktora tezi kapsamında Araş. Gör. Ayşe Ulu Yalçinkaya tarafından yürütülen bir çalışmadır. Çalışmanın amacı benlik ayrışması kavramı üzerinden stres ve evlilik doyumu ile bireysel iyi oluş arasındaki ilişkiyi açıklamaktır. Çalışmaya katılım tamamıyla gönüllülük temelinde olmalıdır. Ankette, sizden kimlik belirleyici hiçbir bilgi istenmemektedir. Cevaplarınız tamamen gizli tutulacak ve sadece araştırmacılar tarafından değerlendirilecektir.

### Demografik Bilgi Formu

- 1) Cinsiyetiniz:  Kadın  Erkek
- 2) Yaşınız: \_\_
- 3) Eğitim düzeyiniz  
İlkokul () Ortaokul () Lise () Üniversite () Lisansüstü ()
- 4) Eşinizin eğitim düzeyi  
İlkokul () Ortaokul () Lise () Üniversite () Lisansüstü ()
- 5) Mesleki durumunuz:  
Çalışmıyor () İşçi () Memur () Serbest meslek () Emekli () Diğer (belirtiniz) .....
- 6) Eşinizin mesleki durumu  
Çalışmıyor () İşçi () Memur () Serbest meslek () Emekli () Diğer (belirtiniz) .....
- 7) Evlilik önceki tanışma süreniz \_\_ yıl \_\_ ay
- 8) Evlilik süreniz \_\_ yıl \_\_ ay
- 9) Bu kaçınıcı evliliğiniz? \_\_\_\_\_
- 10) Eşinizin kaçınıcı evliliği? \_\_\_\_\_
- 11) Eşinizle nasıl evlendiniz?  
Görücü usulü (hiç veya çok az tanıyarak) ()  
Hem görücü usulü, hem anlaşarak () Anlaşarak ()
- 12) Kaç çocuğunuz var ? \_\_\_\_\_

**C. SAMPLE ITEMS OF THE MULTIDIMENSIONAL STRESS  
QUESTIONNAIRE FOR COUPLES**

	<b>İlişkinizde aşağıdaki durumlar ne kadar stres verici/zorlayıcıdır?</b> Aşağıda verilen durumlar eşinizle bağlantılı olarak ortaya çıkan stres ile ilgilidir.	Son 7 gün içindeki stres				Son 12 ay içindeki stres			
		Hiç	Az	Orta	Çok	Hiç	Az	Orta	Çok
1	Eşiniz ile fikir ayrılığı (çatışmalar, tartışmalar)	①	②	③	④	①	②	③	④
2	Eşinizin ve sizin ilişki ve yaşamla ilgili farklı tutumlarınız (farklı hedefler, ihtiyaçlar ve görüşler)	①	②	③	④	①	②	③	④
3	Eşinizin rahatsız edici alışkanlıkları (görgülü davranmama, kayıtsızlık, ilgisizlik gibi)	①	②	③	④	①	②	③	④
4	Eşinizin zor kişiliği (çabuk öfkelenme, anlayışsızlık, güvenilmezlik, dürüst olmama gibi)	①	②	③	④	①	②	③	④
5	Eşinizin zor davranışları (sigara içme, alkol ya da madde kullanma, aşırı TV seyretme, aşırı yeme gibi)	①	②	③	④	①	②	③	④

1. Difference of opinions with your partner (conflicts, disputations)
2. Different attitudes concerning (different goals, views and needs)
3. Disturbing habits of the partner (e.g. manners, carelessness, inattentiveness, etc)
4. Difficult personality of the partner (e.g. temper, intelligence, reliability, honesty, etc.)
5. Difficult behavior of the partner (e.g. smoking, consumption of drugs or alcohol, excessive TV watching or eating etc.)

#### D. SAMPLE ITEMS OF DYADIC ADJUSTMENT SCALE

1. Ne sıklıkla boşanmayı, ayrılmayı ya da ilişkinizi bitirmeyi düşünür ya da tartışırsınız? (How often do you discuss or have you considered divorce, separation or terminating your relationship ?)
2. Ne sıklıkla siz veya eşiniz kavgadan sonra evi terk edersiniz? (How often do you or your mate leave the house after a fight?)
3. Evlendiğiniz için hiç pişmanlık duyar mısınız? (Do you ever regret that you married?)
4. Ne sıklıkta eşinizle olan ilişkinizin iyi gittiğini düşünüyorsunuz?(How often do you think that things between you and your partner are going well? )

## E. SAMPLE ITEMS OF PERCEIVED STRESS SCALE

1. **Geçen ay içinde**, hangi sıklıkla kişisel problemlerinizi ele alma beceriniz konusunda kendinize güvendiğinizi hissettiniz ? (In the last month, how often have you felt confident about your ability to handle your personal problems?)
2. **Geçen ay içinde**, hangi sıklıkla hayatınızdaki sinir bozucu şeyleri kontrol edebildiğinizi hissettiniz? (In the last month, how often have you been able to control irritations in your life?)
3. **Geçen ay içinde** hangi sıklıkta kendinizi stresli hissettiniz? (In the last month, how often have you felt nervous or stressed?)

**F. SAMPLE ITEMS OF DIFFERENTIATION OF SELF INVENTORY-  
SHORT FORM**

1. Baskı altında bile oldukça sakin kalmaya çalışırım. (I tend to remain pretty calm even under stress.)
2. İnsanlar bana çok yakınlaştığında mesafe koymaya çalışırım. (I tend to distance myself when people get too close to me.)
3. Eleştiriye karşı son derece hassasımdır. ( I'm overly sensitive to criticism.)
4. Kendimi, olduğum gibi kabul ederim. (I am fairly self accepting.)

## G. SAMPLE ITEMS OF SATISFACTION WITH LIFE SCALE

1. Yaşamımdan memnunum. (I am satisfied with my life.)
2. Yaşamımda sahip olmak istediğim önemli şeyleri elde ettim. (So far I have gotten the most important things I want in life.)
3. Yaşamım pek çok yönüyle idealimi karşılamaktadır. (In most ways my life is close to my ideal.)

## H. INFORMED CONSENT FORM

### Sayın katılımcı;

Bu araştırma ODTÜ Psikolojik Danışmanlık ve Rehberlik doktora programı öğrencisi Araş. Gör. Ayşe Ulu Yalçınkaya'nın (danışmanı, Prof. Dr. Ayhan Demir) doktora tezi kapsamında yürütülmektedir.

**Araştırmanın amacı**, evlilik ilişkilerinde yaşanan stres ve olumsuz duyguların nasıl ifade edildiği, bu duygularla nasıl başa çıkıldığı ve bu duyguların evlilik doyumu ve yaşam doyumu üzerine etkilerini araştırmaktır.

**Çalışmaya katılım tamamıyla gönüllülüğe dayanmaktadır ve sizden, kimlik belirleyici hiçbir bilgi istenmemektedir.** Cevaplarınız tamamıyla gizli tutulacak ve sadece araştırmacılar tarafından toplu olarak değerlendirilecektir ve bulgular sadece bilimsel yayımlarda kullanılacaktır. Her bölümdeki ölçeğin nasıl cevaplanacağı konusunda, ilgili bölümün başında bilgi verilmiştir.

Anketin cevaplanması yaklaşık 35 dakika sürmekte olup herhangi bir süre kısıtlaması bulunmamaktadır. Anket, genel olarak kişisel rahatsızlık verecek sorular içermemektedir. Ancak, katılım sırasında sorulardan ya da herhangi başka bir nedenden ötürü kendinizi rahatsız hissederseniz katılımcılıktan ayrılma hakkına sahipsiniz. Böyle bir durumda anketi uygulayan kişiye, anketi tamamlamak istemediğinizi söylemeniz yeterli olacaktır. Anket sonunda, bu çalışmayla ilgili sorularınız cevaplanacaktır. Bu çalışmaya katıldığınız için şimdiden teşekkür ederiz.

Çalışma hakkında daha fazla bilgi almak için Orta Doğu Teknik Üniversitesi Eğitim Fakültesi Eğitim Bilimleri Bölümü (oda:420; tel: 0312 210 4030; e-posta: ulayse@metu.edu.tr) ile iletişim kurabilirsiniz.

Katılımınız için şimdiden çok teşekkür ederiz.

Bu çalışmaya tamamen gönüllü olarak katılıyorum ve istediğim zaman yarıda kesip bırakabileceğimi biliyorum. Verdiğim bilgilerin bilimsel amaçlı yayımlarda kullanılmasını kabul ediyorum. (formu doldurup imzaladıktan sonra uygulayıcıya geri veriniz).

İsim soyadı (İsim belirtmek zorunda değilsiniz)

tarih

İmza \_\_\_\_\_

---/---/---

## I. CURRICULUM VITAE

### PERSONAL INFORMATION

Surname, Name: Ulu Yalçinkaya, Ayşe

Nationality: Turkish (TC)

Date and Place of Birth: 19 January 1989, İzmit/KOCAELİ

Marital Status: Married

email: aayse.ul@gmail.com

### EDUCATION

Degree	Institution	Year of Graduation
MS	Middle East Technical University, Psychological Counseling and Guidance	2015
BS	Boğaziçi University, Guidance and Psychological Counseling	2012
High School	Gölcük İhsaniye Anadolu Lisesi	2007

### WORK EXPERIENCE

Year	Place	Enrollment
2013- Present	METU, Educational Sciences	Research Assistant
2012-2013	Ankara Atatürk Mesleki ve Teknik Anadolu Lisesi	Psychological Counselor

### FOREIGN LANGUAGES

English (Advanced)

## PUBLICATIONS

### Journal Articles

Ulu-Yalcinkaya, A., & Demir, A. (2017). Loneliness with regard to maternal and paternal acceptance-rejection and sibling relationship quality. *Journal of Psychologists and Counsellors in Schools*, 28(2), 197-211. doi: 10.1017/jgc.2017.12

### Conference Presentations

Ulu-Yalcinkaya, A. & Kurşuncu, M.A. (2015, October). *Understanding decision for marriage process with the concept of bowen's differentiation of self in turkish culture*. Paper presented at 13<sup>th</sup> National Psychological Counseling and Guidance Conference, Mersin, Turkey.

