



## Comparison of Differentiation among Satisfying Couples and Conflicting Couples in Bandar Abbas City

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### ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was comparison of Differentiation among satisfying couples, and conflicting couples. Components of differentiation (Emotional reactivity, Emotional Cutoff, Emotional Fusion and I- position) were investigated. 120 couples were nonrandom selected as sample of this study. Equally in each group 60 couples attended. Scales were used in this study include differentiation of self-Inventory (DSI) and index of Hudson marital satisfied (IMS). The main results of this study showed: in the differentiation was found significant difference among two groups of participant. There is not among between men and women of participant about differentiation. In the Emotional reactivity and Emotional Fusion was found significant difference among two groups of participant. The results showed that women more than men are suffer Emotional reactivity and Emotional Fusion. There is not any significant difference among two groups participant about Emotional Cutoff and I-position. The multiple regression analysis showed components of differentiation (Emotional reactivity, Emotional Cutoff, Emotional Fusion and I position) could predict %56 variance of marital satisfaction variable. Overall was determined that the satisfying couples had higher level of differentiation in comparison with conflicting couples that improved their marital satisfaction.

**Keywords:** Differentiation, Satisfying Couples, Conflicting Couples

### INTRODUCTION

Marital relationship is considered as the most important relationship of a man and an introduction to educate the next generation [1]. Marriage is a relationship that is started by selection of person and stay in that almost half a century. A man and woman that marry should adapt themselves toward half a century social evolution, development and reciprocal changes. If they couldn't cope with, they will more likely suffer from their marital relationship [2].

Marital satisfied is of the most important and complicated aspect of a marital relationship. Its definition may be so simple; however, considering the affective factors on marital satisfied indicates the difficulty of its definition and description. Marital satisfied is an emotional-cognitive assessment of person from the partial's close relationship [3]. The term, marital satisfied, indicates the joy of a person and his/her satisfaction from the marital close relationship [4]. The definition of compatibility and marital satisfied stated that the compatible couples are spouses that have a lot of agreement with each other. They are satisfied from the type and level of their relationship, the quality of spending the leisure time. They have a good management in the field of financial issues. Epstein & Bacom [5] have proposed that theoretical & experimental developments lead to more understandings of affective recognitions in marital ties. The results of various studies have indicated that success and satisfaction of marital tie depends on the awareness of couples from the affective factors in the successful marital ties.

Occurring conflict is inevitable in any close relationship. Some couples show their conflict directly and others deny and suppressed and show it indirectly. Almost any couples that refer for resolutions are in conflict situation. The subject of their conflicts might be expectations, needs, wants, money, sexual relationship, children

and relatives [6]. Many researchers have been performed in the subject of destructive impacts of conflicts and the results indicated that marital conflict is effective in the mental, physical and family health. Other researchers have approved the ties of marital conflicts with depression, eating disorders and special disease such as cancer and heart disease. In fact, aggressive behaviors are associated with the changes of immune system [7]. Mentally, many people have experienced the conflict in the marital relationship extremely stressful [8]. Marital conflict is associated with phenomena such as violence and divorce. It can be stated that divorce is of the consequences of marital discord and the most distressing life events which is associated with mental and physical disorders [9].

Theories and researches have shown that family experience have a critical role in emotional-social development and compatibility in adult. On the other word, it was figured out that success of adult in achieving the emotional development and the adequacy of their interpersonal ties is associated with their emotional experience in family [10]. Bowen [11] in an attempt to explain the patterns of intimate relationships used the concept of differentiation to link the family experiences to separated relationships. Differentiated ones can separate the feeling and thinking from the intimate interactions. They experienced their emotions fully but they don't react to their emotions passively [12, 13 & 14].

Differentiation is the most fundamental theory of Bowen that pointed to the ability to experience intimacy with others and remain in the emotional atmosphere and at the same time independency from them [15&16]. In theory of Bowen, all the symptoms of mental & physical disease, social problems especially marital discord is associated with the differentiation level [17, 18 and 19]. Differentiation shows the interpersonal performance, ability to separate the emotional processes from logic ones and considering the interpersonal performance, ability to experience the intimacy along with the independency and appropriate balance between them [20, 21]. Differentiation is both applied in interpersonal; level and system structure level. Differentiation in interpersonal level is the ability of person to control his/her reaction toward the act of others [15].

