RESEARCH ON EDUCATION AND PSYCHOLOGY (REP)

Marital Self-Expansion: A Mixed Method Study

Dilek Akça Koca
Dilek Therapy Psychological Counseling Center

Ayşin Satan[2]
Marmara University

Abstract

This research aims to analyze marital self-expansion by mixed method. Designed as an exploratory sequential design, the research consists of qualitative and quantitative stages. In the qualitative stage of the research, marital self-expansion was examined with an interpretative phenomenological design. A study group of ten determined people was formed by criterion sampling, one of the purposive sampling methods. As a result of the qualitative analysis, eight main themes related to marital self-expansion were identified; interactional, emotional, physical, nutritional, intellectual, contextual, sensual, and spiritual. In addition, a total of 18 sub-themes and 69 codes related to these main themes were reached. In the quantitative stage, which is the second stage of the research, the 'Marital Self-Expansion Scale (MSES)' was developed based on the findings in the qualitative study. In order to ensure the validity of the scale, content validity, construct validity, and criterion validity were performed. As a result, a valid and reliable MSES with seven sub-dimensions and 36 items for married people was added to the literature. At the end of the study, qualitative and quantitative findings were discussed first separately and then together.

Key Words

Family • Marital self-expansion • Marriage • Mixed method • Self • Self-expansion

[1] **Correspondance to:** Dilek Therapy Psychological Counseling Center, Istanbul, Türkiye. E-mail: dilekakcakoca86@gmail.com **ORCID:** 0000-0002-8725-8324
[2] Marmara University, Institute of Educational Sciences, Ataturk Faculty of Education, Istanbul, Türkiye. E-mail: aysin.satan@marmara.edu.tr **ORCID:** 0000-0002-9852-902X

As in the past, today the self emerges as an important element that arouses curiosity in understanding the human world. According to James, who argues that the self has a multi-layered structure, the self is everything that people can tell about what they are (James, 1963). The individual may experience an expansion in the self and its sub-dimensions over time. Self-expansion refers to the positive change in the individual's personality traits and the elements that make up the self. According to the self-expansion model, expansion in the self occurs with the addition of new desirable and admirable features to the self, progress in already acquired skills, and gaining a higher-level conception of oneself (Aron & Aron, 1986). According to Mattingly et al. (2014), who created the two-dimensional relational self-change model, self-expansion increases the part of the self-content called positive.

Self-expansion can be achieved by the inclusion of other in the self as an element of self-expansion. Accordingly, the individuals experience expansion by include the selves of the people with whom they are in a close relationship to their own selves (Aron et al., 1992; Dinçer, 2017). Individuals change as a result of being in romantic relationships or close relationships. While some individuals' self-concepts develop, others' self-perceptions deteriorate. Regardless of the type of close relationship, it is possible that they affect the selves of couples in a relationship more or less.

The marital relationship, where two people come together to share life, differs from other romantic relationships both because it is recognized by law, and also it offers a predictable life guide to the spouses, reducing the possibility of experiencing an uncertain future (Day et. al., 2011). Marriage is an institution that allows individuals to combine themselves with another person's self and that ensures the development of their personality and happiness (Fowers, 1993). In this context, the process of expanding the self by including the other into one's self, which is mentioned in the self-expansion concepts of Aron and Aron (1986) and Mattingly et al. (2014), can be experienced much more strongly in the marital relationship. Therefore, marital self-expansion can be defined as the increase in the positive content of the individual's self through the marriage relationship and the inclusion of the spouse's self into their own self and the positive change of the elements that make up the self.

Considering the studies on self-expansion, there are experimental studies examining the effects of intervention programs on the self-expansion of individuals and couples (Bulut, 2014; Carson et al., 2007; Fivecoat et al., 2015; Graham, 2008; Mattingly & Lewandowski, 2013). In addition, the relationships between self-expansion in romantic or close relationships and emotional involvement, friendship, security, sexual satisfaction, intimacy, and suspicion of being betrayed were examined (Lewandowski & Ackerman, 2006); as well as the relationship between self-expansion and long-term and short-term togetherness (Lewandowski et al., 2006) and the relationship between self-expansion and passionate love (Sheets, 2014) were investigated. Besides, Carpenter and Spottswood (2013) investigated the process of self-expansion through social media. In their study, Aron and Aron (2014) explain that individuals can realize themselves and expand their selves through marriage. Considering the literature, the number of studies investigating self-expansion, which mainly involves close relationships, by focusing directly on married individuals is limited (Aron et al., 2000; Aron et al., 2002; Rajabi et al., 2017; Reissman et al., 1993; Tsapelas et al., 2009).

In this research, it is thought that individuals who can accomplish the requirements of the marital relationship and experience the functions and benefits of marriage have the opportunity to expand their selves through marriage. The

self-mandala (Satir, 1988) was taken as a basis to examine how and in which ways this expansion might take place. Accordingly, the self-expansions experienced by individuals in marriage were examined in physical, intellectual, emotional, sensual, interactional, nutritional, contextual, and spiritual dimensions. Inspired by these dimensions, the qualitative stage of the research, which was designed as an exploratory sequential design, was studied. In the quantitative stage of the exploratory sequential design, MSES was developed based on the themes, sub-themes, and codes related to marital self-expansion.