Ulu-Yalcinkaya, A. & Demir, A. (2017, April). *Understanding loneliness with parental-acceptance rejection theory*. 26<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Educational Sciences, Antalya, Turkey.

Ulu-Yalcinkaya, A. & Demir, A (2018, March). *Parental relationships and sibling relationship quality*. 14<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Social Sciences. Frankfurt, Germany.

Gökalp, G., & Ulu-Yalçinkaya, A. (2018, May). *The investigation of crisis and decision making in schools within naturalistic decision making model*. The 13<sup>th</sup> International Congress on Educational Administration, Sivas, Turkey.

Ulu-Yalcinkaya, A., Kursuncu, M.A., Demir, A., & Demir, A. (2018, June). *Internet addiction, loneliness and mindfulness*. International Congress on Education, Istanbul, Turkey.

Kursuncu, M.A., Ulu-Yalcinkaya, A., Demir, A., & Demir, A. (2018, June). *The role of experiential avoidance and mindfulness on self-esteem levels of Turkish university students*. International Congress on Education, Istanbul, Turkey.

Ulu-Yalcinkaya, A., Kursuncu, M.A., Imperiale, F., Fiordelmondo, V., Sümer, Z., & Hoogerwerf, E.J. (2019, August). *Young women, disability and technology: A survey study from the RISEWISE Project*. The 15<sup>th</sup> International Conference of the Association for the Advancement of Assistive Technology in EUROPE (AATE), Bologna, Italy.

### **Book Chapters**

Gökalp, G., & Ulu-Yalçinkaya, A. (2017). Naturalistic Decision Making Model Under Stress. In O. Erdur-Baker & T.Doğan (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.), *Kriz Danışmanlığı-Crisis Counseling* (pp. 109-134) Pegem Akadem Publicationsi, Ankara.

Unlu-Kaynakci, F.Z. & Ulu-Yalçinkaya, A. (2017). Activities for Grief Counseling. In O. Erdur-Baker & I. Aksoz-Efe (Eds.), *Yas Danışmanlığı-Grief Counseling* (pp. 309-374) Anı Publications, Ankara.

### **RESEARCH PROJECTS**

Project Name: Loneliness and the Purposes of Using Social Network Channels with regard to Problematic Internet Use among university students.

Project Coordinator: Prof. Dr. Ayhan Demir

Project Duty: Researcher

Financial Supporter: Middle East Technical University – Scientific Research Projects (ODTÜ-BAP)

## J. TURKISH SUMMARY/ TÜRKÇE ÖZET

### BENLİK AYRIŞMASI: KAVRAMIN YAŞAM DOYUMU, EVLİLİK DOYUMU VE STRES ARASINDAKİ ETKİLEŞİMDE İNCELENMESİ

#### 1. GİRİŞ

Bowen'ın Aile Terapisi Kuramı'nın en önemli bileşenlerinden birisi olan benlik ayrışması ya da benliğin farklılaşması kavramı kişinin hem kişilerarası hem de kendi içindeki (psişik ya da ruhsal) duygusal ve düşünsel süreçleri yönetebilmesini içermektedir. Bireyin duyu ve düşüncelerinin ayırımında olması kendi içindeki duygusal ve düşünsel süreçleri yönetebilmesini ifade ederken kendi içindeki süreçlerin diğer kişilerden bağımsız var olabildiğinin farkında olması kişilerarası boyutu ile ilgilidir. Benlik ayrışması, bireyin güçlü bir benlik duygusuna sahip olmasını ve herhangi bir etki altında kalmadan özgür iradesi ile tercihlerde bulunmasını sağlar. Buna göre, farklılaşma düzeyi düşük olan bireyler, duygularına göre hareket eder ve enerjilerinin çoğunu aşkı, sevgiyi aramak için harcarlar. Bilişsel aktiviteleri ile duygusal süreçleri fazlasıyla iç içe geçtiğinden yaşanan stres verici olaylar karşısında savunmasız kalır ve bağılı buldukları aile sistemi içinde kaybolurlar. Bu kişilerin yaşamları onay alma ve onay alamadıkları kişileri bir şekilde cezalandırmakla geçer. Kendi amaçlarına odaklanıp bu doğrultuda yaşamakta güçlük yaşayan farklılaşma düzeyi düşük bireyler, farklılaşma

düzeyi yüksek olan kişilere göre daha fazla duygusal ve fiziksel sorunlar yaşamaya eğilimlidir (Bowen, 1978).

Bowen'ın aile sistemleri kuramının önemli bir kavramı olarak sunulan benlik ayrışması, kişilerin güçlü bir benliğe sahip olma kapasitesini destekler (Bowen, 1976; Titelman, 2014). Temelde iki yönü bulunan benliğin ayrışması kavramı, bireyin hem duyu ve düşüncelerinin ayrımını yapabilmesini hem de diğerlerinden bağımsız olarak kendini var etmesini içerir (Corey, 2008). Diğer bir ifadeyle, kişinin benliğinin ruhsal ve kişiler arası boyutunu dengede tutabilmesi ve kişinin ailesinden bilişsel ve duygusal düzeyde ayrışması boyutlarını barındırır (Bowen, 1978; Kerr ve Bowen, 1988).

Bowen'ın yaklaşımına göre duygusal ve düşünsel süreçler birlikte uyum içerisinde işlem yaparlar ancak aşırı stresli durumlar ya da kriz durumları düşünsel ve duygusal süreçler arasında bir tercih yapma zorunluluğunu ortaya çıkarır (Rizkalla ve Rahav, 2016). Bu anlamda benliğin farklılaşması duygusal süreçleri bilişsel süreçlerden ayırt ederek gerekli bir durumda hangisinin öncelikli olduğunu belirleme becerisini ifade etmektedir (Barahmand, 2010; Rizkalla ve Rahav, 2016; Skowron, 2004; Skowron ve Friedlander, 1998; Skowron ve Schmitt, 2003; Tuason ve Friedlander, 2000). Benlik farklılaşması süreci, bireyde ya da genel aile sisteminde duygusal tepkiselliğin ve kaygının azalmasını sağlayan bir farkındalık oluşturur ve kişiler böylece olaylara nasıl tepki vermeleri gerektiği konusunda bilinçli seçimler yaparlar (Gehart, 2013).

Bowen benliğin ayrışma düzeyine işaret eden dört faktör tanımlamıştır. Bu faktörler aynı zamanda çekirdek ailenin işleyişine de etki eden faktörlerdir. Bu faktörlerin ilki duygusal tepkiselliktir. Duygusal tepkisellikte duyguların düşünceleri bastırması ve bu nedenle bireyselleşmenin de bastırılması söz konusudur. İkinci faktör duygusal kopma olarak adlandırılmaktadır. Duygusal kopmada aile üyelerinin çözölemeyen bir duygusallık nedeni ile hem fiziksel hem de psikolojik olarak birbirlerinden kaçınmaları ve uzak durmaları söz konusudur. Duygusal kopmanın fazla olması da düşük düzeydeki benlik ayrışmasına işaret etmektedir. Üçüncü faktör füzyon ya da iç içe geçme olarak adlandırılmaktadır. Burada duygusal ve bilişsel yönlerin birbirine karışması nedeniyle bireyin kendi duygu ve düşünceleri ile başkalarının duygu ve düşünceleri arasında ayırım yapabilme becerisini kaybetmesi söz konusudur. Dördüncü ve son faktör ben pozisyonu alma olarak adlandırılır ve burada kişi duygu ve düşüncelerini ayrı ayrı sahiplenir, bunları açık bir şekilde ifade eder ve etrafındaki diğer bireyleri de kendi düşüncelerini ve duygularını ifade etme konusunda cesaretlendirir (Kerr ve Bowen, 1988). Ben pozisyonu alma becerisinin yüksek olması yüksek benlik ayrışmasına işaret etmektedir.

Ayrışma düzeyi yüksek olan bireyler baskı altında ve stres verici durumlarla daha iyi baş edebilirler. Bu olaylar karşısında adaptasyonları ve psikolojik uyumları yüksektir. Stres durumları karşısında aşırı kaygı göstermez ve çok az fiziksel ve psikolojik sorun yaşarlar. Benlik ayrışması düzeyi düşük olan bireyler ise stres ve baskı yaratan durumlarla baş etmede zorlanırlar, kronik kaygı yaşarlar ve psikolojik uyumları düşüktür. Bunun sonucunda da daha sık fiziksel ve psikolojik sorunlar yaşarlar (Bowen, 1978; Kerr ve Bowen, 1988).

