



## The Relationship Between Differentiation of Self and Marital Quality in Turkish Married Women: The Mediating Role of Dyadic Adjustment

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### ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the mediating role of dyadic adjustment in the relationship between self-differentiation and marital quality in married women. The participants of the study consist of 304 women selected by convenience sampling method. A Personal Information Form, Differentiation of Self Scale, Renewed Couple Adjustment Scale, and Marriage Quality Scale were used as data collection tools. Data analysis was carried out with SPSS 22 and AMOS 23 programs. The fit values of the model established in the study showed a perfect fit ( $X^2/sd=1.348$ ,  $NFI=.994$ ,  $CFI=.998$ ,  $IFI=.998$ ,  $RMSEA=.034$ ). In the subsequent correlation analysis, a significant and positive relationship was observed between the predictor variables and the predicted variables ( $p<.01$ ). Regression analysis revealed that differentiation of self significantly predicted marital quality ( $\beta=.46$ ,  $p<.01$ ). It was observed that the effect of the differentiation of self (independent variable) on the quality of marriage (dependent variable) ( $\beta=.46$ ,  $p<.01$ ), decreases with the inclusion of the mediator variable which is dyadic adjustment in the model ( $\beta=.12$ ,  $p<.01$ ). Thus, that dyadic adjustment was found have a mediating role in the relationship between the differentiation of the self and the marital quality. The results were discussed in light of the literature.

### Introduction

In marriage, a structure formed by social rules, two different personalities join together and fulfill each other's wishes, interests, and needs (Ersanlı & Kalkan, 2008). According to Özgüven (2009), it encompasses individual, social, and psychological roles. Individual roles include the sexual adjustment of couples, and social and psychological ones include the achievement of being a family and sharing love, respect, and togetherness. In addition, the marital relationship is an important support mechanism for an individual (Çağ & Yıldırım, 2013; Kurdek, 2005), contributing to his or her physical and psychological well-being (Proulx, et al., 2007), stress management (Kurt, 2018), effective communication, an active sex life (Kapucu, 2014), and perceived social support (Çağ & Yıldırım, 2013).

In this respect, Bowen Family Systems Therapy (BFST), which was developed to understand the couple and family system, is considered to be important. BFST has been used in many studies to understand couple

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relationships (Lampis et al., 2017; Schnarch, 1998; Titelman, 2014). In particular, the concept of Differentiation of Self (DoS) of the BFST is seen as a determinant in couple relationships.

Bowen (1978) states that DoS is an essential factor in the family system and couple relationship. Prior empirical studies indicate that DoS has a significant relationship with both marital quality and dyadic adjustment. In this framework, the mediating model established with the variables used in the study is expected to contribute both to the multicultural structure of BFST and to the couple and family therapy interventions. In this context, it is seen that there is a limited number of studies investigating the DoS concept in Turkey (Polat & İlhan, 2018; Sarıkaya et al., 2018, Işık et al., 2020; Tönbül, 2020). Therefore, it is thought that this research may provide a new perspective on understanding couple and family systems in the Turkish context. In this perspective, we focused on testing the concept of DoS for Turkish women with a collectivist structure.

### **Differentiation of Self (DoS)**

It was Bowen who theoretically claimed that the concept of DoS, which was determined as the independent variable of the study, affects both dyadic adjustment and marital quality (Gonzalez et al., 2020). In Bowen's Family Systems Theory (BFST), couples are influenced by their families of origin when choosing their spouses and maintaining communication, also reflecting these interaction patterns onto their present marriage relationship (Nazlı, 2017). In BFST, Bowen explains the factors underlying the family and spouse interaction patterns through eight concepts: differentiation of self, emotional processes, multigenerational transmission, triangles, family projection, emotional cut-off, social regression, and sibling position (Hall, 2013). Nichols (2013) states that, according to this theory, two known opposite life forces, individuality, and togetherness, govern spousal relationships, and DoS is the basis of spouses' ability to harmonize these two opposite poles.