Considering the literature, it can be noticed that some scales related to self-expansion were developed. Aron et al., (1992) developed the Inclusion of Other in the Self Scale. Also, Lewandowski and Aron (2002) developed the Self-Expansion Scale based on the self-expansion model. Ledbetter (2013) on the other hand, developed a scale for relational care behavior based on the self-expansion model. Mattingly et al. (2014) developed the Relational Self-Change Scale. In addition, Dinçer (2017) has a Turkish adaptation study of the Relational Self-Change Scale and the Inclusion of Other in the Self Scale and also a development study of the Turkish Self-Change in Romantic Relationships Scale.

Consequently, the general purpose of this research is to examine marital self-expansion. The qualitative and quantitative stages of the research, which were designed as an exploratory sequential design, were carried out respectively. The research question of the exploratory sequential design is 'What are the themes of married individuals about marital self-expansion and can these themes be generalized to a sample group of married individuals?' The qualitative stage research question is 'What and how are the positive effects of the marriage process on married individuals selves?'. The quantitative stage research question on the other hand is 'Is the MSES valid and reliable?'.

Mixed-method was studied in the research for development rationale. Mixed methods research has an important place in the literature since it includes both qualitative and quantitative studies. Marital self-expansion was examined deeply with a phenomenological pattern based on the self-expansion model of Aron and Aron (1986) and the eight dimensions in Satir's (1988) self-mandala and the emerging themes were presented comprehensively. Themes related to marital self-expansion will shed light on other psychology researchers interested in the subject, especially marriage and family. Also, these themes will provide an important resource when developing marriage and family programs by experts. MSES, which was developed based on the themes of marital self-expansion, was added to the literature. MSES has the qualification of being a first in the literature as a scale measuring the self-expansion of married individuals. With MSES, married individuals will gain awareness of the change and expansion that occur in their selves and in their spouses. For this reason, the scale is an instrument that will serve well the marriage and family counseling specialists.

Method

In this research, exploratory sequential design (QUALITATIVE→QUANTITATIVE) from mixed-method models was used based on the development rationale (Creswell, 2015; Creswell & PlanoClark, 2007; Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2009).
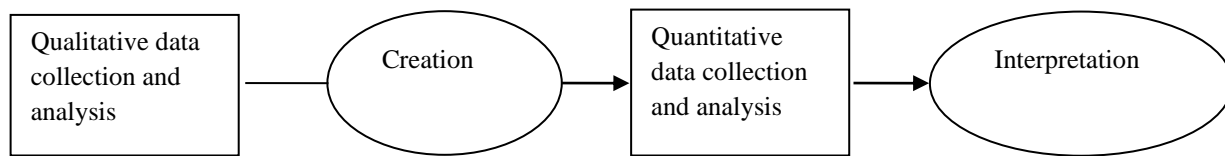

Figure 1. Exploratory sequential design (Creswell ve Plano Clark, 2015, s. 77)

Qualitative Stage

Research model. In the qualitative stage, which is the first stage of the exploratory sequential design, the purpose is to examine in depth what and how are the positive effects of the marriage process on the selves of married individuals. For this purpose, the interpretative phenomenological design was used as a research model (Creswell, 2013; Willig, 2013).

Study group. In the qualitative stage, the criterion sampling method, one of the purposive sampling methods, was used as the sampling method. In order to ensure homogeneity in the research, the study group consisted of 10 voluntary married individuals whose developmental tasks were similar, whose children had not left home yet, and who were in the third, fourth, and fifth stages of Duvall's family life cycle (Nazlı, 2011; Akça-Koca, 2013).

While creating the study group, first of all, short-term pre-interviews were conducted with 21 voluntary married individuals who were reached within the framework of the specified criteria. Of these 21 people, 10 people who were thought to have positive contributions to the self of marriage were included in the study group. Afterward, in-depth interviews were conducted with the study group in order to examine what and how are the positive effects of the marriage process on their selves. Particular attention was paid to the fact that the participants were not previously met by the researcher in order not to cause non-objective answers during the interviews.

Four people of the study group are male and six are female. Their ages range from 30 to 49. One is a high school graduate and the others are university graduates. Eight of them are teachers and, the other two are in different professions. The age of the spouses of the participants ranges from 32 to 46. The education levels of their spouses vary from primary school to graduate school, and their professions differ as teacher, accountant, tourism, business, designer, and housewife. The family income levels of the participants are between 3000-15.000. Half of them have one child and the other half have two children. Their marriage periods range from 7 years to 23 years. Four of the participants got married by meeting their spouses in person, three of them by meeting through relatives, and three of them by meeting through friends. When the marriage year and child information was examined, it was observed that the participants were in the third, fourth, and fifth stages of the family life cycle.

Data collection tools. In this research, standardized open-ended interviews were conducted. In order to examine the self-expansion of married individuals, open-ended questions were formed based on Satir's (1988) concept of self-

mandala. Before starting the interviews, the questions were confirmed by 10 experts. In line with the feedback from the experts, the order of the relevant dimensions in the questions was rearranged, the three questions thought to be similar were combined and the interview questions were put into their final forms.

