

## AN ANALYSIS OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TEMPERAMENT AND CHARACTER QUALITIES AND MARITAL ADJUSTMENT\*

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### ABSTRACT

The primary aim of this study is to analyze the relationship between temperament and character qualities and marital adjustment. Individuals employed in various public institutions in Hatay were involved in the study. Those who were married at least for one year with at least one child were invited to participate in the study. The study population consisted of 200 married individuals. The Temperament and Character Inventory adapted by Kose and Sayar in 2001, and the Marital Adjustment Scale adapted by Tutarel-Kislak (1999) were employed to collect data for the present study. According to the findings, there is a statistically significant negative relationship between marital adjustment and harm avoidance, as a temperament dimension, and a statistically significant positive relationship between marital adjustment and self-directedness and cooperativeness, as character dimensions.

**Key words:** personality, temperament and character, marital adjustment

### 1. INTRODUCTION

When starting a new relationship, individuals proceed by shaping their personal attitudes, motivations, expectations, and desires, whether consciously or unconsciously. An individual's emotions, thoughts, and behaviors determine his/her personality. An individual's personality influences the way s/he starts and maintains a relationship while enjoying it, becomes disappointed, adjusts, and solves problems (Ozbalci, 2009).

It is difficult to make a sole definition of personality, on which there is a consensus, as it is a comprehensive concept. Personality is not built on a few qualities of a person. It embodies all of a person's qualities along with their interactions (Ozguven, 1992). Personality theories can be classified under six groups according to the approaches adopted: psychoanalytic, trait, biological, humanist, behavioral-social learning, and cognitive approaches. Each approach adopts a different perspective to explain personal differences in behaviors (Burger, 2006). Though personality, temperament, and character are used interchangeably in everyday language, personality is made up of temperament that has a genetic basis and character that is acquired later in life (Akiskal and Mallya, 1987).

This study is based on Cloninger's Psychobiological Theory of Personality in order to clarify personality. This theory developed a dimensional psychobiological model of personality that accounts for both normal and abnormal variations in two major components of personality: temperament and character (Cloninger, 1987; Cloninger, Przybeck, Svrakic, and Wetzel, 1994). Cloninger argues that personality is a product of the interaction between temperament and character. Temperament tends to react automatically to emotional stimuli in a structurally certain manner on an innate basis (Cloninger, 1987; Cloninger, Przybeck, Svrakici, and Wetzel, 1994). Character, on the other hand, refers to the attitudes that are developed and learned under the influence of one's environment and upbringing. Some elements of a character can be altered in time (Akiskal, Hirschfeld, and Yerevanian, 1983). While temperament dimensions represent the innate genetic structure, character dimensions represent personality traits developed by means of learning. While temperament refers to a person's born form, character refers to a person's form that s/he has intentionally altered (Cloninger and Svrakic, 1997). Temperament that is described as personal differences in automatic responses to an emotional stimulus includes certain basic emotional responses such as calmness against fear, rage against timidity, attachment against loathing, and lack of courage against perseverance. Individual differences related to temperament dimensions can be observed in early childhood, and are acknowledged to predict adult behaviors moderately. Traits of a personality that are accepted as temperament-related are hereditary and manifest during early development. They explicitly include pre-operational or unconscious biases in learning. Temperament consists of four

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dimensions: novelty seeking, harm avoidance, reward dependence, and persistence (Cloninger, 1987; Kose, 2003). Character, on the contrary, reflects the differences between personally chosen goals and values. These objectives and values are based on intuitions, and our concepts about ourselves, others and other things. Character qualities refer to interpersonal differentiations during self-object relations that start with early childhood through bonding with parents, self-object differentiations that develop later on and maturing that continues for the rest of life. Cloninger (1987) defines three personality dimensions in his theory of personality: self-directedness, cooperativeness, and self-transcendence.

This study analyzes personality dimensions that are addressed in the context of Cloninger's psychobiological personality theory, in terms of marital adjustment. Marriage is a social system with emotional, behavioral, biological, and formal dimensions. A twosome psychological system is established after two persons come together and begin to share the same time and space. The aim of these two people coming together by marriage is to create an environment that can satisfy their mutual needs in terms of physiological, psychological, and social needs (Gulerce, 1996).