Kerr (1988), who conducted research on the DoS together with Bowen, states that adjustment problems in a marital relationship increase chronic anxiety, which in turn decreases the level of DoS. Furthermore, Xue et al. (2018) state that chronic anxiety is caused by dysfunctional close relationship systems, which is a consequence of insufficient DoS. The most important result is that existing research on DoS reveals that it is an important resource for spouses in stress management and marital adjustment (Peleg & Grandi, 2018).

Research results show that individuals who experience problems with dyadic adjustment and have low-quality marriages fail in the DoS. Accordingly, spouses who have not achieved DoS are more prone to be emotional and maintain their relationships by reacting to the people around them (Nichols & Schwartz, 2005). As a result, the partner who has lower levels of DoS in their relationship has difficulty maintaining autonomy, especially when encountering issues that cause anxiety or conflict (Nichols, 2013). According to Skowron et al. (2003), individuals with a higher level of DoS in anxiety and conflict situations may exhibit an "I" stance, thus protecting their sense of self and managing conflicts rationally. In contrast, people who show little DoS tend to suffer emotional problems in their relationships, having trouble in maintaining their sense of self and aggravating their psychological problems.

### **DoS and Marital Quality**

The extent to which spouses perceive their marriage as good and healthy influences the marital quality (Glenn, 1990). Spanier (1976) asserts that spouses whose marriages are high quality tend to show better adjustment, enjoy communication with each other, and derive satisfaction from marriage. Proulx et al. (2007) argue that marital quality is an umbrella term that covers concepts such as marital satisfaction, marital adjustment, and marital happiness. Fincham and Bradbury (1987) point out that confusion about the concept of marital quality can be eliminated by this umbrella term.

From this perspective, marital quality is seen as a subjective evaluation of the relationship between the spouses; it is also recognized as a multidimensional concept that includes positive (happiness, satisfaction) and negative (conflict) aspects (Spanier & Lewis, 1980). Indeed, the quality of a marriage is determined by the dynamic interactions between spouses (Mosmann et al., 2006). This interactivity is a complex structure influenced by spouses' personal characteristics, education level, parental status, socioeconomic status, and sexuality (Olson, 2000).

Bowen expresses that couples with low levels of DoS tend to experience marital conflict more frequently (Bowen, 1978). In terms of BFST, this situation is also considered to impede marital quality (Roytburd & Myrna, 2008). In a family, when the struggle begins in the relationship, anxiety appears (Murphy, 1999). If

anxiety cannot be managed well, that is, if DoS is low, the mental health of family members is imperiled (Campos, 2007). When the level of differentiation decreases in the marital relationship, fusion between couples occurs, and marital quality and adjustment decrease (Harrison, 2003; Kruse, 2007).

Longitudinal studies of marital quality suggest that one's family of origin experiences persist into later life (Wamboldt & Reiss, 1989). Therefore, it is thought that BFST and the concept of DoS, which forms the core of this approach, are important in understanding the concept of marital quality. In addition, family systems theory aims to understand marital quality as perceived by spouses. It defines this perspective, i.e. the perception of marital quality by spouses, as the principle of holism, which states that all parts of the system are interconnected and affect each other (Broderick, 1993). This principle of holism implies that a partner's level of differentiation affects not only their marital quality but also their partner's marital quality.

### **DoS and Dyadic Adjustment**

Another variable that is thought to be effective on marital quality in the research model is dyadic adjustment. Sabatelli (1988) asserts that a major determinant of marital quality is dyadic adjustment. Indeed, the definition of dyadic adjustment encompasses a couple's ability to maintain harmony by using a positive communication language in the face of problems. In the meantime, it ensures quality in marriages, contributing to the psychological well-being of individuals and reducing various psychological symptoms (Robinson & Blanton, 1993).