Differentiation is defined as a process to achieve the objective. Differentiation is a direction in life and is of more than an existential mode. Furthermore, demonstrate it in situations such as: to say "Me" while others want "Us", to maintain the "Non anxious presence" against the anxious of others, to clarify the personal values and goals, acceptance of the maximum responsibility in return for emotional comfort, blaming it instead of others. Differentiation is systematic level is applied as the ability of a system/family in ordering itself. It has the higher level of compatible differentiation in family and system and in an emergency; create a balance between being separated and fusion [22, 17].

Two common responses of non-differentiated people to the situations is emotional fusion and emotional cutoff. Emotional fusion is a disability in keeping the personal belief of a divergent person toward others. These people prove themselves in being concordant with others. Emotional cutoff is one way to disagree with others due to the physical and psychological distance from them. The amount of revealing the emotional fusion and cutoff is totally depends on the level of their differentiation [14]. When there is no balance, the system is ready to explode and without feeling of separation, people became severely involved with emotional fusion with others and without feeling of belonging faced the emotional cutoff. Establishing balance between these two allowed people to have a feeling of belonging and individual identity along with the support from the system of family. A high level of differentiation allows the family to adjust themselves with necessary changes and sense of coherence and this leads to higher satisfaction in family communication [23, 17]. Differentiation acts as both process and personal feature. As a process, it describes the impact that system of family generation has in person and also is considered as predictor of anxiety [24]. As a personality trait differentiate will appear in various levels of inter psychic traits and extra psychic traits. In Inter psychic level, differentiation is divided into two level of functional and basic. Its functional level changes the method of adaptation with situations and its basic level lead to have stability in relations and situations. In Extra psychic level, it is formation of relationship of individual with others and personal boundaries about these ties [12, 25]. Many researches proposed the differentiation as predictive of marital satisfied, quality of marital satisfied and marital intimacy [17, 18, 22, 26, 27, 28 and 29]. And the other side of results proposed some differentiation researches as a fundamental structure in development of puberty and achieving to the mental health [30,31 and 32].

Clinical experience of family therapist and approaches of therapy family indicated that family has an important role in incidence of many marital conflicts and issues [2]. In another word, considering the above said researches in the field of differentiation and its components, it can be anticipated that differentiation is affective in marital satisfaction and confliction and consequently the incidence of divorce. Additionally, considering the current situation of society and warning statistics about divorce and its negative personal and social consequences, the objective of the current research is comparison of differentiation between satisfying and conflicting couples and also determining role of differentiation in predicting the marital satisfying.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

Considering the objective of research, two groups of satisfying couples and conflicting couples were compared in terms of differentiation variables and components of differentiation. Components of differentiation and marital satisfied were respectively considered as predicting variable and criterion variable. To analyze the results of research, multiple regression analysis tests and multivariate analysis of variance have been used.

**Differentiation of Self Inventory (DSI-R):** this self-inventory questionnaire has been prepared by Skowron & Fridlander [13] and revised by Skowron & Smith [23]. This questionnaire has 46 questions. The questions were categorized in Likert 6 part spectrum from 1 (Totally Disagree) to 6 (Totally Agree) and has four sub scales of Emotional Reactivity (ER), I- position (IP), Emotional Cutoff (EC) and Emotional Fusion (FO) [33]. Skowron and Smith [23] have reported the total reliability of research of Cronbach's alpha Coefficient an amount of 0.92 and its subscales reliability, a range of 0.81 to 0.86. Kener [18] has reported the total reliability of research of Cronbach's alpha Coefficient an amount of 0.90 and its subscales reliability, a range of 0.76 to 0.86 and Lal, 2006 have reported the Cronbach's alpha Coefficient an amount of 0.81 and its subscales reliability, a range of 0.60 to 0.81. Yonesi [29] standardized the mentioned questionnaire among the people between 25 to 50 years old in Tehran by applying retest methods on 500 people. He reported the total reliability of questionnaire with Cronbach's alpha an amount of 0.85 and for its subscales a range of 0.60 to 0.77. The reliability of this questionnaire by primary implementation on 20 couples and analysis through Cronbach's alpha Coefficient was equal to 0.85.