Marital adjustment should be ensured in order to maintain this twosome psychological system in a healthy manner. Marital adjustment is ensured when there is a balance between compulsory and voluntary aspects of a marriage. Marital adjustment is ensured when couples with different personality traits complement each other as a whole to achieve happiness and reach their common goals. Marital adjustment determines the level of satisfaction and happiness in the lives of the spouses who relate to each other in harmony (Tutarel-Kislak and Cabukca, 2002). According to Spanier (1976), marital adjustment can be defined as the way spouses adapt themselves to daily life and changing conditions in life, and adjust themselves in a certain way to fit each other. Sabatelli (1988) defines marital adjustment as a marriage where compatible spouses can communicate with each other, there is no major conflict in certain significant parts of their relationship and they settle their conflicts in a mutually pleasing manner. The marriage of a couple who interacts with each other reaches a consensus in issues related to their marriage and family and solve their problems in a positive way. Marital adjustment enables spouses to achieve happiness and fulfill their expectations. Thus, researchers, as well as clinicians, are paying more and more attention to the studies on marriage quality and marital adjustment (Erberk, Bestepe, Akar, Eradamlar, Alpan, 2005).

The review of literature reveals a number of national and international studies conducted in different sample groups to shed light on the relationship between marital adjustment and numerous variables such as depression, infidelity and conflict tendencies, affirmative and negative perception levels related to the mother-child relationship, perfectionism, empathy, unrealistic beliefs, styles of attachment, attitudes relevant to menopause, infertility, mastectomy, sense of humor and anxiety levels, the couple's somatization levels, length of marriage, economic stress, emotional maturity, demographic characteristics (age, gender, and length of marriage), and personality (Creamer and Campbell, 1988; Moller and Zyl, 1991; Carter and Carter, 1993; Cole, Cole, and Dean, 1980; Tutarel-Kislak and Cabukca, 2002; Kinnunen and Feldt, 2004; Akar, 2005; Demiray, 2006; Polat, 2006; Keskin-Gurbuz, 2007; Erdogan, 2007; Fidanoglu, 2007; Chen, Tanaka Hiramura, Shika, and Uji, 2007; Acik, 2008; Coban, Nehir, Demirci, Ozbasaran, and Inceboz 2008; Okanli and Ekinci, 2008; Gungor and Ilhan, 2008; Wunderer and Schneewind, 2008; Berk, 2009; Dogan, 2010; Kansiz and Arkar, 2011; Taycan and Kuruoglu, 2013). In a study based on the five-factor model of personality, personality traits are reported to significantly predict marital adjustment in both women and men. Among the personality traits used in this five-factor model, neuroticism is indicated to be a strong predictor of marital adjustment (Buss, 1991; Geist and Gilbert, 1996; Bouchhard, Lussier, and Sabourin, 1999). However, there are few studies that address marital adjustment focusing on temperament and character dimensions of personality based on Cloninger's theory of personality (Taycan and Kuruoglu, 2013). A study that seeks answers to some questions, such as how people with different characteristics and unique qualities live their lives together or people with which personal traits achieve greater marital adjustment, will offer a better understanding of the relationship between temperament and character qualities and marital adjustment.

The primary aim of this study is to analyze the relationship between temperament and character qualities and marital adjustment in married couples. Thus, the study asks whether there is a significant relationship between novelty seeking, harm avoidance, reward dependence, persistence, self-directedness, cooperativeness, and self-transcendence, as sub-dimensions of temperament and character, and marital adjustment.

## 2. METHOD

The population of this study consisted of 200 voluntary individuals (100 men and 100 women) selected by means of snowball sampling from various public institutions/organizations in Hatay. Table 1 presents demographic data related to the population of the study.

**Table 1.** Demographic Data Related to the Study Population

Qualities	Women n (%)	Men n (%)	Total n (%)
Gender	100 (50%)	100 (50%)	200 (100%)
Age			
20-41	86 (43%)	69 (34.5%)	155 (77.5%)
42 and above	14 (7%)	31 (15.5%)	45 (22.5%)
Number of children			
1-2	95 (47.5%)	93 (46.5%)	188 (94%)
3-4	5 (2.5%)	7 (3.5%)	12 (6%)
Educational Background			
High School and a Higher Education Institution	16 (8%)	13 (6.5%)	29 (14.5%)
University and Graduate Studies	84 (42%)	87 (43.5%)	171 (85.5%)
Year of Marriage			
1-10	59 (29.5%)	55 (27.5%)	114 (57%)
11 and above	41 (20.5%)	45 (22.5%)	86 (43%)

Those who were married at least for one year with at least one child were invited to participate in the study.