Today dyadic adjustment does not only refer to partners' subjective perception of their marriages, but it also pertains to the quality of the relationship (Kalkan, 2002). Spanier and Cole (1976) define it as spouses' promoting each other's personal development, rather than merely adapting to cohabiting. Dyadic adjustment as a form of supporting personal development is considered as dyadic consensus, dyadic satisfaction, affectional expression, and dyadic cohesion (Spanier & Cole, 1976).

More recently, making a study into the factors affecting dyadic adjustment, Larson (2003) described these factors as a three-dimensional concept, which he called the "marriage triangle." The first dimension involves individual characteristics. These are personality traits, irrational beliefs, and psychological symptoms. The second dimension, dyadic characteristics, consists of spouses' communication styles, problem-solving abilities, role-sharing, and attachment. The third, and final, one is the environmental dimension, which includes social support perceived to be provided by the root family, friend relationships, work life, and parental attitudes. Considering all these explanations, dyadic adjustment is regarded to be of great importance for romantic relationships such as marriage (McGoldrick et al., 2016) and an important constituent of marital quality (Spanier, 1976).

DoS is seen as a fundamental element of an individual's capacity to achieve intimacy and reciprocity in marriage. In recent years, many studies have put forward that DoS is a significant determinant of dyadic adjustment, and there are many research findings that individuals and couples with high DoS are more satisfied with their intimate relationships and experience less relational conflict compared to couples who experience fusion with others, emotional reactivity or emotional disconnection (Aryamanesh et al, 2012; Knauth & Skowron, 2004; Lampis, 2016; Lampis et al, 2017; Rodriguez-Gonzalez et al, 2016; Sabatelli & Bartle-Haring, 2003).

For more than 40 years, many empirical studies have scrutinized the relationship between DoS and dyadic adjustment (Rodríguez-González, 2016). The attention to examining the cross-cultural validity of Bowen's expression that is DoS predicts dyadic adjustment has been illustrated by studies in different cultural structures (Ferreira et al., 2015; Kaleta, 2014; Lampis, 2016; Rodríguez-González et al. 2016). These studies have found that DoS is positively associated with higher dyadic adjustment for men and women.

### **Present Study**

Considering the literature presented in the introduction, it was observed that DoS had a predictive effect on both couple adjustment and marital quality. In this context, it was thought that couple adjustment might be a mediating variable as a result of the literature review. Although many researchers have studied the connection between dyadic adjustment and marriage quality, it is still considered critical to delve deeper into the basic

mechanism of the relationship between these two variables. Because, as indicated by Bowen (1978), DoS is a core concept in marital relationships. However, as marriage has a dynamic structure, it is difficult to explain it with a single concept. Although DoS constitutes the fundamental to a marriage relationship, it is thought that the dyad's adjustment process may have positive or negative effects on the relationship. Therefore, dyadic adjustment is considered a mediating mechanism in the relationship between DoS and marital quality. The two objectives of this study, (1) the effect of DoS on dyadic adjustment and marital quality, and (2) the reflections of increasing the level of DoS on the dyadic relationship, are thought to make great contributions to the BFST literature. Besides, as this study aims to understand the cross-cultural view of BFST and to test the concept of DoS in a sample of married Turkish women, it is considered important to understand how supporting the DoS influences marital quality in married Turkish women. Therefore, this present study focused on the mediating role of dyadic adjustment in the relationship between DoS and marital quality. Although several different studies have focused on the relationship between DoS and dyadic adjustment, and also that between DoS and marriage quality separately, there has not been a study addressing the mediating effect of dyadic adjustment. For this reason, it is hoped that a study shedding light on the mediating effect of dyadic adjustment will be significant for the related literature. In brief, the present study intends to explore the mediating role of married women's dyadic adjustment in the relationship between DoS and marriage quality. To this end, answers to the following research questions were sought in light of the related literature:

1. Is differentiation of self a significant predictor of marriage quality?
2. Is dyadic adjustment a significant predictor of marriage quality?
3. Does a dyadic adjustment have a mediating role in the relationship between differentiation of self and marriage quality?