Alanyazında, stres ile yaşam doyumu ve evlilik doyumu arasında güçlü bir ilişki olduğu görülmektedir; ancak bu ilişkiyi ortaya çıkaran faktörler henüz yeterince cevap bulamamıştır. Oysaki stres yaşayan tüm bireylerin evlilik ya da yaşam doyumunda azalma ortaya çıkmadığı gibi stres seviyesi düşük bireylerin tamamının da ilişki ve yaşamla ilgili tam doyumundan söz etmek mümkün değildir.. Ayrıca, yaşamdan ve ilişkiden hoşnutsuzluk yaşayan tüm bireyler de stres geliştirmez. Bu bulgular ilişkilerin daha iyi anlaşılmasına yardımcı olabilecek arabulucu değişkenlerin olabileceğini düşündürmektedir ve bu açıdan bakıldığında da nedenselliği ortaya çıkarmada aracı değişkenlere odaklanmanın önemi vurgulanmaktadır (Whisman, 2001). Örneğin Whisman (2001) depresyon ve evlilik doyumu arasındaki ilişkiyi incelemiş ve bu ilişkide üçüncü değişkenlerin çift yönlü etkisi olabileceği sonucuna varmıştır. Benzer bir şekilde, evlilik doyumu ve yaşam doyumu ile stres arasındaki ilişkiyi açıklamak basit değildir. Bu doğrultuda, duygusal tepkisellik, stres yönetimi ve evlilik atıfları gibi arabulucu değişkenleri incelemenin önemini vurgulayan çalışmalar bulunmaktadır (Graham ve Conoley, 2009; Neff ve Karney, 2009; Neff ve Broady, 2011). Benlik ayrışmasının hem evlilik doyumu ve yaşam doyumunu hem de stresi çift yönlü olarak etkileyeceği varsayılmaktadır. Stres ve doyum değişkenleri arasında açık bir ilişki olduğundan, kuramsal temellere dayanarak benlik ayrışmasının bu ilişkide arabuluculuk edebilecek değişkenlerden biri olabileceği düşünülmektedir.

Baron ve Kenny'ye (1986) göre, aracı değişken olabileceği düşünülen değişkenin bağımlı ve bağımsız değişken ile ayrı ayrı ilişkisi olduğunda, diğer iki değişken (bağımlı ve bağımsız değişken) arasındaki ilişki üzerindeki aracılık etkisi test edilebilir. Alan yazında daha önce de vurgulandığı gibi

evlilik doyumu ve yaşam doyumu stres ile ilişkiliyken benliğin ayrışması bu değişkenlerle ayrı ayrı ilişkili bulunmaktadır. Bowen (1978; Kerr ve Bowen, 1988) ve Skowron, Wester ve Azen (2004), evlilik doyumu ile algılanan stres arasındaki olumsuz ilişkinin bireylerin farklılaşma düzeyinden etkilendiğini varsaymaktadır. Bu nedenle, benlik farklılaşmasına bu modelde arabulucu değişken olarak yer vermek uygun görülmektedir.

Bowen'in kuramı, stres ve kaygı ile işlev bozukluğu arasında aracı rolü olduğu ifade edilen farklılaştırma kavramını ortaya koymaktadır. Başka bir deyişle, farklılaşma düzeyleri yüksek olan bireyler stresli durumlarla başa çıkmak için iyi donanımlıdırlar ve bu nedenle daha az işlev bozukluğu yaşarlar. Bu anlamda, benlik ayrışması ve stresle başa çıkma stilleri benzer yapıda işlev gösterir gibi görünse de benlik ayrışması başa çıkma tarzını da kapsayan daha karmaşık bir kavramdır (Murdock ve Gore, 2004). Örneğin, yüksek farklılaşma düzeyine sahip kişilerin üretken başa çıkma teknikleri kullanma olasılıklarının daha yüksek olduğu görülmüştür (Murdock ve Gore, 2004). Ancak benlik ayrışması ise başa çıkma tarzlarını yordayabilecek çati bir değişkendir.

Alan yazında yüksek benlik ayrışması gösteren bireylerin evlilik uyumu ve evlilik doyumlarının yüksek olduğu; benlik ayrışması düşük evli bireylerin ilişkilerinde sorun yaşadıkları (Bowen, 1978; Bowen ve Kerr, 1988) ve boşanmaya neden olan bazı istenmeyen durumlarla karşı karşıya kalabilecekleri belirtilmektedir (Skowron ve Friedlander, 1998). Bu çalışmada, evli bireylerden oluşan bir grupta benliğin ayrışması (farklılaşması) kavramı tartışılmış ve bu bağlamda, evlilik doyumu, yaşam doyumu ve stres

arasındaki ilişki incelenmiştir. Ayrıca, Bowen'a göre (Bowen, 1978; Kerr ve Bowen, 1988), Aile Sistemleri Kuramı evrenseldir ve tüm kültürler için genellenebilir. Bu araştırma, Türkiye'de gerçekleşmesi dolayısıyla ağırlıklı olarak özerk ilişki benlik kurgusu benimsenmiş (Kağıtçıbaşı, 2007; Özdemir ve İlhan, 2013) bir kültürde test edilen kuramın evrenselliği ile ilgili alanyazına katkı sağlayacağı düşünülmektedir.

Yapılan araştırmalarda, ayrışma düzeyi yüksek bireylerin oluşturduğu evliliklerde yüksek çift uyumu, evlilik uyumu, evlilik doyumu ya da cinsel doyumun yaşandığı tespit edilmektedir. Öte yandan, düşük farklılaşma düzeyine sahip çiftlerin oluşturduğu evliliklerde, evlilik ilişki kalitesi belirleyicilerinin (evlilik uyumu, evlilik doyumu, çift uyumu, çift doyumunu) düşük düzeylerde olduğu ve çiftler arasında yaşanan çatışmaların daha fazla olduğu tespit edilmiştir (Arpita, 2006; Bartle, 1993; Bradbury, Fincham ve Beach, 2000; Birditt ve Antonucci, 2008; Campos, Keltner, Bech, Gonzaga ve John, 2007; Hobby, 2004; Hollander, 2007; Lal ve Bartle-Haring, 2011; Lim ve Jennings, 1996; Peleg, 2008; Polat, 2014; Richards, 1989; Skowron, 2000; Skowron ve Friedlander, 1998). Bunun yanında, bazı araştırmacılar evlilik doyumu ile benliğin farklılaşması arasında bir ilişkiye rastlamamışlardır (Patrick, Sells, Giordano ve Tollerud, 2007).

Yapılan araştırmalar benlik farklılaşmasının; psikolojik sağlık (Sohrabi, Asadi, Habibollahzade ve Ali, 2013), psikolojik uyum, sosyal problem çözme becerisi (Skowron, 2004), ve çift uyumu (Peleg, 2008; Polat, 2014; Skowron, 2000) ile olumlu yönde ilişkili olduğunu tespit etmiştir. Diğer taraftan, yüksek benlik farklılaşmasının; depresyon (Hooper ve DePuy, 2010; Hooper ve Doehler,

2011; Polat, 2014), kaygı ve stres (Polat, 2014), bağlanma kaygısı (Skowron ve Dendy, 2004), güvensiz bağlanma ve yakınlaşma korkusu (Thorberg ve Lyvers, 2006), kaygıyla ilişkili bozukluklar (Xue ve arkadaşları, 2016) olumsuz yönde ilişkili olduğu sonucuna ulaşılmıştır. Bunun yanı sıra, benlik farklılaşmasının; ilişki doyumu (Lal, 2006; Lal ve Bartle-Haring, 2011; Skowron ve Friedlander, 1998), evlilik doyumu (Bartle, 1993; Lim ve Jennings, 1996; Skowron, 2000) ile olumlu yönde ilişkili olduğu; genogram temelli danışmanlık sürecinin çiftlerde bağlılık ve evlilik uyumuna önemli bir etkisinin olduğu (Varol, 2015) ve sürekli kaygının anlamlı bir yordayıcısı (Tuason ve Friedlander, 2000) olduğu çeşitli araştırmalarla desteklenmektedir.

Özet olarak, alan yazındaki çalışmalar incelendiğinde, benlik farklılaşmasının hem evlilik uyumu hem de depresyon, kaygı ve stres gibi psikolojik koşullarla ilişkili olduğu ve onları yordadığı görülmektedir. Farklılaşma düzeyi yüksek olan bireyler daha yüksek evlilik doyumu, daha yüksek refah ve daha az fiziksel ve psikolojik problemler göstermektedir. Farklılaşma düzeyi düşük olan bireyler, düşük evlilik uyumu, yüksek çatışma, kronik kaygı ve daha fazla fiziksel ve psikolojik sorun göstermektedir. Bu bakımdan, bir süreç olarak kabul edilen benliğin farklılaşması, bireyin ilişkisel ve bireysel yaşam kalitesinin önemli bir belirleyicisi olarak görülebilir.

### **1.1 Araştırmanın Amacı ve Araştırma Soruları**

Bu araştırmanın amacı, evli çiftlerde benlik ayrışmasının dört alt boyutunun (ben pozisyonu alma, duygusal tepkisellik, iç içe geçme ve ilişkiyi kesme), eşten kaynaklı stres ile algılanan stresin yaşam doyumu ve evlilik doyumu

arasındaki ilişkiye aracılık etme rolünü arařtırmaktır. Bu alıřmada, “Benlik ayrıřması deęiřkenleri, eřten kaynaklanan stres ve algılanan streten oluřan model yařam doyumunu ve evlilik doyumunu ne kadar iyi aıklamaktadır? ” arařtırma sorusuna yanıt aranmıřtır.