### 2.1. Data Collection

The Temperament and Character Inventory (TCI) developed by Cloninger et al. (1994) and adapted to Turkish by Kose, Sayar et al (2004), and the Marital Adjustment Test (MAT) developed by Locke and Wallece (1959) and adapted to Turkish by Tutarel-Kislak (1999) were employed in this study to determine temperament and character qualities of the participating married couples.

#### 2.1.1. Temperament and Character Inventory (TCI)

This inventory was developed by Cloninger et al. (1994) and adapted to Turkish by Kose, Sayar et al. (2004). This version was approved by Cloninger as TCI in Turkish. The Temperament and Character Inventory (TCI) is a self-assessment tool consisting of 240 items rated as "True" or "False" to measure seven basic dimensions of personality. The validity and reliability of this seven-factor personality inventory have been tested on both the general population and psychiatric patients. The TCI, in terms of content, is applicable to the individuals aged 15 years and over. The TCI has four temperament dimensions: novelty seeking, harm avoidance, reward dependence and persistence; and three character dimensions: self-directedness, cooperativeness, and self-transcendence. The internal consistency, validity, and reliability of the Turkish TCI were measured by using the Cronbach's alpha method. The Cronbach's alpha values were found to be between .60 and .85 for temperament, and between .82 and .83 for character. The lowest Cronbach's alpha coefficients were .60 for reward dependence and .62 for persistence. The coefficients for the internal consistency of the scale and sub-scales were between .60 and .85. The distribution of scale points was supported by the internal consistency coefficient and validity. This study shows that the Turkish TCI can successfully measure Cloninger's seven-factor model of personality within Turkish society. The Cronbach's alpha values of the scale and sub-scales were found to be between .51 and .83.

#### 2.1.2. Marital Adjustment Test (MAT)

This 15-item scale was developed by Locke and Wallace in 1959, and adapted to Turkish by Tutarel-Kislak, and tested for validity and reliability. Participants can score between 1 and 60 in the scale. Higher scores infer higher marital adjustment, while lower scores refer to lower adjustment. In addition to marital adjustment, the scale measures the degree of consensus between spouses on certain issues such as the family budget, expression of feelings, friends, sexuality, life philosophy, confidence, and problem-solving, and the way they are related to each other in free time and out-of-home activities. In terms of reliability, its internal consistency coefficient was calculated to be .84, and the split half reliability was .84. The correlation coefficient was found to be .57 as a result of the test-retest reliability method. The correlation coefficient between total scores of the Interpersonal Relationship Scale used to measure the criterion-related validity and the MAT was .12; and the correlation coefficient between total scores of the Relationship Pressure Scale was -.54 (Tutarel-Kislak, 1999). The Cronbach's alpha test of the Marital Adjustment Test in this study was found to be .90.

### 2.2. Data Analysis

The relationship between the sub-scales of the TCI, consisting of four temperament dimensions (novelty seeking, harm avoidance, reward dependence, and persistence), and three character dimensions (self-directedness, cooperativeness and self-transcendence), and marital adjustment was calculated using the Pearson Correlation Coefficient, with a margin of error accepted as 0.05. The SPSS 11.5 software package was used to analyze data.

## 3. FINDINGS

The correlation coefficients were calculated in order to determine the relationships between four-dimensional temperament (Novelty Seeking - NS, Harm Avoidance - HA, Reward Dependence - RD, and Persistence - P) and three-dimensional character (Self-Directedness - SD, Cooperativeness - C, and Self-Transcendence - ST) of the Temperament and Character Inventory, and marital adjustment. Table 2 shows the relevant correlation values.