## Method

### Research Design

This research is a descriptive study that has adopted the relational screening model to explore the relationship among spouses' dyadic adjustment, marital quality, and differentiation of self, as well as the mediating role of dyadic adjustment in the relationship between spouses' differentiation of self and marriage quality.

### Study Group

The study group for the research consists of 303 female participants, who responded to an online survey. The demographic characteristics of the study group are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Sociodemographic characteristics of participants (N=304)

	<b>Groups</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Age</b>	20-29	57	18.8
	30-39	159	52.3
	40-49	72	23.7
	50-60	16	5.3
<b>Sex</b>	Female	304	100
<b>Education Level</b>	Primary	28	9.2
	High School	50	16.4
	University	226	74.3
<b>Number of Children</b>	None	65	21.4
	Single	107	35.2
	Two	113	37.2
	Three and more	19	6.3
<b>Type of Marital Union</b>	Arranged marriage	81	26.6
	Love match	223	73.4
<b>Length of Marriage</b>	0-5 years	94	30.9
	6-12 years	104	34.2
	13-20 years	62	20.4
	21 years and longer	44	14.5

An analysis of demographic variables shows that 52.3% of the married women who participated in the study are within the 30-39 age range; 74.3 % of the participants are university graduates, 37.2 % have two children, 73.4% got married having dated, 34.2% have been married for 6-12 years.

### Data Collection Tools

**Renewed Dyadic Adjustment Scale.** The 32-item Dyadic Adjustment Scale developed by Spanier (1976) to measure spouses' adjustment levels was converted by Busby et al. (1995) to a 14-item version. Gündoğdu (2007) translated the scale into Turkish as part of a master's thesis study, and Bayraktaroğlu and Çakıcı (2017) conducted psychometric analyses to adapt it to the Turkish culture. The scale consists of three sub-dimensions: satisfaction, negotiation, and adjustment. The internal consistency coefficient scores of the renewed Dyadic Adjustment Scale are as follows: .87 overall, .80 for the *satisfaction* sub-dimension, .80 for the *negotiation* sub-dimension, and .74 for the *adjustment* sub-dimension (Bayraktaroğlu & Çakıcı, 2017). In this study, the internal consistency coefficient was determined to be .93 for the total score, .86 for the satisfaction subdimension, and .87 for the adjustment sub-scale.

**Differentiation of Self Inventory.** DSI, developed by Skowron and Friedlander (1998) and later revised by Skowron and Schmitt (2003), has been adapted to Turkish by Işık and Bulduk (2014). In the original scale, the Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient of the scale was .88 for the whole scale, and for the subscales, it was found to be .84 (Emotional Reactivity), .83 (Individuation), .82 (Emotional Disconnection), and .74 (Fusion). As a result of the adaptation process, the DSI was converted into a 20-item, 6-point Likert-type scale composed of emotional reactivity (ER), individuation (I), emotional disconnection (ED), and dependency on others (DO) sub-scales. The higher the score on the overall scale and sub-scales, the higher the differentiation-of-self level. The validity analyses conducted confirmed the four-factorial structure and revealed a strong negative correlation with anxiety. The internal consistency reliability coefficient of the DSI was found to be .81 overall (ER= .78, I= .75, DO= .77, RD= .74), and the test-retest reliability coefficient obtained at five-week intervals was found to be  $r = .74$  (Işık & Bulduk, 2014). In the present study, the internal consistency reliability coefficient of the inventory overall was found to be .85, while it was found to be .73 for emotional reactivity, .64 for individuation, .77 for dependency on others, and .64 for emotional disconnection.