**Questionnaire of Index of Marital Satisfied:** Hudson Index of Marital Satisfied is a 25 questions questionnaire that is prepared for assessment of severity or range of discards of wife or husbands. This indicator has two cutting scores. The first cutting score is 30 ( $\pm 5$ ) that scores lower than it indicates no major clinical problems of a relation. The score higher than 30 indicates the remarkable clinical problems. The second cutting score is 70. The Scores those are higher than 70 almost indicate the severe stress and likely require the use of violence to solve problems [34]. The reliability of this questionnaire is 0.96 [34]. Ebrahimnejad [34] has found its reliability an amount of 0.96 in women and 0.94 in men through Cronbach's alpha. In this research, reliability of questionnaire was equal to 0.91 by primary implementation on 20 couples and analysis through Cronbach's alpha which is considered a good reliability for the questionnaire.

Hudson Indicator of Marital Satisfied has a high validity and a significance relationship with Lock-Wallace Marital Adjustment Test and Test of Enrich Marital Satisfied. Also, this indicator has a good and significance validity for differentiation of conflicting couples and apparently satisfied couples. Additionally, indicator of marital satisfied has a good validity [34].

## RESULTS

**First Hypothesis:** By sex (male and female), there is a difference between satisfying couples and conflicting ones about differentiation level. To analyze this hypothesis, MANOVA statistical test has been used. As it is seen in table 1, considering the independent variable, type of couples (satisfying & conflicting) with  $F=108.74$  in alpha level  $P=0.01$  has a significance difference in differentiation. There was no differentiation in independent variable of sex with  $F=1.15$ . Interactive impact of sex and type (satisfying and conflicting) with  $F=0.588$  has no significance difference in differentiation. Generally, among the two main impacts, only main impact of type of couples (satisfying & conflicting) has significance difference in differentiation. However, sex interactive impact has no significance difference on type of (satisfying and conflicting group).

**Second Hypothesis:** By sex (female and male), there is a significance difference between satisfying couples and conflicting couples about components of differentiation. To analyze this hypothesis, MANOVA statistical test has been used. As it is seen in table 2, considering the independent variable, type of couples (satisfying & conflicting) with  $F=133.962$  in alpha level  $P=0.001$  has a significance difference in emotional reactivity. Considering the independent variable of sex (male and female) in emotional reactivity, there is a significant difference between two groups of male and female with  $F=6.972$  in alpha level of  $P=0.009$ . Interactive impact of sex (male and female) and type (satisfying and conflicting) in emotional reactivity level with  $F=6.675$  in alpha level  $P=0.01$  is significant. Generally, both two main impacts and one interactive impact of type of couples (satisfying & conflicting) and sex (male and female) has significance difference in emotional reactivity. Additionally, table 2 shows that, given to the independent variable of type of couples (satisfying and conflicting) with  $F=62.422$  in alpha level  $P=0.001$ , there is a significance difference in variable of emotional fusion. Considering the independent variable of sex (male and female) in variable of emotional fusion, there is no significance relationship between two groups of male and female with  $F=0.91$ . Interactive impact between sex (male and female) and type (satisfying and conflicting) about emotional fusion with  $F=3.448$  in alpha level  $P=0.065$  is close to be significance. However, between two groups of (satisfying and conflicting couples) and male and female of the current research about two variables of emotional cutoff and I-position, there is no significance relationship.

**Table 1.** Two-way ANOVA of Type of (Conflicting & Satisfying) Group and Sex on differentiation between satisfying and conflicting couples

Source	Sum of Squares	Freedom Degree	Mean of Squares	Amount of F	Significance Level
<b>Type (Satisfying &amp; Conflicting)</b>	43686.02	3	43686.02	108.74	0.01
<b>Sex (Male &amp; Female)</b>	464.82	1	464.82	1.15	0.23
<b>Interactive Effects (Type &amp; Sex)</b>	236.02	1	236.02	0.588	0.44
<b>Error</b>	94808.33	236	401.73		
<b>Total</b>	5054394	240			