Data collection. The people in the study group were reached by contacting married individuals who were directed by married individuals in the researcher's work and friends circle and whom the researcher had never met before. Firstly, a pilot interview was conducted with a married woman and a married man. These pre-interviews, which were conducted in order to predetermine the quality of the interviews, to predict and correct the possible errors arising from the researcher, participant, environment, and questions, were not included in the research. Appointments were made from the participants who voluntarily participated in the research, they were met at a suitable place and time for them, and the interviews were conducted face to face. With the permission of the participants, the interviews were recorded by a voice recorder. The transcription process was done on the day of the interview, without accumulating the interviews. The interviews lasted an average of 45-75 minutes.

Data analysis. In the data analysis stage of the research, first, the audio recording transcriptions of the interviews were transferred to the MAXQDA 12 program for qualitative data analysis. As to analysis steps, Smith and Osborn's (2003) analysis steps used in interpretive phenomenological studies were followed. In the first step which was multiple reading and note-taking, the audio recordings of the interviews were first transcribed word by word. In the stage of transforming the notes into the developing themes, which was the second step, the coding process was started. In the third step which was researching the connections and clustering the themes, the data were grouped as themes, main themes, and sub-themes. Codes and sub-themes that were related to each other were combined. In conclusion, 8 main themes, 18 sub-themes, and 69 codes emerged. In the fourth step, the analysis stage was reported.

Quantitative Stage

Research model. In this section, which is the second stage of the exploratory sequential design, the aim is to generalize the themes about marital self-expansion obtained in the qualitative stage to a sample group of married individuals. In accordance with this purpose, the validity and reliability studies of the MSES, which were created by using the themes and codes that emerged in the qualitative research conducted with the interpretive phenomenological design and the relevant literature, were carried out. In the study, content validity, construct validity, and criterion validity studies were carried out for the validity studies of MSES. For reliability studies, internal consistency coefficient Cronbach alpha was examined, test-retest was performed and item analyzes were performed.

Content validity. In this research, first, an item pool was created by using 18 sub-themes and 69 codes determined at the end of the qualitative research and by reading the relevant literature comprehensively. The pool consisting of 117 items was presented to the opinion of seven experts. As a result of expert opinions, the items that needed to be removed were deleted and the items recommended to be revised were corrected. As a result, a 65-item draft scale was obtained.

Construct validity. In order to ensure the construct validity of the MSES, firstly exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and then confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) were performed. For EFA, first, a 65-item draft scale was applied to a sample group of 305 married individuals by convenience sampling. The collected data was analyzed in SPSS 22 program. Bartlett sphericity test and Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin sampling adequacy test were examined in order to determine whether the collected data was suitable for factorability. Kaiser criterion and Scree test were considered as criteria for factor extraction in the research. In addition, since an eight-dimensional structure was predicted in the research in parallel with the qualitative research results, the number of factors was fixed while performing EFA. After factor subtraction, Promax, which is the rotation technique, was preferred. Kappa value was determined as 4. As a result, 7-dimensional and 36-item MSES emerged. According to the CFA result obtained from 227 married individuals in the study, the structure of the MSES consisting of 36 items and 7 sub-dimensions was tested and verified.

Criterion validity. The Relational Self-Change Scale and General Self-Efficacy Scale, which are introduced below, were used to determine the criterion validity of the MSES. For this purpose, three scales were applied to 42 married individuals.

Relational Self-Change Scale. The scale was developed by Mattingly et al. (2014), and was adapted into Turkish by Dinçer et al (2018). The scale, which consists of 4 dimensions with 3 items each, does not give a total score. Dimension names are self-expansion, self-contraction, self-pruning, and self-adulteration. The internal consistency reliability coefficients of the dimensions are respectively; 84 is .84, .89, and .76. (Dinçer et al., 2018; Mattingl et al., 2014).

General Self-Efficacy Scale. Developed by Schwarzer and Jerusalem (1995) the scale was adapted into Turkish by Aypay (2010). The scale, which consists of 10 items and 2 dimensions, does give a total score. Internal consistency reliability coefficients are .79 for the first dimension, .63 for the second dimension, and .83 for the entire scale. (Aypay, 2010; Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995).

In order to determine the criterion validity, Pearson correlation analysis was performed to determine the relations of the MSES total score with the Relational Self-Change Scale and the General Self-Efficacy Scale. The Self-Expansion, Self-Contraction, Self-Pruning, and Self-Adulteration dimensions of the Relational Self-Change Scale, which did not give a total score, and the total score of the General Self-Efficacy Scale and the sub-dimensions of 'Ability and Confidence' and 'Effort and Resistance' were included in the analysis.

Internal consistency coefficient. In this research, the total score and Cronbach alpha values of the sub-dimensions were determined in order to examine the internal consistency coefficients of MSES.

Test-retest. In order to determine the test-retest reliability of the scale, the scale form was applied to a sample group of 52 people twice, with an interval of 18 days. For this purpose, Pearson correlation analysis and related group t-test were performed.

Item analyzes. As the last study of the quantitative stage of the research, item analyzes of the MSES were carried out. For this purpose, the index of item distinctiveness total item and residual item correlation analysis of the scale were examined.