**Marital Quality Scale.** The Marital Quality Scale was developed by Hahlweg (1996) to assess marriage relationship quality. It is a 4-point Likert-type measurement tool composed of 30 items. The Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient of the scale overall was .95; as to subscales, it is .93 for quarreling, .91 for tenderness, and .88 for togetherness/communication. The lowest scale score is 30, whereas the highest scale score is 120. A score of 54 and below indicates low marital quality, and scores above 54 indicate a high level of marital quality. The correlation coefficient of .85 indicates that there is a strong correlation between the scale and the Marital Adjustment Inventory. The scale was adapted to Turkish by Kurt (2018). After the adaptation of the scale, the internal consistency coefficient of the scale was found to be .80 for the total score, .87 for the quarreling subscale, .91 for the tenderness subscale, and .88 for the togetherness/communication subscale. In the present study, the internal consistency coefficient of the scale for the total score was .91. As for subscales, it is .91 for quarreling, .91 for tenderness, and .91 for togetherness/communication.

### Data Collection

Before the data collection phase of the research process, approval of the Istanbul Medipol University Social Science Ethics Committee was obtained (dated 07.07.2022 and numbered E-43037191-604.01.01-27998). Subsequently, online versions of the scales were obtained through a Google Form web page. A response to each item on the online scales was mandatory and necessary settings were made to prevent multiple attempts by the same respondent. After the necessary adjustments, the online forms were published, and they were first sent to married participants in Çanakkale and then to those in Istanbul and Mersin through social media and email. Data collection took place between 15 July and 15 September 2022.

### Data Analysis

The present research analyzed the mediation effect of spouses' dyadic adjustment in the relationship between marriage quality and differentiation of self. Before the testing of mediation, first, descriptive statistics of variables (arithmetic mean, standard deviation, skewness, and kurtosis) were evaluated. Then, the relationship

between the variables was examined using Pearson Product Moments Correlation Analysis. Finally, analyses were performed to determine whether the mediator variable has a partial or full effect. The data was analyzed by means of SPSS-22 and Amos 23. The significance level was set at .05.

**Results**

This section presents the results about correlational relations in participants’ scores from scales and analyses of mediating variables. Results of Pearson Product Moments Correlation Analysis performed to analyse the relationship between differentiation of self, marital quality, and dyadic adjustment are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Analysis of correlation between predictive variables

	1.	2.	3.
<b>1.Differentiation of self</b>	1		
<b>2.Marriage quality</b>	.459**	1	
<b>3.Dyadic adjustment</b>	.419**	.833**	1

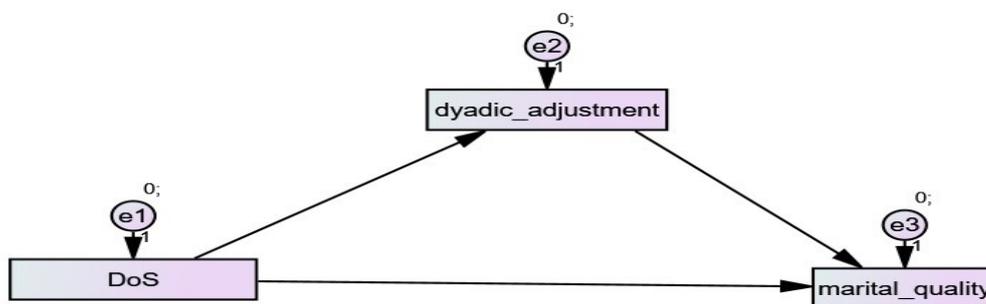
*p*<.01

As can be seen in Table 2, there is a moderate positive correlation between *differentiation of self* total scores and *marital quality* total scores ( $r = .459, p < .01$ ), and between *differentiation of self* total scores and *dyadic adjustment* total scores ( $r = .419, p < .01$ ). In addition, a strong and positive correlation was found between *marital quality* total scores and *dyadic adjustment* total scores ( $r = .833, p < .01$ ).

**Mediation Test by Structural Equation Modelling**

The mediating role of dyadic adjustment in the effect of differentiation of self on marital quality was tested by means of AMOS 23 pathway analysis. Producing more accurate results than regression analysis, structural equation modelling was employed (Meydan & Şeşen, 2011). The design adopted in the research is presented in Figure 1.