## **1.2 Önerilen Yapısal Model**

Yařam doyumunu ve evlilik doyumunu anlamaya yönelik olarak önerilen yapısal modelde, eřten kaynaklanan ve algılanan strese iliřkin stres faktörleri ile benlik ayrıřması faktörleri arasındaki ilişki arařtırılmıř ve bu faktörlerin evli bireylerin yařam ve evlilik doyumlarını ne derecede yordadığı arařtırılmıřtır. Önerilen yapısal modelde, algılanan stres ve eřten kaynaklı stres dıřsal deęiřkenler; benlik ayrıřması faktörleri aracı deęiřkenler, evlilik doyumunu ve yařam doyumunu ise içsel deęiřkenlerdir. alıřmada, benlik ayrıřması faktörlerinin evlilik doyumunu ve yařam doyumunu üzerindeki doğrudan etkisine ve benlik ayrıřmasının algılanan stres ve eřten kaynaklı stres ile yařam ve evlilik doyumunu arasındaki ilişkide dolaylı aracı etkisi de test edilmiřtir.

## **1.3 Arařtırmanın Önemi**

alıřmanın pratik önemi aısından, günlük yařamda güncel ve yaygın bir durum olarak karřılařılan stres, bireysel iyi oluř ve evlilik ilişkisi kalitesi bağlamında arařtırılmaktadır. Öncelikle, alan yazın taraması bölümünde daha fazla belirtildięi gibi, günümüz toplumlarında stres ortak bir unsurdur veya problemdir ve psikolojik, kiřisel, sosyal ve ekonomik sorunlara yol aabilir.

Ayrıca, önceki çalışmalar da stresin zararlı ve olumsuz sonuçları olduğuna dikkat çekmektedir. Günlük sıkıntılar ve deneyimler karşısında artan stres ve çaresizlik hissi, yakın ilişki üzerinde etkili olabilir ve evlilik çatışmaları ile sonuçlanabilir. Stres sonucunda, bireyin iletişim ve problem çözme becerileri engellenebilir veya azalabilir. Bu anlamda, stresin evlilik ve yaşam doyumu üzerindeki dolaylı ve doğrudan etkilerinin incelenmesi önem arz etmektedir. Stresle baş etme becerileri geliştirmek için hazırlanan müdahale programları, çiftlerin stresini azaltabilir ya da önleyebilir ve başa çıkma stratejilerini öğrenme ve uygulama konusunda cesaret verici sonuçlar verebilir (Bodenman ve ark., 2007). Bu programlar içerisinde, bireyin farklılaşma düzeyini arttırmaya yönelik iyileştirici müdahale, birinin yaşamındaki duygu düzenleme kapasitesini arttırmaya ve evlilikte samimiyet ve karşılıklılık sağlamaya yönelik içeriklere yer vermek oldukça önemlidir. Bu çalışmanın bulguları stresle başa çıkma konusunda geliştirilmek istenen müdahale programlarının içeriklerinin düzenlenmesi konusunda fikir verici olabilir.

Bu çalışma, araştırma ve klinik uygulamadaki çift dinamiklerini anlamada benlik farklılaşmasının arabulucu rolüne odaklanan az sayıdaki çalışmadan biridir. Bu çalışmanın bulguları, benlik ayrışması yapılarının evli Türk yetişkinlerde stres ve yaşam doyumu ile evlilik doyumu arasındaki etkileşimi açıklayıp açıklamadığını gösterebilir. Aynı zamanda çalışma, kuramın kültürümüzdeki işleyişinin anlaşılmasına yardımcı olabilir.

Evlilik danışmanları, evliliklerdeki kalitenin bileşenlerini anladığı ölçüde, bunu sağlamak için çalışabilirler. Evliliklerinden yüksek doyum alan insanların yüksek yaşam kalitesine ulaşma kapasitesi arttığından, çiftlerin

kaliteli evlilikler içerisinde kalmasını sağlamak çift ve aile danışmanlığının başta gelen hedefleri arasındadır. Bu hedefe yönelik olarak da evlilik kalitesinin arkasında yatan faktörleri anlamaya çalışmak önemlidir. Aile sistemleri kuramları, eşlerin evlilik işleyişi içindeki yapıcı ve yapıcı olmayan davranış alışverişlerine, kullanılan iletişim becerilerine ve problem çözme becerilerine yeterince odaklanır ve kişiyi aile sistemine odaklanarak ele alır. Bu araştırma sonucunda, kişiyi sistem içerisinde ele alan, geniş kapsamlı bir kuramın evlilik araştırmacıları ve alan uygulayıcıları tarafından daha fazla ilgi görmesi sağlanabilir. Bowen'ın Aile Sistemleri Teorisi, ülkemizdeki aile ve evlilik terapisi alanındaki kuramsal ve klinik gelişmelerde önemli bir rol oynayabilir. Eğer araştırma benlik farklılaşmasının eşlerin mevcut stres veya zorluklarla baş etmesine ve onları yönetmesine yardımcı olduğu hipotezini doğrularsa, klinik ortamda Bowen'ın aile terapisinin daha sık kullanılmasını sağlayabilir. Bu çalışma aynı zamanda batı ve bireysel değerlerin baskın olmadığı bir kültür üzerinde gerçekleştirilmesi açısından kuramın evrenselliğine dair soruların cevap bulmasına da yardımcı olacaktır.

Çalışmanın araştırma alanındaki önemi açısından, stres çalışmaları arasında evlilik ve yaşam doyumu ile stres arasındaki doğrudan ilişkinin incelendiği birçok araştırma var olmakla birlikte (Hooper ve Doehler, 2011; Krycak, Murdock ve Marszalek, 2012; Murdock ve Gore, 2004; Sandage ve Jankowski, 2010), bu ilişkide benlik ayrışmasının aracı rolünü inceleyen çalışma az sayıdadır. Tek bir modelde, tüm değişkenler arasındaki ilişki daha önce incelenmemiştir. Benlik ayrışmasının, psikolojik ve ilişkisel iyi oluş için strese karşı bir tampon görevi görmesi yeni bir yaklaşım olarak önerilebilir.

## 2. YÖNTEM

### 2.1 Araştırmanın Deseni

Bireyin eşinden kaynaklı ve genel algılanan stresi, evlilik ve yaşam doyumu ile benlik ayrışması değişkenleri arasındaki ilişkileri incelemek amacıyla tasarlanan bu çalışma ilişkisel bir araştırma desenine sahiptir (Fraenkel, Wallen, ve Hyun, 2012).

### 2.2 Örneklem

Türkiye'nin farklı şehirlerinde yaşayan 920 evli kişiye anket uygulanmıştır. Katılımcıların çoğu İstanbul, Kocaeli ve Ankara'da yaşamaktadır. Veri setinin taranmasından sonra, anketlere yanlış cevap verme şekli nedeniyle 38 katılımcı çalışmadan hariç tutulmuştur (örneğin sadece ilk ve son sayfayı doldurmak, anketleri rastgele doldurmak ve bazı soruları atlamak). Katılımcıların 41'i de en az bir çocuğa sahip olma ölçütlerini karşılamadığından, 6'sı da ileriki analizlerde çoklu normallik (multivariate normality) sayıltısını etkilediğinden çalışmanın dışında bırakılmıştır. Sonuçta bu araştırmaya 841 evli birey (420 kadın, 405 erkek) katılmıştır. Katılımcıların yaş ortalaması 38,14'tür ( $SS = 8,91$ ).

### 2.3 Veri Toplama Araçları

Araştırmada veri toplama araçları olarak aşağıda verilen ölçekler kullanılmıştır.

### 2.3.1 Çiftler İçin Çok Boyutlu Stres Anketi

Orijinal Almanca adı Multidimensionaler Stressfragebogen für Paare, İngilizce adı The Multidimensional Stress Questionnaire For Couples olan Çiftler için Çok Boyutlu Stres Anketi'nin Türkçe'ye uyarlama çalışması, ölçeğin asıl formunu geliştiricilerden biri olan Prof. Dr. Guy Bodenman'dan gerekli izin alındıktan sonra bu tez araştırmasının pilot çalışması kapsamında yapılmıştır. Partnerlerin eşinden kaynaklı ya da eşinden bağımsız olarak yaşadıkları stresi ölçen envanter Bodenmann, Schär, ve Gmelch (2008) tarafından geliştirilmiştir. Ölçek 29 maddeden, 4 bölümden ve 2 puanlama sütunundan oluşmaktadır. Katılımcılar ölçekte yer alan her bir maddeyi son yedi gün boyunca yaşanan stres ve son on iki ayda yaşanan stresi düşünerek iki kere puanlamaktadır. Son yedi günde yaşanan stres sütununda akut stres deneyimleri, ikinci sütunda ise kronik stres deneyimleri değerlendirilmektedir. Ölçek 4'lü Likert tipinde bir ölçektir. Temel olarak ankette dört alan bulunmaktadır: eşten kaynaklı stres (farklı değerler ve tutumlar, sıkıntılı alışkanlıkları vb. gibi eşten kaynaklanan stres), eşten bağımsız stres (iş, çocuklar, mali durum, günlük zorluklar, vb. gibi eşten bağımsız oluşan stres), makro stres ve mikro stres. Her bölümün hem akut hem de kronik puanlama seçeneği bulunmaktadır. Makro stres değerlendirilmeden önce, bu olayların yaşanıp yaşanmadığını gösteren iki sütun (evet veya hayır) mevcuttur. Yüksek puanlar daha çok stres yaşandığına işaret etmektedir.