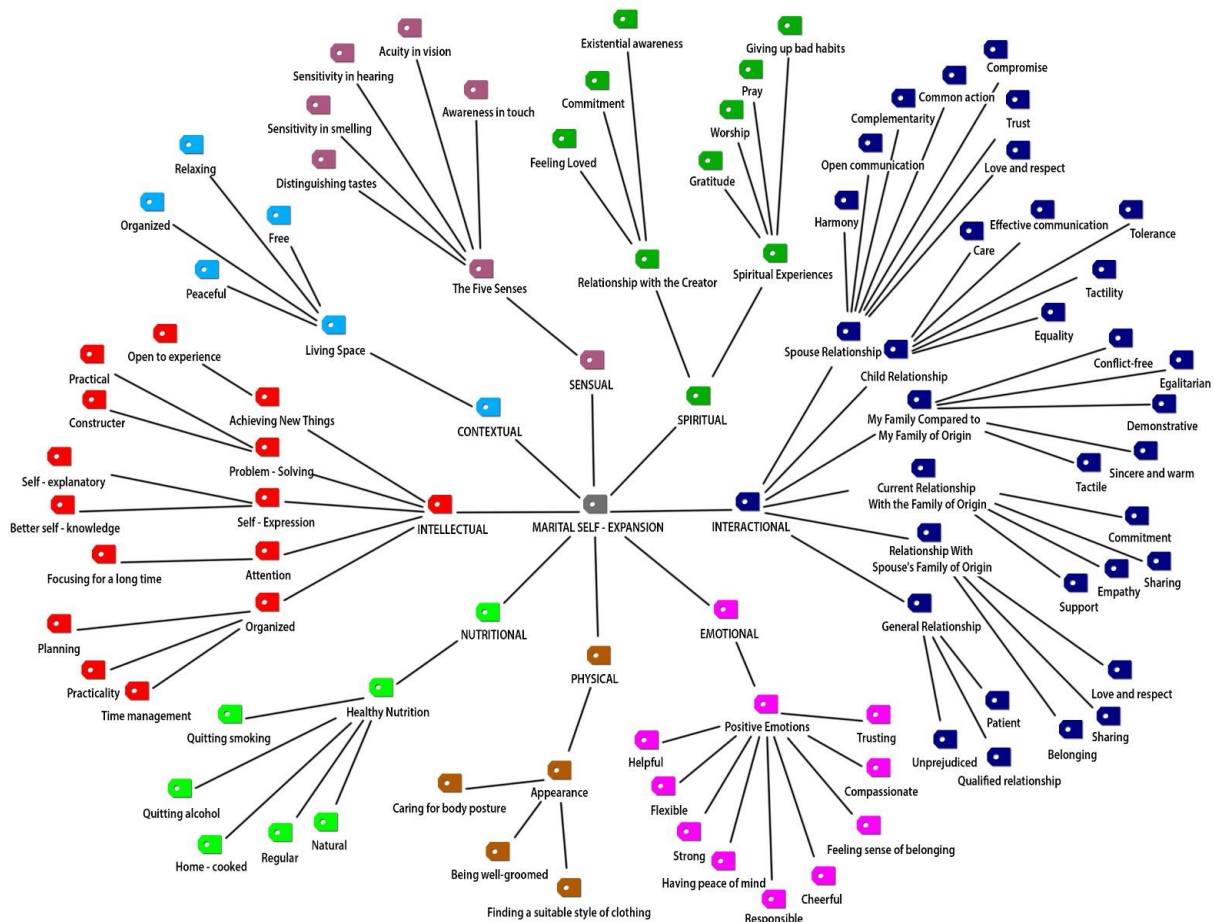## Findings

Qualitative Stage Findings

Figure 2. Main themes and sub-themes and codes of marital self-expansion

In this section, the qualitative stage findings, all of which are seen above are listed as the main theme, sub-theme, and codes. Accordingly, 8 main themes, 18 sub-themes, and 69 codes constitute marital self-expansion. All codes are ordered in descending order of frequency. That is, the first of the codes belonging to a sub-theme contains the code that was mentioned most frequently during the interviews, and the last one contains the least repeated code. Regarding each code, the statements of the participants who were thought to reflect the code best were included.

Main theme 1: Interactional. In the main interactional theme, there are sub-themes of *spouse relationship, child relationship, my family compared to my family of origin, current relationship with the family of origin, relationship with spouse's family of origin,* and *general relationship.* The participants were asked the question, "What kind of spousal relationship did you dream of before getting married and what are the aspects of your relationship with your

spouse that you are satisfied with?" Thus, the codes of *harmony, open communication, complementarity, common action, compromise, trust, love,* and *respect* were reached in the sub-theme of *spousal relationship.*

P1: *'I like the harmony between us...'* harmony; P2: *'When I come in the evening, we don't go to bed without a summary of the things that happened on that day. It's been like that for 23 years. I ask her what she did, she asks me what I did.'* open communication; P7:*'Also, my husband is an extroverted person who is sympathetic and always cheers up wherever he goes. It may have affected me too. He has been supportive.'* complementarity; P8: *'...our common decision-making and doing it together. Not doing independently...' common action;* P2: *"So when I make a decision if I see that my wife makes the right decision, which she usually does, I don't impose my own opinion. I'm glad to be more flexible.'* compromise; P9: *'I like that he takes care of our family very much and does all the responsibilities related to marriage and family.'* trust; P2: *'...we continue to protect the love. That was my expectation. I mean mutual respect and love.'* love and respect.