**Table 2.** Arithmetic mean, standard deviation, and correlation values of the scores from the sub-scales of the Temperament and Character Inventory and Marital Adjustment Test

TCl sub-scales	n	$\bar{X}$	Ss	r
NS	200	18.32	4.83	
MAT	200	41.62	8.86	-0.130
HA	200	15.06	6.08	
MAT	200	41.62	8.86	-0.193*
RD	200	13.87	3.12	
MAT	200	41.62	8.86	0.161
P	200	5.23	1.88	
MAT	200	41.62	8.86	0.114
SD	200	30.74	6.66	
MAT	200	41.62	8.86	0.394*
C	200	28.35	6.52	
MAT	200	41.62	8.86	0.212*
ST	200	18.22	5.45	
MAT	200	41.62	8.86	-0.005

As Table 2 indicates, there is a negative ( $r = -0.193$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) relationship between Harm Avoidance as a temperament dimension of the Temperament and Character Inventory and marital adjustment, which means the higher the level of harm avoidance, the lower the degree of marital adjustment. There is a positive ( $r = 0.394$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) relationship between self-directedness as a character dimension and marital adjustment, and again another positive ( $r = 0.212$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) relationship between cooperativeness as a character dimension and marital adjustment. There is no significant relationship between marital adjustment and novelty seeking, reward dependence, and persistence as temperament dimensions, and self-transcendence as a character dimension.

#### 4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

According to the findings of the study, as the level of harm avoidance as a temperament dimension increases, the degree of marital adjustment decreases. Individuals with higher levels of harm avoidance adopt passive-avoidant behavior as they are pessimistic and anxious about future problems, afraid of uncertainty and embarrassed of the foreigner. They reportedly get tired easily, feel anxious, nervous, timid, skeptical, exhausted, insecure, and passive, and they respond in a negative or pessimistic manner to ordinary cases that do not affect other people. It is suggested that such qualities are effective in reducing the degree of marital adjustment. Individuals with lower levels of harm avoidance are reportedly indifferent, lazy, brave, fearless, calm, optimistic, or sympathetic in social surroundings, and daring and self-confident. They have high energy levels and influence other people around with their dynamic, exhilarated and vigorous personalities (Cloninger, 1987; Kose et al., 2004). These traits are thought to be important for achieving a higher level of marital adjustment. The findings suggest that the less the harm avoidance is, the less the level of anxiety is and are relevant to the findings of the study by Acik (2008). Acik (2008) states that there is a significant differentiation, in terms of anxiety state, between compatible and incompatible couples. In terms of anxiety state and avoidance, compatible couples score lower than incompatible ones. Based on the findings of the study by Fidanoglu (2006), a male spouse's anxiety state and age of a male spouse and a couple's sense of humor have significant impacts on marital adjustment.

There is a positive relationship between self-directedness (SD) as a character dimension and marital adjustment. The concept of self-directedness includes maturity, power, self-sufficiency, responsibility, reliability, high self-esteem and compatibility between personal choices and goals. The findings suggest that these traits incorporated in the concept of self-directedness help couples to promote marital adjustment. There is also a positive relationship between cooperativeness (C) as another character dimension and marital adjustment. The concept of cooperativeness includes being empathetic, tolerant, merciful, supportive, gentlemanly, having principles, serving other people with pleasure, and being sensitive to other people's choices and needs (Cloninger, 1987; Kose et al., 2004). These qualities as part of cooperativeness are likely to enhance marital adjustment. In their study, Tutarel-Kislak and Cabukca (2002) indicate that empathy is a significant predictor of marital adjustment. Considering the negative relationship between empathy and egocentricity, it is stated that a spouse acting in the least egocentric way possible contributes to marital adjustment. Given that cooperativeness, as a character dimension of the Temperament and Character Inventory, is associated with empathy-driven qualities, the findings of this study are consistent with the findings of the study by Tutarel-Kislak and Cabukca (2002). The review of the literature on the studies addressing the relationships between marital adjustment, marital satisfaction and personality variables shows that there are few studies that investigate the relationship between temperament and character qualities, and marital adjustment. Kansiz and Arkar (2011) employed the Dyadic Adjustment Scale, and Temperament and Character Inventory in their study and reported a positive correlation between marital adjustment and reward dependence as a temperament dimension. However, this study did not suggest any significant relationship between reward dependence and marital adjustment. This different finding may be a result of different scales used to measure marital adjustment and the number of samples. It is suggested that future studies are conducted on larger samples and generate in-depth information by using qualitative research methods as well.

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