Ölçeğin psikometrik özellikleri açısından eşten kaynaklı ve eşten bağımsız stres boyutları akut ve kronik türleri için doğrulanmıştır. Ancak makro

olaylardan kaynaklı stres bölümleri, psikometrik özelliklerinin test edilmesi anlamlı alt boyutlar değildir çünkü yaygın olarak, örneklemdaki herkesin yaşadığı olaylar olmadığı gibi homojen şekilde tek bir yapıyı da ölçmemektedir.

### **2.3.2 Yaşam Doyumu Ölçeği**

Orijinal adı Satisfaction with Life Scale olan Yaşam Doyumu Ölçeği, Diener ve arkadaşları (1985) tarafından bireylerin yaşamlarından aldıkları doyumun belirlenmesi amacıyla geliştirilmiştir. Ölçek, 5 maddelik ve yedili Likert tipi ölçeklendirmeye dayanır. Diener ve arkadaşları (1985) ölçeğin yapısı için tek boyut önermişlerdir ve ölçeğin tek alt boyutlu yapısı bu çalışmada da doğrulayıcı faktör analizi ile desteklenmiştir. Alınan puanın yüksek oluşu daha yüksek seviyede yaşam doyumuna işaret etmektedir. Orijinal ölçek geliştirme çalışmasında, ölçeğin iç tutarlılık kat sayısı .87 olarak raporlanmıştır (Diener ve ark., 1985). Ölçek, 1991 yılında Köker tarafından Türkçe' ye uyarlanmış; Yetim (1991) de ölçeğin yapı geçerliliğine ilişkin bir çalışma gerçekleştirmiştir. Bu çalışmada ölçeğin iç tutarlılık kat sayısı .87 olarak hesaplanmıştır.

### **2.3.3 Çift Uyumu Ölçeği**

Orijinal adı Dyadic Adjustment Scale olan Çift Uyum Ölçeği, Spanier (1976) tarafından hazırlanmış olup evli veya birlikte yaşayan çiftlerin algıladığı biçimiyle ilişkinin niteliğini değerlendirmek için geliştirilmiştir. 32 maddeden oluşan ölçek, hem evet-hayır soruları hem de Likert tipi maddeleri içerecek şekilde düzenlenmiştir. Ölçeğin çift fikir birliği, çift tatmini, çift birlikteliği ve

duygulanım ifadesi olmak üzere dört alt testi vardır. Tüm ölçekten alınan en düşük puan 0 ve en yüksek puan ise 151'dir. Toplam puan yükseldikçe, daha yüksek düzeydeki evlilik uyumunu ifade etmektedir. Ölçek Türkçe'ye Fışiloğlu ve Demir (2000) tarafından uyarlanmıştır. Bu çalışmada ölçek .90 iç tutarlığa sahiptir ve yalnızca çift tatmini alt boyutu kullanılmıştır. Ayrıca yapılan pilot çalışmada, doğrulayıcı faktör analizi ile ölçeğin dört faktörlü yapısı doğrulanmıştır.

#### **2.3.4 Benliğin Farklılaşması Envanteri -Kısa Formu**

Orijinal adı Differentiation of Self-Inventory-Short Form olan ve benlik farklılaşması için daha kısa süreli ölçümler sunan envanter DSI-SF, Drake ve arkadaşları (2015) tarafından geliştirilmiştir. 46 maddelik DSI-R'ye dayanmaktadır. Ölçek, dört alt gruba ayrılmış 20 maddeden oluşmaktadır. Her madde 6 puanlık Likert tipi bir ölçekle değerlendirilmektedir. Toplam puan hesaplanırken "duygusal tepkisellik", "duygusal kopma" ve "başkaları ile birleşme" boyutları ters puanlanırken, "ben pozisyon" boyutunda sadece bir maddede ters puan alır. Alt ölçek puanları, alt ölçek içerisindeki madde sayısına göre ortalamalar alınarak hesaplanır. Benzer şekilde, dört alt ölçek puanının ortalaması, toplam ölçek puanını vermektedir. Cronbach'ın alfa iç tutarlılık katsayıları duygusal tepkisellik, duygusal kopma, iç içe geçme ve ben pozisyonu alma ölçek toplam puanları sırasıyla .80, .79, .68, .70 ve .88; Beş haftalık aralık test-tekrar test güvenilirlik katsayıları .82, .81, .72, .74 ve .85 olarak bulundu (Drake ve ark., 2015). Ölçeğin Türkçe'ye uyarlanması Sarıkaya (2018) tarafından yapılmıştır. Bu çalışmada da ölçeğin dört faktörlü yapısı doğrulanmış ve iç tutarlılık kat sayıları ben pozisyonu almak için  $\alpha = .86$ ,

duygusal kopma için  $\alpha = .83$ , başkalarıyla iç içe geçme için  $\alpha = .87$ , ve duygusal tepkisellik alt testi için  $\alpha = .91$  olarak raporlanmıştır.

### **2.3.5 Algılanan Stres Ölçeği-10**

Orijinal adı Perceived Stress Inventory-10 olan Algılanan Stres Ölçeği (ASÖ) Cohen, Kamarck ve Mermelstein (1983) tarafından geliştirilmiştir. Toplam 10 maddeden oluşan ASÖ kişinin hayatındaki bir takım durumların ne derece stresli algılandığını ölçmek için tasarlanmıştır. Katılımcılar her maddeyi “Hiçbir zaman (0)” ve “Çok sık (4)” arasında değişen 5’li Likert tipi ölçek üzerinde değerlendirmektedir. Maddelerden olumlu ifade içeren 4 madde (4, 5, 7 ve 8. maddeler) tersten hesaplanmaktadır. Yüksek puan, kişinin stres algısının yüksek olduğuna işaret etmektedir. Ölçeğin Türkçe uyarlaması Örucü ve Demir (2009) tarafından yapılmıştır. Bu çalışmada ölçeğin iki faktörlü yapısı doğrulanmış olup iç tutarlılık katsayısı .85 olarak hesaplanmıştır.

### **2.3.6 Kişisel Bilgi Formu**

Kişisel Bilgi Formu, araştırmacı tarafından oluşturulmuştur ve formda katılımcıların sosyo-demografik nitelikleri hakkında bilgi edinmek amacıyla cinsiyet, yaş, mesleki ve eğitim durumları, evlilik sayısı, evlilik türü, çocuk sayısı ve yaşları gibi konularda kişinin kendisi, eşi ve evliliklerine dair bilgilere ilişkin sorulara yer verilmiştir.

## **2.4 Veri Toplama Süreci**

Orta Doğu Teknik Üniversitesi Uygulamalı Etik Araştırma Merkezi'nden gerekli izinler alındıktan sonra araştırmacının sosyal bağlantıları ve onların yakınları üzerinden veri toplanmıştır. Ölçeklerin uygulanmasından önce Bilgilendirilmiş Onam Formu verilmiş ve uygulama sırasında toplanmıştır. Katılımcılar çalışmanın amacı hakkında bilgilendirilmiştir ve uygulamaya yönelik açıklama yapılmıştır. Ölçeklerin doldurulması yaklaşık 30-40 dakika aralığında sürmüştür. Tüm katılımcılar çalışmaya gönüllülük esasına dayalı olarak katılmayı kabul etmiştir. Araştırmanın verileri 2019 yılı, Mayıs ve Temmuz aylarında toplanmıştır.

## **2.5 Veri Analizi**

Veri analizi sürecinde ilk olarak veri tarama ve temizleme, veri girişinin doğruluğunu kontrol etme, kayıp veri analizi, uç değer analizi, normal dağılım değerlendirme, betimsel istatistik ve korelasyon değerleri için SPSS 25 paket programı kullanılmıştır (IBM, 2015). Daha sonra, önerilen yaşam doyumu ve evlilik doyumu modelini test etmek için, AMOS 18 ve 22 programları (Arbuckle, 2009; 2016) ile Yapısal Eşitlik Modellemesi (YEM) analizi yapılmıştır.

## **2.6 Çalışmanın Sınırlılıkları**

Bu çalışmanın bazı sınırlılıkları bulunmaktadır. İlk olarak, katılımcıları belirlemek için kolay ulaşılabilir örnekleme yöntemi kullanılmıştır ve bu

nedenle çalışmanın sonuçlarının genellenebilirliği sınırlılık taşımaktadır. İkinci olarak, öz bildirim ölçekleri uygulanmıştır. Katılımcıların cevaplarının içtenliği kontrol edilemediğinden verilen cevapların sosyal olarak kabul gören cevaplar olma riski bulunmaktadır. Üçüncü olarak, bu araştırma ilişkisel bir araştırma olduğundan dolayı neden sonuç ilişkisi elde edilememektedir. Son olarak da, bu araştırmada evlilik ve yaşam doyumu ile ilişkili olabilecek bazı değişkenler incelenmiştir, ancak evli bireylerin evlilik doyumları ve yaşam doyumları ile ilişkili olabilecek daha birçok değişken bulunmaktadır.

### 3. BULGULAR

Çalışmanın amacı; stres deneyimleri, benlik ayrışması ve yaşam ile evlilik doyumu değişkenleri arasındaki ilişkilerin doğasını anlamaktır. Eşten bağımsız kronik stres, yüksek çoklu bağlanma değerleri (multicollinearity) nedeniyle çalışmadan çıkarılmıştır. Böylece, eşten kaynaklı stres ile algılanan stres ve benlik ayrışması değişkenleri içsel değişkenler iken, evlilik doyumu ve yaşam doyumu çalışmanın dışsal değişkenlerini oluşturmuştur.