**Figure 1.** Differentiation of self – marital quality - dyadic adjustment structural equation modelling



In the validation of the structural model, which is the first stage of analysis, the Maximum Likelihood calculation method was employed. The fit values of the model are presented in Table 3.

**Table 3.** Fit values of differentiation of self-dyadic adjustment -marital quality model

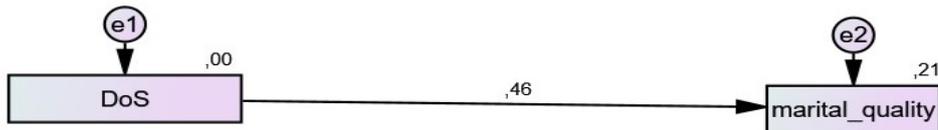
Model	Result	Excellent fit parameters*	Goof fit parameters*
X <sup>2</sup> /sd	1.348	0 ≤ X <sup>2</sup> /sd ≤ 3	3 < X <sup>2</sup> /sd ≤ 5
NFI	.994	>.95	>.90
CFI	.998	>.95	>.90
IFI	.998	>.95	>.90
RMSEA	.034	<.05	<.08

\*Based on model fit values proposed by Tabachnick and Fidell (2015)

As can be seen in Table 3, the model fits the data perfectly, showing excellent fit indices.

As the model showed a perfect fit, the relationship between differentiation of self, which was the independent variable, and marital quality, which was the dependent variable, was examined in the first place. The regression coefficient obtained from the model test is displayed in Figure 2. It was found that differentiation of self scores have a significant and positive effect on marital quality scores ( $\beta = .46, p < .01$ ). That is, the first sub-question was answered: differentiation of self score is a significant predictor of marital quality.

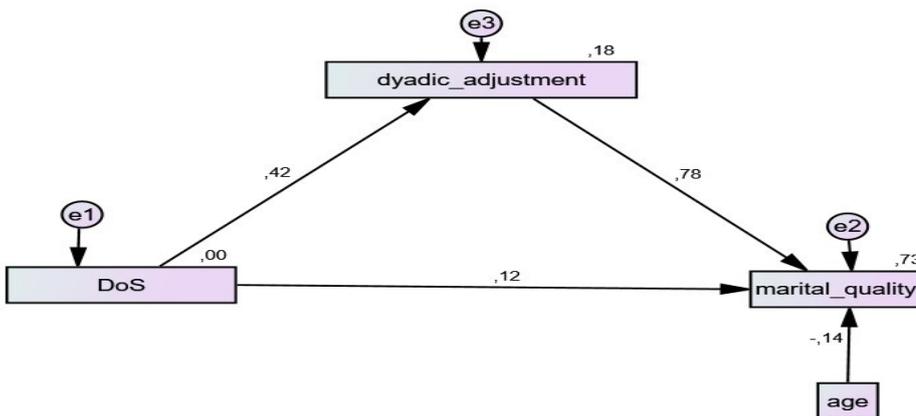
**Figure 2.** Differentiation of self – marital quality structural equation modelling



$p < .01$ , DoS=Differentiation of Self

In the second step, dyadic adjustment was added to the relationship between differentiation of self and marital quality, which were already on the model, as the mediator variable. Moreover, age, which is accepted to have an effect on marriage quality, was added to the model. Mediator variable regression coefficients for the model are presented in Figure 3.