**Table 2.** Two-way ANOVA of Type of (Conflicting & Satisfying) Group and Sex on differentiation components between satisfying and conflicting couples

Differentiation Components	Source	Sum of Squares	Freedom Degree	Mean of Squares	Amount of F	Significance Level
<b>Emotional Reactivity</b>	Type (Satisfying & Conflicting)	6232.204	3	6232.204	133.962	0.001
	Sex (Male & Female)	324.338	1	324.338	6.972	0.009
	Interactive Impact (Sex & Type)	310.538	1	310.538	6.675	0.01
	Error	10979.217	236	46.522		
	Total	280065	240			
<b>Emotional Cutoff</b>	Type (Satisfying & Conflicting)	11.267	3	11.267	0.445	0.505
	Sex (Male & Female)	60	1	60	2.372	0.125
	Interactive Impact (Sex & Type)	1.667	1	1.667	0.066	0.798
	Error	5969	236	25.292		
	Total	435810	240			
<b>Emotional Fusion</b>	Type (Satisfying & Conflicting)	3872.067	3	3872.067	67.422	0.001
	Sex (Male & Female)	52.267	1	52.267	0.910	0.341
	Interactive Impact (Sex & Type)	198.017	1	198.017	3.448	0.065
	Error	13553.633	236	57.431		
	Total	327134	240			
<b>I- position</b>	Type (Satisfying & Conflicting)	22.817	3	22.817	1.073	0.301
	Sex (Male & Female)	38.400	1	38.400	1.806	0.18
	Interactive Impact (Sex & Type)	4.817	1	4.817	0.227	0.635
	Error	5017.90	236	21.262		
	Total	336908	240			

Third Hypothesis: There is a multiple relationship between differentiation components with marital satisfied in satisfying couples.

As it can be seen in table 3, multiple correlation coefficients between differentiation components and marital satisfied should be equal to 0.756 and components of differentiation (emotional cutoff, emotional reactivity, emotional fusion and I-position) can almost determine the 56% of variance of dependent variable of marital satisfied as adjusted.

As it was seen in table 5, among four components of differentiation, emotional cutoff has the most shares in predicting variance of dependent variable of marital satisfied and can significantly predict the marital satisfied so that with  $\beta=0.460$  and  $t=7.42$  in  $P=0.001$  can positively predict satisfaction of marital. Another components of differentiation is I-position which with  $\beta=0.437$  and  $t=7.092$  in  $P=0.001$  can significantly predict the marital satisfied. Emotional cutoff is the other components of differentiation that with  $\beta=0.275$  and  $t=-4.44$  in  $P=0.001$  can significantly predict the marital satisfied. As it is seen in table 5, only differentiation component that significantly don't predict the marital satisfied is emotional fusion. Generally, mentioned components as it was mentioned in table 3, can determined almost 56% of variance of marital satisfied

**Table 3.** Summary of regression model and analysis of differentiation and marital satisfied variance

Indicator of Enter Model	SS	df	MS	F	P	R	R <sup>2</sup>
<b>Regression</b>	2283.83	4	570.96	6.62	0.001	0.75	0.57
<b>Balance</b>	1712.72	115	14.89				
<b>Total</b>	3996.55	119					

**Table 4.** Regression coefficient of differentiation components for predicting marital satisfied in current research

Model	Non-standard Coefficients		Standard	Amount of t	Significance Level
	B amount	Standard Error	Amount of $\beta$		
<b>Emotional Reactivity</b>	-0.314	0.042	-0.460	-7.42	0.001
<b>Emotional Cutoff</b>	-0.239	0.054	-0.275	-4.44	0.001
<b>Emotional Fusion</b>	-0.013	0.050	-0.016	-0.265	0.792
<b>I-position</b>	-0.437	0.049	-0.437	-7.092	0.001