Doğrudan etkilere bakıldığında, algılanan stresin ben pozisyonu alma ( $\beta = -.29, p < .01$ ), duygusal kopma ( $\beta = .09, p < .05$ ), başkalarıyla iç içe geçme ( $\beta = .31, p < .01$ ), ve duygusal tepkisellik ( $\beta = .20, p < .01$ ) üzerinde doğrudan etkisi istatistiksel olarak anlamlı bulunmuştur. Bu sonuçlar, algılanan stres ile ben pozisyonu alma davranışı alma arasındaki olumsuz yönlü ilişkiyi; duygusal kopma, iç içe geçme ve duygusal tepkisellik arasındaki olumlu yönlü ilişkiyi göstermektedir.

Eşten kaynaklanan stresin ben pozisyonu alma ( $\beta = -.26, p < .01$ ), iç içe geçme ( $\beta = .21, p < .01$ ) ve duygusal tepkisellik ( $\beta = .11, p < .01$ ) üzerinde doğrudan etkisi bulunmuştur. Bununla birlikte, eşten kaynaklı stresin duygusal kopma üzerindeki doğrudan etkisi anlamlı değildir ( $\beta = -.00, p = .93$ ). Bu sonuçlar, eşten kaynaklanan stres arttığında ben pozisyonu puanının azaldığını göstermektedir. Öte yandan, katılımcılar eş kaynaklı yüksek düzeyde stres yaşadıklarında, iç içe geçme ve duygusal tepkisellik puanları da artmaktadır.

Aracı değişkenler, ben pozisyonu alma ( $\beta = .33, p < .01$ ), duygusal kopma ( $\beta = -.08, p < .05$ ), iç içe geçme ( $\beta = -.10, p < .05$ ), ve duygusal tepkiselliğin ( $\beta = -.22, p < .01$ ) yaşam doyumu üzerindeki doğrudan etkileri istatistiksel olarak anlamlı bulunmuştur. Bu, duygusal kopma, başkalarıyla iç içe geçme ve duygusal tepkisellikteki yüksek puanların, yaşam doyumunun düşmesine, ben pozisyonundaki yüksek puanların ise yaşam doyumunun artmasına neden olduğu anlamına gelir. Aracılar, ben pozisyonu alma ( $\beta = .45, p < .01$ ), duygusal kopma ( $\beta = -.09, p < .05$ ), başkalarıyla iç içe geçme ( $\beta = -.12, p < .05$ ) ve duygusal tepkisellik ( $\beta = -.23, p < .01$ ), evlilik doyumunda anlamlı doğrudan etkiye sahiptir. Bu sonuçlar, ben pozisyonu almadaki daha yüksek puanların, evlilik doyumunun artmasına, duygusal kopmadaki, duygusal tepkisellikteki ve başkalarıyla iç içe geçmedeki yüksek puanların, evlilik doyumunun azalmasına neden olduğunu göstermektedir. Son olarak, stres değişkenleri ile doyum değişkenleri arasındaki doğrudan yollar incelendiğinde, algılanan stresin yaşam doyumu ( $\beta = -.21, p < .01$ ) ve evlilik doyumunu ( $\beta = -.32, p < .01$ ) üzerinde doğrudan olumsuz etkiler yarattığı sonucuna ulaşılmıştır. Bu bulgular, katılımcılar daha fazla stres yaşadıklarında, yaşamlarında ve evliliklerinde daha az doyum yaşadıklarını bildirmişlerdir. Eşten kaynaklı

stresin yaşam doyumu ( $\beta = -.33, p < .01$ ) ve evlilik doyumu ( $\beta = -.51, p < .01$ ) üzerinde de doğrudan olumsuz etkileri bulunmuştur. Bu bulgular, katılımcıların evlilik stresinin daha yüksek olduğu durumlarda, daha az yaşam ve evlilik doyumu duyduğunu bildirdiklerini ortaya koymuştur.

İlk bulgulara göre, bu çalışmada dışsal, arabulucu ve endojen değişkenler arasında orta düzeyde ilişki ortaya çıkmıştır. Belirgin olarak, en önemli anlamlı ilişki ben pozisyonu alma ile evlilik doyumu arasında, en zayıf anlamlı ilişki ise duygusal kopma ile algılanan stres arasında çıkmıştır. Duygusal kopma ve eşten kaynaklı stres arasında anlamlı bir ilişki bulunamamıştır. Önerilen modeldeki doğrudan etkiler açısından, yaşam doyumunun en iyi yordayıcısı ben-pozisyonu, ardından eşten kaynaklı stres, algılanan stres, duygusal tepkisellik, iç içe geçme ve duygusal kopma olmuştur. Evlilik doyumunun en iyi yordayıcısı eşten kaynaklı stres olup onu, ben pozisyonu alma, algılanan stres, duygusal tepkisellik, iç içe geçme ve duygusal kopma izlemiştir. Modeldeki dolaylı etkiler göz önüne alındığında, yaşam doyumu ve evlilik doyumu en iyi şekilde ben pozisyonu alma üzerinden evlilik stresi ile açıklanmıştır.

Algılanan stresin, ben pozisyonu alma ve duygusal tepkisellik yoluyla yaşam doyumu üzerinde dolaylı etkileri bulunmuştur (sırasıyla  $\beta = -.14, p < .01$ ;  $\beta = .05, p < .05$ ). Bununla birlikte, algılanan stresin duygusal kopma ve iç içe geçme yoluyla yaşam doyumuna dolaylı etkileri anlamlı bulunmamıştır ( $\beta = -.01, p = .37$ ;  $\beta = -.03, p = .36$ ). Algılanan stres, ben pozisyonu alma ve duygusal tepkisellik aracılığıyla yaşam doyumunu açıklar. Katılımcıların algılanan stres düzeyi arttıkça, ben pozisyonu puanları düşmekte ve katılımcıların yaşam

doyumunu azaltmaktadır. Diğer taraftan, katılımcıların algılanan stres düzeyi arttıkça, duygusal tepkisellik puanları artmakta ve duygusal tepkisellikteki artış katılımcıların yaşam doyumlarını azalmaktadır. Evlilik doyumu üzerindeki dolaylı etkilere bakıldığında, algılanan stresin ben pozisyonu alma ve duygusal tepkisellik üzerinden dolaylı etkileri anlamlı bulunmuştur (sırasıyla  $\beta = -.15, p <.01$ ;  $\beta = -.04, p <.05$ ). Bununla birlikte, algılanan stresin duygusal kopma ve iç içe geçme yoluyla evlilik doyumu üzerinde dolaylı etkileri anlamlı değildir ( $\beta = -.00, p = .37$ ;  $\beta = -.03, p = .15$ ).

Eşten kaynaklı stresin, ben pozisyonu alma üzerinden yaşam doyumuna dolaylı etkisi anlamlı bulunmuştur ( $\beta = -.15, p <.01$ ). Bununla birlikte, evlilik stresinin kopma, duygusal tepkisellik ve başkalarıyla iç içe geçme yoluyla yaşam doyumuna dolaylı etkileri anlamlı değildir ( $\beta = -.00, p = .94$ ;  $\beta = -.04, p = .10$ ;  $\beta = .04, p = .24$ , sırasıyla). Eşten kaynaklı stres, dolaylı ve olumsuz olarak ben pozisyonu ile yaşam doyumunu açıklar. Diğer bir deyişle, katılımcıların eşten kaynaklı stres seviyesi arttıkça, ben pozisyonu puanları düştüğünde ve katılımcıların yaşam memnuniyeti de azaltmaktadır.

Evlilik doyumu açısından, sadece evlilik stresinin ben pozisyonu üzerinden dolaylı etkileri anlamlı bulunmuştur ( $\beta = -.16, p <.01$ ). Bununla birlikte, eşten kaynaklı stresin kopma, duygusal tepkisellik ve iç içe geçme yoluyla evlilik doyumu üzerindeki dolaylı etkileri anlamlı bulunmamıştır (sırasıyla,  $\beta = -.00, p = .94$ ;  $\beta = -.03, p = .09$ ;  $\beta = .03, p = .07$ ).

Çoklu korelasyon katsayıları, algılanan stres ile evlilikten kaynaklı stresin, yaşam doyumundaki varyansın % 37'sini ve evlilik doyumundaki varyansın % 63'ünü açıkladığını ortaya koymuştur.

#### 4. TARTIŞMA

Bu çalışmanın amacı, Türk evli bireylerde yaşam doyumunu ve evlilik doyumunu tahminlerini, öz değişkenlerin, algılanan stresin ve içsel stresin ayırt edilmesini içeren önerilen bir modelde incelemektir. Özellikle, benlik ayrışması değişkenlerinin ve stres faktörlerinin farklılaşması ile evlilik doyumunu ve yaşam doyumunun ne ölçüde tahmin edildiği ve bu değişkenler arasındaki etkileşimlerin yaşam doyumuna ve evlilik doyumuna etkilerini anlamaktır. Kuramsal olarak, Bowen'e göre (Bowen, 1978; Kerr ve Bowen, 1988), benlik farklılaşması, evlilikteki uzun süreli samimiyet ve birliğin temelidir. Bireyin bu iki güç arasında bir denge kurması ve benlik duygusunu sürdürmesi, yani benliğin konumu olması, benlik farklılaşması ile yakından ilgilidir. Farklılaşma düzeyi yüksek olan bireyler daha iyi bir denge sağlarlar ve stresli ve ihtilafli durumlar durumunda kendi öz duygularını kaybetmezler. Farklılaşma düzeyi düşük olan bireyler, kendilik duygularını dengelemeyi ve kaybetmeyi zor bulmaktadır. Dengeyi sürdürememenin bir sonucu olarak, aşırı duygusal tepkisellik, duygusal geri çekilme ya da kopma ve diğerleriyle iç içe geçme davranışı sergilerler (Bowen, 1976, 1978; Kerr ve Bowen, 1988; Skowron, 2000). Bu çalışma, Bowen'in kuramında yer alan benlik ayrışması kavramına ışık tutmakta ve bu kavramın bireysel ve ilişkisel refah düzeyindeki önemini pekiştirmektedir.