Based on these results, it is thought that marital adjustment and positive spousal relationships can also increase the quality of the relationship that individuals establish with other people. In other words, individuals can find the opportunity to expand their selves by making the skills they discover in the spouse relationship permanent.

The participants were asked the question, "What kind of relationship did you dream of establishing with your children before you got married and what are the aspects you are satisfied with your relationship with your children now?" Thus, the codes of *care, effective communication, tolerance, tactility*, and *equality* emerged in *the child relationship* sub-theme:

P1: *"We play games with the child for at least 1 hour every night. One evening he does his homework with his mother and one evening with me. We play games also for 1 hour. We paint, we play with the ball.'* care; P6: *'I sit, I chat, I communicate.'* effective communication; P4: *"I am academically ambitious, but if my children are not, I do not push them too hard."* toleration; P6: *'I kiss, I hug. I spoil; I make a 'high five!.I never remember my father cuddling me in his arms. I don't remember him stroking my hair. I don't know if he ever kissed me on my face. Maybe he kissed me when I was a baby.'* tactility; P5: *'I used to say I'd only be happy if I had a daughter. I used to have that nonsense idea.'* equality.

Most of the time, individuals involuntarily reflect on what they have learned from their parents while raising their children. Particularly when children exhibit negative behavior and when interfering in a crisis, parents often tend to use patterns of behavior and words that they have seen and heard from their own parents as a child. Since the participants in the research are sufficiently motivated and diligent to apply their own methods, it can be expressed that they experience self-expansion in parental attitude and approach to the child. That means an expansion in the interactional dimension of the self.

The participants were asked the question, "What are the better aspects of your relationship with your current family (spouse and children) compared to your relationship with your family of origin (parents, siblings)?" *Thus, conflict-free, egalitarian, demonstrative, sincere and warm, tactile codes emerged in the sub-theme of my family compared to my family of origin:*

P8*: 'There was more tension and conflict in my family of origin… But now I have a calmer family.' <u>conflict-free</u>*; P10: *'My family was more patriarchal. In my current relationship, we can make decisions by talking to each other. More equal.' <u>egalitarian</u>*; P4: "*I couldn't talk to my parents comfortably, but I can talk to my children more comfortably.*" P7*:'Now we have become more sincere and warmer towards the child.' <u>sincere and warm</u>*; and, P2: 'I *talk to my brother and my sisters and we say ''before my late father passed away, we wish we could hug him without hesitation, we would even do that with his permission."* <u>tactile.</u>

Just like in the child relationship sub-theme, the participants' efforts to make their children experience positive emotions that they could not experience enough in their own families when they were children can be observed in this sub-theme. Also, the positive effects of self-differentiation in both the spouse and child relationships are evident here. Establishing a stronger self and a more functional family through self-differentiation is thought to be a success that individuals with high self-expansion can achieve.

Participants were asked the question, "What are the positive changes in your relationship with your own family (parents and siblings) compared to before marriage?" Accordingly, the codes of *commitment, sharing, empathy,* and *support* emerged in the current *relationship with the family of origin* sub-theme:

P3: *'After getting married, I started to meet and visit more. As it is a home environment, as there is a grandchild…' <u>commitment</u>;* P9*: 'Until I got married, we couldn't have a relationship since I was the youngest of our family. But when I got married, I also became an individual, now we can share everything.' <u>sharing</u>;* P10*: 'I understood the value of my family. When I had a child, I understood them better. I realized how much effort they actually put in.' <u>empathy</u>;* and P6*: 'Some people have a thought of 'I haven't had anything from my family. So why should I do it for my family?' I don't have that. '<u>support.</u>*

Getting married and emerging as an adult made sharing with the family of origin more qualified. In addition, the relationships of grandmother, grandfather, and grandchild have also a positive effect on this issue. Besides, standing on their own legs and trying to overcome the problems of starting a family enabled the participants to feel more empathy towards their family of origin and to support them materially and morally. Thus, individuals who expand their selves turn the situation of separation from their family of origin into an opportunity and can experience a more productive union with the same family than before.

The question "What are the aspects that you are satisfied with your relationship with your spouse's family of origin?" was asked to the participants. Accordingly, the codes of *love and respect, sharing,* and *belonging* emerged in the sub-theme of the *relationship with spouse's family of origin:*

P1*: 'We have a relationship based on love and respect. And that is mutual. They call and ask about me. '<u>love and respect</u>;* P5: *'I can tell my mother-in-law about everything I do. I can communicate. I don't have anything secret. We're like friends.' <u>sharing</u>;* P6*: 'I really like my wife's family. My brother-in-law always calls me brother. My wife's parents call me my son.' <u>belonging.</u>*

Individuals who feel love, respect, and belonging for their spouse's family of origin and interact and share these feelings with them can find the opportunity to expand their selves through them. Especially in marriages formed by

the union of people brought up in different cultures, it can be thought that the vision of these couples is expanded due to the inner circle of their spouses. Because different cultures provide opportunities such as gaining a new perspective, meeting people with different personalities, acquiring wider expression skills, seeing new places, and tasting new foods. All of these may be different reasons for self-expansion after marriage.