## DISCUSSION

**1st Hypothesis:** The results of analysis of 1st hypothesis have indicated that there is a significant difference between satisfying couples and conflicting ones about amount of differentiation. It means satisfying couples that have higher differentiation than conflicting couples; however, between male and females about differentiation has no significant difference. Additionally, interactive impact of satisfying and conflicting couples and sex (male and female) was not significant. Considering the results, the first hypothesis of research is confirmed. This result is the same as the results of research of Knerr [18], Skowron, & Dandy [22], Lal [17], Amato, Johnson, Booth & Rogers [26], Murdock & Gore [27], Gross, & Simmons, [28], that considers the differentiation as effective factor in increase of marital satisfied. In describing these results, it can be said that low level of differentiation according to Bowen leads to interpersonal and mental problems. Bowen believed that main reason of mental and marital satisfied signs is lack of differentiation in family. Not having differentiation means not having specified border for maintaining individual identity and main intimacy, while differentiated people have the ability to control their interpersonal relations. People with high differentiation are aware of their emotions and can evaluate their position. These people have the capability to develop in intimate ties and can keep their calmness and comfort in deep relationships. Therefore, they avoid from emotional cutoff or fusion for adjustment of their internal tensions while, people who are less differentiated or inclined to emotional fusion, will be soon disappointed by separation from important people of their life, or involved with emotional cutoff and therefore in facing with emotional intimacy will show anxious reaction [27].

**2nd Hypothesis:** Analysis of second hypothesis has indicated that there is a significant difference between two groups of satisfying couples and conflicting ones in emotional reactivity and emotional fusion. It means mean of satisfying couples is more than conflicting ones and it indicates that satisfying couples has less conflict and emotional reactivity and fusion with others. These results have shown that conflicting couples have higher emotional reactivity and in fewer situations, they intellectually decide. However, satisfying couples wisely decide in tension situations. Additionally, there is a significant difference between male and female in emotional reactivity; it means that women are emotionally reactive more than men. Given to these findings, 2nd hypothesis of research is confirmed. These results are the same as results of researches of Knerr, [18], Lal, [17], and Barahmand, [30] that were evaluated the impact of differentiation on mental discords and marital satisfied.

Generally, in describing these findings, it can be stated that correct estimation of situation which its requirement is application of cognitive factors, leads to controlling the situation by people and considering the right decisions. Thus, couples that have better cognitive skills and don't react emotionally have more power in controlling their relationships and enjoys from their relations. Given to the fact that emotional reactivity is a state that a person's logic overcomes his sense, and in different situations, he/she only decides based on emotional situation of environment and without considering the possible logical solution, therefore, he/she emotionally deal with life's and marital problems and leads family to the emotional functioning and reduce his/her self-actualization. As a result of self-actualization, a person will suffer from chronic anxiety which this causes new problems. Also, it can be stated that since the couples that have higher emotional reactivity, don't use their cognitive performances in dealing with situations and life problems, they will face problems and this fact will cause disagreements and reduction of marital satisfied. In emotional reactivity, it seems that considering the gender and personal features, women are more emotional reactive than men.

**3rd Hypothesis:** The analysis of third hypothesis has indicated that differentiation is a good predictor of marital satisfied. This result is the same as results of, Skowron and Dandy [22] and Herass [19] about relationship of differentiation with marital satisfied. Therefore it can be stated that differentiation has a direct relation with performance and family construction and improvement in differentiation level can cause progress and increase of marital satisfied. On the other word, marital satisfied is effected by characteristic traits of couples. Differentiation as the major factor of development of individual's trait according to Bowen can be one of the factor of development of marital relation.

Generally, the results of the current research have indicated that differentiation is an affective factor in marital satisfied. Differentiation level in satisfying couples is more than conflicting ones which is consistent with theory of Bowen. According to Bowen, firstly, differentiated people rationally deal with problems of life and solve them. Secondly, differentiation from main family causes separation of systems construction (families) from each other, prevention from creation of problems in life of couples and facilitation of process of conflict resolution. Another result of this research is not significance of difference between satisfied and conflicted couples in two variable of emotional cutoff and I-position. Therefore, cultural issues should be considered in association with these two components. The results of this research can be applied for consulting issues such as pre-marriage counseling that by determining the rate of couple's differentiation, aware each of them from the level of their differentiation. This awareness can have a great impact on adjustment and marital satisfied. These findings also can be used to educate couples on differentiation and enhancement of marital satisfied

### Limitation

1. Due to random sampling, the results of the current research can only be generalized to the sample group .
2. Because of using the questionnaire for collecting information, there is possibility of expending the most favorite method of couples as the favorite method of whole society.

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