Benlik farklılaşması değişkenlerinin, evlilik doyumu üzerindeki doğrudan etkileri üzerinden gidildiğinde alan yazın bu bulgu ile tutarlı sonuçlar vermektedir. Benlik farklılaşması değişkenlerinin evlilik doyumu üzerindeki doğrudan etkileri konusunda farklılaşma seviyesinin yükselmesi ile eşlerin ilişkilerinden daha fazla tatmin olmaları sonucuna ulaşılmıştır. Çalışmanın bu bulgularına göre, alan yazındaki birçok çalışma, Benlik farklılaşması kavramı ile evlilik doyumu arasında olumlu bir ilişki olduğunu ortaya koymaktadır. Bu çalışmalara göre, yüksek farklılaşma, yüksek evlilik uyumu, evlilik doyumu ve cinsel tatmin anlamına gelir; düşük farklılaşma ise düşük evlilik uyumu, evlilik doyumu ve yüksek evlilik çatışması anlamına gelir (Arpita, 2006; Bhatt, 2001; Birditt ve Antonucci, 2008; Campos, Keltner, Bech, Gonzaga ve John, 2007; Hollander, 2007; Patrick, Sells, Giordano, ve Tollerud, 2007; Peleg, 2008; Timm ve Keiley, 2011).

Farklılaşma düzeyleri yüksek olan bireyler; yakın ilişkilerinde samimiyet konusunda rahat olmakla birlikte, beraberlik-bireysellik dengesini doğru kurarak ilişkilerindeki ben konumlarını kaybetmezler ve yoğun duygularla ilişkili yalnızlıklardan ziyade duygusal kopma ve kimliklerini kaybetme korkusu olmadan kararlılıkla duygusal bağlılıklarını korurlar (Skowron, 2005; Skowron ve Schmittland, 2003; 2000). Bu içerikte; başkalarına bağımlı olmadan ilişkide kalabilen ve işlevsel ve bağımsız bir öz benlik algısına sahip olan bireylerin daha yüksek kalitede bir evlilik ilişkisine sahip olma şansının daha yüksek olacağı düşünülebilir. Kişinin eşinin beklentilerine göre davranıp özerklik ihtiyacını devamlı bastırarak davranması ve duygularından sürekli etkilenerek kendini tüketmesi, evlilik ilişkisinin kalitesini olumsuz yönde etkileyeceği söylenebilir.

Diğer çalışmalarda olduğu gibi (örneğin, Anderson ve Sabatelli, 1992; Aryamanesh vd., 2012; Gubbins vd., 2010; Lampis, 2016; Lampis, Busonera vd., 2017; Lampis, Cataudella vd., 2017; Peleg, 2008; Skowron, 2000; Skowron ve Dendy, 2004), bu araştırma Bowen'in kuramına destek vermekte ve yüksek benlik ayrışmasına sahip bireylerin işlevsel duygusal ilişki kurabilme, sürdürebilme ve eşlerine empatik olarak yanıt verme kapasitelerine bağlı olarak daha iyi uyuma sahip evlilikler kurabildiklerini göstermektedir.

Yaşam doyumu konusunda da yapılmış benzer çalışmalar bulunmaktadır. Bu çalışma bulguları, benlik ayrışması ile yaşam doyumu ve iyi oluş arasındaki olumlu ilişkiler gösteren önceki çalışmaları desteklemektedir (Skowron, Stanley ve Shapiro, 2009). Bu çalışmanın sonuçları, benlik ayrışması değişkenlerinden ben pozisyonu almanın yaşam doyumu üzerinde doğrudan olumlu etkisini; iç içe geçme, kopma ve duygusal tepkiselliğin ise doğrudan olumsuz etkileri olduğunu ortaya koymuştur. Yüksek benlik ayrışmasına sahip olma özelliği, genel olarak yaşam için olumlu bir niteliktir, çünkü bireyler bu şekilde zihinlerinden geçenleri doğrudan konuşabilir ve aileden ve akranlarından gelen baskılara karşı kendilerini savunabilirler. Kendileri olabildikleri bir yaşam da onlara daha fazla doyum sağlayacaktır.

Bulgulara paralel olarak, Skowron, Holmes ve Sabatelli (2003) 221 kişilik bir grup üzerinde çalışmış ve örnekleminde hem erkek hem de kadınlar için benlik farklılaşmasının bir refah göstergesi olduğunu bulmuştur. Bohlander (1995b), benlik farklılaşmasının evli kadınların psikolojik iyilik halinde anlamlı düzeyde varyans açıkladığını bulmuştur. Benzer şekilde, Arap kadınları için ben pozisyonu alma ve yaşam doyumu arasında olumlu ilişki

bulunmuştur (Biadsky-Ashkar ve Peleg, 2013). Ross ve Murdock (2014) da, farklılaşma düzeyi arttıkça, bireyin yaşam doyumunun da arttığı sonucuna ulaşmıştır. Ross ve Murdock'un çalışmasında da, bu çalışmada olduğu gibi yaşam doyumu benlik ayrışması göstergeleri arasında ben pozisyonu ile en yüksek korelasyona ( $r = .48$ ) sahiptir ve bunu sırasıyla duygusal tepkisellik, duygusal kopma ve iç içe geçme takip etmektedir.

Stres ve benliğin farklılaşması ile ilgili sonuçlara ilişkin olarak, çalışmanın bulgularına paralel olarak Murdock ve Gore (2004), benlik farklılaşmasının algılanan stres ile olumsuz yönde ilişkili olduğunu göstermiştir. Daha sonra, Krycak vd. (2012), gerçek stres verici olayların ve algılanan stresin benliğin farklılaşması üzerindeki önemli rolünü ortaya koymuştur. Gerçek stres durumunda, bireyler gerçekten stresli ve belirgin bir olay yaşarlar. Örneğin, bazı tür kanser vakaları incelenmiş ve benliğin farklılaşması, stres ve olumsuz düşünce düzeyi ile olumsuz ilişki göstermiştir (Bartle-Haring ve Gregory, 2003). Akademik stres de benliğin farklılaşma düzeyi ile olumsuz yönde ilişkili bulunmuştur. Çalışma stresi altındayken, yüksek ben pozisyonu alabilmek ve duygusal tepkisellik, duygusal kopma ve başkalarıyla iç içe geçmeye olan eğilimi azaltabilmek çalışmayla ilgili stresi azaltır (Skowron, Wester ve Azen, 2004). Farklılaşma ve stres ilişkisi incelendiğinde, stresli yaşam olaylarına maruz kalma ile benliğin farklılaşma düzeyi arasında anlamlı bir ilişki olmadığını gösteren çalışmalar da bulunmaktadır (Tuason ve Friedlander, 2000). Daha sonraki analizlerinde yazarlar (Krycak, Murdock, ve Marszalek, 2012), ölçülen stres türünün bu farklı sonuçlarda önemli bir rol oynadığını açıklamıştır. Çalışmalarda gerçek stres ve algılanan stres farklı

sonuçlara yol açabilir. Ancak bu çalışmada, eşten kaynaklı stres ve algılanan stresin her ikisi de benlik ayrışması değişkenleri ile ilişkili bulunmuştur.

Hem eşten kaynaklı stresin hem de algılanan stresin yaşam doyumunu ve evlilik doyumunu doğrudan olumsuz etkilediği sonucuna ulaşılmıştır. Bu bulguya paralel olarak, kayda değer araştırmalar artan stres ve azalan yaşam doyumunu arasında bir bağlantı kurmuştur (örneğin, Anders vd., 2012; Bailey ve Miller, 1998; Buser ve Kearney, 2017; Malinauskas, 2010; Saklofske vd., 2012). Simons vd., 2002; Weinstein ve Laverghetta, 2009). Evlilik doyumunu ve stres arasındaki olumsuz yöndeki ilişkiyi destekleyen çalışmalar da görülmektedir (Bodenmann vd., 2007; Williams, 1995; Karney, Story, ve Bradbury, 2005).

Skowron vd. (2004), üniversite stresinin duygusal tepkisellik, ben pozisyonu alma ve duygusal kopma ile anlamlı derecede yordandığını ortaya koymuştur. Daha fazla duygusal tepkisellik ve duygusal kopma yaşayan bireylerde algılanan stresin ve stresin etkilerinin daha fazla olacağı öngörülmüştür. Yine aynı çalışmada sonuçlar, benlik farklılaşmasının stres ile psikolojik belirtiler arasındaki ilişkiye aracılık ettiğini göstermiştir. Stres, benliğin farklılaşma düzeyleriyle olumsuz yönde ilişkiliyken ve psikolojik uyumla olumlu yönde ilişkili bulunmuştur (Skowron, Wester, ve Azen, 2004). Bu bulgulara benzer şekilde bu çalışmada da algılanan stres, ben pozisyonu alma ile olumsuz ve duygusal tepkisellik, duygusal kopma ve iç içe geçme ile olumlu yönde ilişkilidir ve stres üzerinden duygusal tepkisellikteki artış ve ben pozisyonundaki azalma daha düşük yaşam doyumunu seviyesiyle sonuçlanmaktadır.