Participants were asked the question, "What do you think is the contribution of your marriage to the way you relate to other people in general?" Thus, the codes of *patient, qualified relationship,* and *unprejudiced* emerged in the *general relationship* sub-theme:

P9: *'Well, I think our level of patience is higher in marriage. We learn to be patient in some matters. My relationship with my husband may also have affected my other relationships in terms of being patient.' patient;* P4: *'Marriage influenced my relationship choices. I make few but more qualified friendships. Less is more. Before I got married, I didn't use to select my friends. I didn't have anyone who could evaluate that from outside.' qualified relationship; P7: 'I realized that I acted prejudiced unknowingly in my relationships with my friends by the time. My husband's contribution is great in this…' unprejudiced.*

During the marriage process, the communication style of the individuals with their spouses and children, if any, can act as a projection about their interaction with other people. Regardless of who the individuals are with, the attitudes they adopt during communication can enable them to self-criticize about their active and passive movements, feelings, and thoughts. In this case, the individuals' communication not only with the family environment but also with all the people around them can become more qualified. It would not be wrong to say that this kind of togetherness expands the interaction dimension of the individual's self.

Main theme 2: Emotional. There is the sub-theme of *positive emotions* in the emotional main theme. The participants were asked the question, 'What are the positive emotions that came into your life after marriage? How often do you feel these feelings?' So, *trusting, compassionate, feeling sense of belonging, cheerful, responsible, having peace of mind, strong, flexible,* and *helpful* codes emerged in *the positive emotions* sub-theme:

P10: *'Behind me, next to me, I always feel his support. I trust him.' trusting;* P1:*'I am more compassionate. To everyone.' compassionate;* P6: *'When I was single, I was questioning where would be my place, my homeland, what is the purpose of my life. When I get married, I now have a place. I have a wife, I have children.' feeling sense of belonging;* P3*: 'A new joy every day, especially as we have a child…' cheerful;* P1*:'I was the complete opposite of what I am now. I used to leave like I was going to work in the morning. I would come home again after 10 days… Now I am much more settled.' responsible;* P5: *'Actually, it is important to make yourself happy, and I learned that after marriage.' having peace of mind;* P4*: 'To be the root of a family, not a branch. These made me feel stronger.' strong;* P1: *'I can give up the things I could not give up, I can let go of the things I said I would never let go of.' flexible;* P4: *'…I found myself more helpful than I expected. I couldn't say I could do that much before I got married.' helpful.*

Being the root of a new family not just a branch of the family of origin anymore, starting a family, having children, spousal support, the mutual sacrifice of spouses, and the necessity of managing the house have been

effective in the development of those positive feelings of married individuals. The trusting, compassionate, feeling sense of belonging, flexible and helpful aspects of the individuals show that their agreeableness increase, responsibility, and strengths of individuals show that their responsibility increase and cheerful, having peace of mind aspects show that their extraversion increase. Those positive emotions expand the emotional dimension of married individuals.

Main theme 3: Physical. The physical main theme has an *appearance* sub-theme. Participants were asked the question, "What do you find positive about your appearance now, compared to before marriage?" Accordingly, in the sub-theme of *appearance*, the codes of *finding a suitable style of clothing*, *being well-groomed* and *caring for body posture* emerged:

P4: *'But when I'm married, I say 'I'm married now, I have an attitude, I like it, I wear it. 'So I wear what suits me. I'm happy with it.' finding a suitable style of clothing;* P10: *'I take care of my clothing, care, and appearance' being well-groomed;* P7: *My posture may have started to be a little more upright. With work-life and marriage, my self-confidence may have increased. Over time, as I began to dominate work and married life...' caring for body posture.*

The desire to gain the appreciation of the spouse, to value oneself more, and the increasing of self-confidence have made body presentation more important. The participants' wearing what suits them, taking care of themselves, and caring about their body postures made them feel good about body presentation. In this context, it can be said that the participants experienced an expansion in the physical dimension of their selves.

Main theme 4: Nutritional. In the main theme of nutritional, there is the sub-theme of *healthy nutrition*. The participants were asked the questions "What are the things that have changed positively in your eating habits after marriage?" and "What do you think is the contribution of your marriage to your healthy diet?" Thus, in the sub-theme of *healthy nutrition*, *natural, regular, home-cooked, quitting alcohol, and quitting smoking* codes emerged:

P10: *'After I had a daughter, we started paying more attention. Like making yogurt at home...Like growing small tomatoes in pots... I mean more natural...' natural.* P3: *'Before getting married, it was very irregular. The meal used to be eaten even at night. But now we eat on schedule.' regular;* P2: *"Before, there was the eating out and eating the way we wanted, but now my wife divides what we eat as healthy and unhealthy." home-cooked;* P1: *"I don't drink alcohol anymore, I quitted shortly after getting married... When I see my friends who drink alcohol, I can smell alcohol if they come a little closer." Think about it, you are with your wife every evening, you smell every evening.' quitting alcohol;* P6: *'I used to smoke before I got married, then I quit. That's because my wife was disturbed. I used to smoke frequently every day before. Especially after the child, I completely quit smoking'. quitting smoking.*

The codes that emerged in the healthy nutrition sub-theme explain the nutritional habits that individuals gain with marriage. Avoiding fast food, preparing food that can be made at home, paying attention to the variety of meals and eating times, quitting all kinds of bad habits that negatively affect health are healthy eating behaviors of married individuals. It can be expressed that the marriage process has a contribution towards leaving unhealthy eating habits and gaining healthy eating habits. That, in turn, provides an expansion in the nutritional dimension of the self.