**Figure 3.** The mediating role of dyadic adjustment in the relationship between differentiation of self and marital quality



$p < .01$ , DoS=Differentiation of Self

As can be seen in Figure 3, differentiation of self-scores significantly and positively correlate with dyadic adjustment ( $\beta = .42, p < .01$ ). Dyadic adjustment, included in the analysis as the mediator variable, was found to

be a significant predictor of marital quality ( $\beta=.78$ ,  $p<.01$ ), providing an answer to the second research question. The effect of differentiation of self, which is the independent variable, on marital quality, which is the dependent variable ( $\beta= .46$ ,  $p<.01$ ), was observed to decrease with the inclusion of dyadic adjustment, which is the mediator variable ( $\beta=.12$ ,  $p<.01$ ). It shows that dyadic adjustment has the role of partial mediator variable. Thus, it answered the main research question, manifesting the mediating role of dyadic adjustment in the relationship between differentiation of self and marital quality.

The results of the structural model analysis are displayed in Table 4.

**Table 4.** Structural model analysis results

Estimators	Result Variables			
	Dyadic adjustment		Marital Quality	
	$\beta$	S.E.	B	S.E.
Differentiation of self (Path a)	.42**	.039		
R <sup>2</sup>	.18**			
Differentiation of self (Path c)			.46**	.071
R <sup>2</sup>			.21**	
Differentiation of self (Path c)			.12**	.046
Dyadic adjustment (Path b)			.78**	.061
R <sup>2</sup>			.73**	
Indirect effect			.329 (0.250, 0.405)	

$p<.01$ , SE=Standard Error, the values in parentheses are within the lower and upper limits of confidence interval. Bootstrap resampling=5000

Bootstrap analysis was performed to confirm the third hypothesis of the research. As assumed, Bootstrap values of 5000 resample and 9% confidence interval did not contain the value 0, so it was determined that differentiation of self-correlated significantly with marital quality through the mediating role of dyadic adjustment ( $\beta= .329$ , %95 GA [0.250, 0.405]). The mediating role of dyadic adjustment in the relationship between differentiation of self and marital quality was once again proved by the Bootstrap method.

### Discussion and Conclusion

The present study explored the mediating role of dyadic adjustment in the relationship between married women's DoS and marital quality. To this end, first, the relationship between the predictor and predicted variables was examined. The results of Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Analysis revealed that DoS has a moderately positive relationship with both marital quality and dyadic adjustment. This is indicative of the probability that both marital quality and dyadic adjustment will increase parallel to an increase in married women's DoS. Moreover, the findings showed a significant and positive correlation between dyadic adjustment and marital quality, which indicates that marital quality increases parallel to the increase in dyadic adjustment levels of married women.

The findings of the study are in concordance with those of the studies in the related literature. Substantial research focusing on the connection between dyadic adjustment and relationship quality exists in the literature. For example, Griffin and Apostol (1993) implemented the Relationship Development Program to observe that it remarkably increases spouses' DoS levels and improves the quality of their relationship. Similarly, Skowron and Friedlander (1998) maintained that DoS is a significant predictor of marital satisfaction. Skowron (2000) found out that married couples with higher levels of DoS tend to have higher-quality marital relationships. Similarly, Lal and Barte-Harling (2011) identified a meaningful relationship between DoS and marital quality, and based on their research, Polat (2014) concluded that DoS positively correlates with dyadic adjustment.

After the identification of correlations, the predictive effects were analysed in the research. The first research question was formulated to seek an answer to whether DoS significantly predicts marital quality. It was determined that the extent of married women's DoS is a significant predictor of marital quality and explains 21% of the variance. Accordingly, an increase in the level of DoS is likely to improve marital quality.

Connections between DoS and dyadic adjustment were also explored in the study. The findings revealed that DoS is a significant predictor of dyadic adjustment, explaining 18% of the variance. Thus, it can be inferred that the increase in DoS potentially increases dyadic adjustment.

To seek an answer to the second research problem, whether dyadic adjustment is a significant predictor of marital quality was analysed. The findings demonstrated that married women's dyadic adjustment is a significant predictor of marital quality. Accordingly, it can be concluded that dyadic adjustment is a remarkable factor in marital quality for women.