Buna paralel şekilde, Murdock ve Gore (2004), Bowen'ın Aile Sistemleri Kuramı bakış açısıyla baş etme, stres ve farklılaşma arasındaki etkileşimi incelemiş ve benlik farklılaşmasının, algılanan stresin psikolojik işleyişi açıklamasındaki etkileri değiştirdiği sonucuna varmıştır. Benlik farklılaşması ve stres etkileşimi, başa çıkma stilleri üzerinde anlamlı derecede varyans açıklamıştır. Ayrıca algılanan stres ve benlik ayrışması arasında da anlamlı bir olumsuz ilişki ortaya konmuştur. Başka bir deyişle, yüksek stres yaşayan ve benlik ayrışma düzeyi düşük insanlar, benzer stres seviyelerinde yaşayan yüksek düzeyde farklılaşmış insanlardan daha fazla psikolojik işlev bozukluğu bildirmiştir.

Duygusal tepkisellik ve ben pozisyonu alma algılanan stres ile evlilik doyumu arasındaki ilişkiye aracılık ederken, duygusal kopma ve iç içe geçme stres ile evlilik doyumu arasındaki ilişkiye aracılık etmemiştir. Alan yazınına bakıldığında, benlik farklılaşması, bazı çalışmalarda evlilik doyumu ile stres arasındaki ilişkiye aracılık etmiştir. Örneğin, Kaleta'nın (2014) kadın örneklemindeki çalışması, evlilik doyumu ile benlik farklılaşması arasında anlamlı bir olumsuz ilişki bulmuştur ve benlik ayrışmasındaki düşmeye işaret eden her boyuttaki değişiklik, duygusal gerginlik, intra-psişik stres ve dışsal stres ile olumlu yönde ilişkili bulunmuştur. Kısacası, bireyin farklılaşma derecesinin, stres altındayken evlilik ya da herhangi bir yakın ilişkiden alınan doyumu düzeyini etkilediği sonucu ortaktır. Bu durum kuramsal olarak şu şekilde açıklanabilir. Eşler arasındaki sınırların esnekliği, benlik ayrışmasının düşmesiyle azalır ve bunun tam tersi de geçerlidir. Bununla birlikte, düşük farklılaşma düzeyine sahip bireyler, evlilik içinde yaşanan strese ve kriz durumlarına, etkileşimden çekilme, uzak durma veya eş ya da diğer bireylerle

aşırı yakınlık arama arayışıyla cevap verirler. Bu da ilişki kalitesinde azalma ile sonuçlanır. Kerr ve Bowen (1988) yüksek benlik ayrışması gösteren bireylerin strese daha dirençli olduğunu ve daha az işlevsel olmayan belirtiler geliştirdiğini öne sürmektedir.

#### **4.1 Bulgulara İlişkin Çıkarımlar**

Bu çalışmanın bulguları, Bowen Aile Sistemleri Kuramı'nın birçok varsayımını desteklemektedir. Bu çalışmada benlik ayrışması düzeyi algılanan stres ile eşten kaynaklı stres ile evlilik doyumu ve yaşam doyumu arasındaki ilişkiye aracılık etmektedir. Her ne kadar benliğin ayrışması göstergeleri ile algılanan stres arasındaki önemli etkileşimler mevcut olsa da, benliğin ayrışması göstergeleri, yaşam doyumunda evlilik doyumunda olduğundan daha az varyans açıklamıştır. Bu nedenle, çalışmanın yöntemsel kısıtlamaları da göz önüne alınarak, bu bulguların daha detaylı incelenmesi için daha fazla araştırmaya ihtiyaç duyulmaktadır.

Bu çalışmada, benlik ayrışması faktörlerinden özellikle duygusal tepkisellik ve ben pozisyonu alma, stres ve doyum arasında anlamlı aracılık etkisi göstermiştir. Buradan hareketle bu iki göstergenin birer stresle başa çıkma mekanizması olarak işlev gördüğü düşünülebilir. Başa çıkma stilleri ile benliğin farklılaşması arasındaki bağlantıları bulmak için daha fazla araştırma yapılması gerekmektedir. Bu çalışma, bir temel olarak kabul edilebilir.

Eş ilişkisinden doğan stres kaynakları, çift yaşantısı içinde ve eşten kaynaklı olarak ortaya çıkan stres olarak tanımlanır ve çiftler arasında ortaya çıkan

farklı hedefler, tutumlar, ihtiyaçlar, istekler, rahatsız edici alışkanlıklar veya uyumsuzluk nedeniyle ortaya çıkan gerilimler ve çatışmaları içerir. Evlilik stresi aynı zamanda eş ile ilgili endişeleri ve üzüntüleri de içerir (Bodenman ve ark. 2006). Stresin yakın ilişkiler üzerindeki etkisinin anlaşılmasının yanı sıra yakın ilişkilerden kaynaklı stresin anlaşılması gereği de söz konusudur. Ancak stresin yakın ilişkiler üzerindeki etkisinin incelendiği çalışmalar daha fazla ilgi görmüştür (Bodenmann, Ledermann ve Bradbury, 2007; Repetti, 1989; Story ve Repetti, 2006).

Uygulamalar açısından, psikolojideki arabuluculuk süreçlerinin değerlendirilmesi ve anlaşılması, çok değişkenli doğrudan ve dolaylı ilişkilerin önemi hakkında bilgi ortaya koyabileceği ve müdahale etmenin uygun olduğu yerler hakkında ipuçları sağlayabileceği için önemlidir. Evlilik işleyişini geliştirmek için, insanlar hem ilişkilerinden kaynaklı hem de dışsal kaynaklı stresle başa çıkma becerilerini geliştirmelidir.

Bu araştırmanın bulguları, stresli bireylere ve ailelerine müdahale eden aile terapistlerini, aile danışmanlarını ve klinik uygulayıcılarını bilgilendirebilir ve bireylerin ilişkisel ve kişisel refah konularına ilişkin aile sistemi görüşünü benimsemeye teşvik edebilir. Böylece pratikte ailedeki duygusal işleyiş faktörlerini de ele alırlar. Alan uygulayıcıları Benlik Farklılaşması Envanteri-Kısa Formu gibi araçlar kullanarak, belirtilerle bağlantılı olabilecek aile duygusal işleyişinin (örneğin iç içe geçme, duygusal tepkisellik ve duygusal kopma) potansiyel olarak sorunlu yönlerini tanımlayabilir. Bireyin kendi farklılaşma düzeyini değerlendirdikten sonra, müdahale programlarından ziyade önleme programlarına odaklanabilir ve bu şekilde evlilik ve günlük

yaşam konularını ele almak için ön hazırlıklı hale gelebilirler. Bu, yetişkinlerin gelecek nesillere keyifli bir yaşam sürmeleri ve eşleriyle daha yakın ilişkiler kurmaları için rol modeller olmalarına yardımcı olabilir. Örneğin, algılanan stres duygusal tepkisellik aracılığıyla yaşam doyumu ve evlilik doyumunu etkiler ve alan çalışanları danışanın stresi daha iyi yönetebilmesi için duygusal tepkiselliğe müdahale ederek eşleriyle daha sağlıklı ilişkiler geliştirmelerine ve daha doyum veren bir yaşam sürmelerine yardımcı olabilir. Benliğin Farklılaşması Envanteri-Kısa Formu gibi araçların aile öyküleri, genogramlar ve zaman çizelgeleri dahil olmak üzere değerlendirmeyi tamamlamak için, tamamlayıcı olarak kullanılması gerektiğini vurgulamak önemlidir. Son olarak, bu çalışma kapsamında ele alınan değişkenlerin evlilik ve yaşam doyumunu açıklamadaki etkililiğinin Bowen'ın aile sistemi kuramı çerçevesinde incelenmesi, hem ulusal hem de uluslararası alan yazına katkı sağlamaktadır.

#### **4.2 Gelecek Çalışmalar için Öneriler**

Bu çalışmanın sonuçları, başlangıç aşaması sayılabilecek nitelikte de olsa ümit vericidir ve stres değişkenleri ve benlik farklılaşmasının yaşam doyumu ve evlilik doyumu üzerindeki rolünü göstermektedir. Gelecek çalışmalar için, ayrışma düzeyinin zaman içinde evlilik doyumunu yordama gücünü nasıl değiştirdiğini gösteren boylamsal araştırmalar tasarlanabilir. Boylamsal araştırmalar benlik ayrışması düzeyinin evlilik doyumunun uzun ömürlülüğünü ne ölçüde ön göreceğini açıklayabilir. Aynı şekilde, Bowen'ın (1978; Kerr ve Bowen, 1988), psikoterapinin farklılaşma düzeylerinde artış ile sonuçlanacağını iddia ettiği Aile Sistemleri Kuramı'nın uygulandığı deneysel

psikoterapi çalışmalarına ihtiyaç olduğu düşünülmektedir. Bu sayede, evlilik hayatının kalitesini arttırmada Aile Sistemleri Kuramı, çiftlerin hem samimiyet ve yakınlık hem de bağımsızlık kazanma kabiliyetini kuvvetle güçlendirir mi? sorusuna yanıt bulunabilir. Yine bu sayede evlilik terapilerinin danışma süreci sonrası uzun vadeli kazanımlar göstermedeki etkililiği sınanabilir (örneğin Jacobson, 1992; Snyder, Wills ve Grady-Fletcher, 1991). Bu araştırma soruları gelecekteki çalışmalarda yanıt bulursa, hem evlilik danışması hem de bireysel danışma süreçlerinde benlik ayrışmasının rolü açıklığa kavuşabilir.

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