Main theme 5: Intellectual. In the main theme of *intellectual*, there are the sub-themes of *achieving new things, problem-solving, self-expression, attention,* and *organized.* Participants were asked the question, "What contribution does your marriage make to your ability to achieve new things?" Thus, the code *open to experience* emerged in the sub-theme of *achieving new things:* P9: *"Since I continue to work and improve myself, I think that my marriage has positively affected this issue."* and P3:*'When I want to try a new job or effort, my wife says 'all right'. I mean she is positive'. open to experience.*

Contrary to the prevailing belief that marriage restricts individual growth, especially after having children, it is observed that the participants are open to experience. Couples, who experience a healthy marriage, support each other's personal dreams and efforts, as well as having a purpose to spend their lives together. That effort to use outside resources can create an expansion of the intellectual dimension of the self by broadening the spouses' vision.

The question "What are the positive changes in your ability to solve a problem after marriage?" was asked to the participants. Thus, *constructor* and *practical* codes emerged in the *problem-solving* sub-theme: P8*: 'It is good for me to exchange opinions with my husband when I have a problem. I realized that I could solve problems more easily than before.' constructive;* P4: *'I can say that I have improved in solving problems, moving faster, doing more in less time, doing things that appeal to several people at the same time.' practical.*

Problems that often cause conflict in marriage are based on the spouses' lack of problem-solving skills. Couples who can effectively solve the problems that arise in their marriage and family life can reflect that practice they experience in their own homes to their other relationships. This, in turn, can provide an intellectual expansion of self.

The question "What are the positive changes in your ability of self-expression after marriage?" was asked to the participants. Thus, in the sub-theme of *self-expression, better self-knowledge* and *self-explanatory* codes emerged: P7*: 'I think I know myself better. I don't like to explain myself verbally to others. But as I live, over time they understand how I am from my behavior and my attitude.' better self-knowledge;* P5: *'I realized that I can express myself without shouting. Sometimes I express myself to my husband by writing. Especially at times that I can't stay calm. So marriage taught me not to shout at the same time. Of course, this was reflected in my other relations. self-explanatory.*

Family life, which is the closest environment of married individuals, affects also their ability to express themselves. Factors such as communication patterns used in the family, the vocabulary of family members, language skills, and whether they are open to communication are closely related to individual language development. Therefore, it can be said that relationships, which positively affect individual language development, provide expansion in the intellectual dimension of the self.

The question "What are the positive changes in your ability to focus and pay attention to a subject after marriage?" was asked to the participants. Thus, the code of *focusing for a long time* emerged in the *attention* sub-theme: P5: *'But now my focusing time is longer. Often, I think twice about something. I try to be more calm and careful. When you are single, everything is easier; there is support from the parents. Now, you make a living. focusing for a long time.*

The effort of married couples to stand on their own and manage a house without their parents may have made them care more about the work they undertake. In addition, the effort to act without haste and keeping calm while making and implementing any work-related decisions may have increased the attention given to the work being done. It can be thought that a marriage process that develops the ability to focus with these features leads to a intellectual expansion of self.

Participants were asked the question "What are the positive changes in your ability to organize your work compared to before marriage?" Thus, the codes of *time management, practicality,* and *planning* emerged in the sub-theme of *organized:*

P5: *'You have a family, there are children, there is love, dinner will be eaten in the evening, so I think that arrangement has a positive effect on the mind and keeps it clean.'* time management; P9: *'Actually, you learn to fit so much into the whole time, with the children…This increases your organizational ability in your normal work life. That comes with marriage, something that children provide…'* practicality; P8: *'I organize better. Since the responsibility increases, I constantly make plans to do this or that.'* planning.

The effort of married individuals to manage their home life and the responsibility it brings may have developed their skills of planning the work to be done and making quick decisions about those, asking for help from other people while doing work, and making a qualified division of labor. The fact that family members do not regard doing their part as burdensome and help each other reduces the individual workload and allows them to complete more work in less time. It may be possible that such a relationship, which supports organizational skills, provides intellectual expansion.

Main theme 6: Contextual. There is the sub-theme of *living space* in the main theme of *contextual.* The participants were asked the questions "What are the aspects of the environment you live in that makes you happy compared to before you got married?" and "What is the positive contribution of your current home environment to your mood?" Thus, *peaceful, organized, relaxing,* and *free* codes emerged in the sub-theme of *living space:*

P9 *'Our home is peaceful…'* peaceful; P6: *'I wasn't more selective when I was single about the place I live in. But when you get married, you live with your wife. Your stuff, the organization of the home, etc. are more advanced and nice.* organized; P1: *'She takes my tiredness'* relaxing; P5: *'We did all of them of our own will, we chose them. We decorated as we wanted. Nobody interferes. So it feels freer.'* free.

With the start of the marriage, couples begin to live in a new context with certain characteristics and conditions. The fact that the house is calm, clean, spacious, and bright, there are regular habits such as eating and sleeping at home and there are the children's room, flowers, etc. positively affect the context in which married individuals live. Therefore, it can be expressed that a home environment that improves human well-being contextually expands self.