The confirmation of the first and second hypotheses because of the findings of the study are important for mental health professionals working in the field of couple and family counseling. Moreover, the confirmation of these hypotheses provide support for empirically proving the importance of DoS, which is central to the BFST approach, for couple and marital relationships. Also, it is thought that investigating the levels of DoS of married women in Turkish culture, because of its collectivist structure, may provide a multicultural perspective to Bowen's approach.

The third research question of the study is formulated to explore the mediating role of dyadic adjustment in the relationship between differentiation of self and marital quality for married women. The findings identified the mediating role of dyadic adjustment. In addition, it was found that differentiation of self and dyadic adjustment together explain 73% of marital quality among married women. Thus, it can be concluded that an increase in marital quality can be attributed to the co-existence of differentiation of self and dyadic adjustment.

All these findings are in concordance with those of studies in the existing related literature. The results of the present study confirmed the importance of DoS, which Bowen considered critical to couple relationships (Kerr, 1988). They are also parallel to the findings of several studies that point to the fact that DoS has a significant predictive effect on dyadic adjustment (Arpita, 2006; Harrison, 2003; Hollander, 2007). The finding pointing to the predictive role of DoS marital quality is parallel to the findings obtained by Kalkan and Aydoğan (2019). Several studies exist in the related literature demonstrating that marriage quality has an impact on overall psychological health. The higher the quality of a marital relationship is, the lower the level of depression (Williams, 2003), the fewer the somatic disorders (Wickrama et al., 1997), and the more improved positive perspectives (Ross et al., 1990). The DoS concept, which this study sheds light on, can be regarded as positively influencing marital quality and other aspects of marriage.

These results are significant for marriage and couples' therapists. The DoS concept, which was determined to be an important predictor of marriage quality and dyadic adjustment in the present research, can be utilized in marriage and couples' therapies. Interventions towards increasing spouses' DoS levels can be integrated into group therapies and psychoeducation procedures, which are most likely to have a longer-lasting effect on marriage quality.

The study is expected to be of remarkable significance for mental health specialists working with couples and scientists focusing on intimate relationships, presenting a new perspective. It will especially help researchers focusing on marital and couple relationships gain new insight into areas such as understanding the marriage process, identifying the factors affecting intimate relationships, and determining the psychological sub-dimensions of close relationships. It is hoped that the findings of the study will provide the foundation of interventional procedures for couple therapies. In brief, it is expected that the research will significantly contribute to the related literature.

Since these findings were conducted with married women in Turkish culture, they support the universality of the propositions of Bowen's concept of DoS. In addition, the research results provide a cultural perspective on women's understanding of marriage. However, since these findings represent only the sample of Turkish married women, it is necessary to extend the application to other cultures. This study shows that DoS and dyadic adjustment predict marital quality in married women. In future studies, the focus should be with close relationship forms such as married couples, couples in romantic relationships, etc. It was determined that dyadic adjustment played a mediating role in the relationship between DoS and marital quality. Apart from this model, other variables that may be related to DoS in couple relationships should be included in the research. For example, family of origin attitudes, marital anxiety, conflicts, etc.

Nevertheless, the research has certain limitations. It was carried out with married women only, so the findings are related with this sample. When interpreting these findings, it should be noted that the mediation tests were conducted cross-sectionally. Longitudinal studies are needed to reach more causal conclusions. Finally, the factors determining relationship quality can be added to the research variables to increase generalizability.

As a result, higher levels of DoS contribute to higher marital quality and couple adjustment. The results of the study contribute to the understanding of how DoS and dyadic adjustment affect marital quality among married Turkish women. Moreover, the results of the mediation analysis show that DoS is an important mechanism in the transfer of dyadic adjustment to marital quality.

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**Data Availability:** The dataset generated and analyzed during the current study is available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

**Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate:** All actions conducted in research studies involving human participants adhered to the ethical guidelines set forth by the institutional and/or national research committee. Ethic committee approval was obtained from Istanbul Medipol University Social Science Ethics Committee (dated 07.07.2022 and numbered E-43037191-604.01.01-27998).

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