Main theme 7: Sensual. The *sensual* main theme has *the five senses* sub-themes. The participants were asked the questions "What are the positive changes in your senses of sight, hearing, taste, touch, and smell compared to before marriage?" and "What do you think is the positive contribution of your marriage to your senses?". Thus, the codes of

distinguishing tastes, sensitivity in smelling, sensitivity in hearing, acuity in vision, and *awareness in touch* emerged in *the five sense* sub-themes:

P8: *'My sense of taste has improved. Because I tried different dishes after marriage…"* <u>*distinguishing tastes;*</u> P8: *'My sense of smell may be developed. You live with the opposite sex. You can immediately feel the scents he uses, such as perfume and cologne.'* <u>*sensitivity in smelling;*</u> P6*: 'Hearing may have increased. Because of the children. My ears are always with the children. Did they fall? Are they okay? How are they? So my sensitivity increased.* <u>sensitivity in hearing;</u> P9: *'My selectivity has increased. As a result, I think my sense of sight has become sharper.*<u>'</u> <u>*acuity in vision;*</u> P4: *'There is also a change in my sense of touch. When I touch something , I immediately recognize the change there.'* <u>*awareness in touch.*</u>

The codes that emerged in the five senses sub-themes strengthen the belief that the marriage process can affect also the functioning of our senses. Reasons such as the variety of food and tasting new dishes, starting to live with the opposite sex, the need to love, protect and follow children positively affected the development of the senses. Individuals who do not experience obstacles such as 'Don't look!', 'Don't touch!', 'Don't listen!', in the marriage process, so to say, find the opportunity to use their senses at full capacity. Thus, they can experience a pure awareness of their own feelings and thoughts and the conditions they are in.

Main theme 8: Spiritual. The *spiritual* main theme has sub-themes of *relationship with the creator* and *spiritual experiences*. Participants were asked the question, "What are the positive changes in your relationship with the Creator compared to before marriage?" Thus, the codes of *feeling loved, commitment,* and *existential awareness* emerged in the sub-theme of *relationship with the creator:* P1: *'I feel it more now. I say I am loved more so these were given to me.'* <u>*feeling loved;*</u> P10*: '...marriage contributed to my spiritual life, especially since I tried to rely on God in matters related to my child.'* <u>*commitment;*</u> P5*: ' I began to think about my own self more often.'* <u>*existential awareness.*</u>

Accordingly, married individuals tend to feel more loved by God because of the new feelings, thoughts, and experiences that come to their lives with marriage. It can be observed that being married to a spouse who has a spiritual life, the feeling of protecting their child, and feeling lucky because of what they have, increases the devotion to God. Similar reasons lead up individuals to think more about their existence and make them question their life purpose. All these show that the marriage process can affect the relationship of the individuals with the transcendent power or the creator they believe in, and in this way expand the spiritual dimension of their selves.

The question "What do you think are the spiritual experiences that add meaning to your life now?" was asked to the participants. Thus, codes of *gratitude, worship, pray,* and *giving up bad habits* emerged in the sub-theme of *spiritual experiences:* P1: *'I'm more grateful. For I am married, for my child… I am grateful for everything.'* <u>*gratitude;*</u> P6:'*Marriage has helped me in my regular worship. In a religious life stemming from an organized life, the order also emerged.'* worship; P5*:' I started to pray more, especially with pregnancy'* pray; P9: *'I quit alcohol shortly after getting married.'* <u>*giving up bad habits.*</u>

The participants stated that they were grateful for the material and spiritual benefits of marriage and that they benefited more from prayer especially in problem-solving processes. Regular family life allowed time for worship. In addition, marriage has increased their efforts to give up bad habits such as smoking and alcohol. Unlike the need for healthy nutrition, this effort includes the desire to feel better spiritually, not to disturb the spouse and children, and to try to set a good example for them. These spiritual experiences that are formed and increased provide an expansion in the spiritual dimension of the self.

Quantitative Stage Findings

Construct validity. First, it was seen that the data collected by the Bartlett sphericity test (p<,000) and Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin sampling adequacy test (,923) was suitable for factorization. As a result of the analysis, nutrition and physical dimensions were eliminated from the 8 predicted dimensions, and the origin familial interactional dimension was added, and as a result, the 36-item and seven sub-dimensional structures of the scale emerged. The total variance explanation amount of the seven factors that occurred was found to be 68,804%. The amounts of variance explained by the factors were determined as 35,590% for the first factor (Spiritual), 10,255% for the second factor (Familial Interactional), 6.065% for the third factor (Emotional), 4,925% for the fourth factor (Sensual), 4.635% for the fifth factor (Contextual), 4.492% for the sixth factor (Family of Origin Interactional) and 2.842% for the seventh factor (Intellectual) respectively. Accordingly, it was observed that the contribution of MSES to the total variance was at a good level and it strongly measured the structure it measures. When the accumulation graph of the factors is also examined, it is seen that the slope decreases after the first 7 factors.

As a result of Promax rotation, it is seen that the scale consists of seven factors, and 2 items have acceptable load values, 18 items are good, 13 items are valuable and 3 items have excellent load values (Lowest:.404; Highest:.911). However, as a result of the Pearson correlation analysis performed to determine whether the relationship between sub-dimensions is significant, it is seen that the factors have a positive and significant relationship among themselves (p<.001). This shows that the sub-dimensions are in a good relationship with each other. The DFA result performed after this stage is as follows:
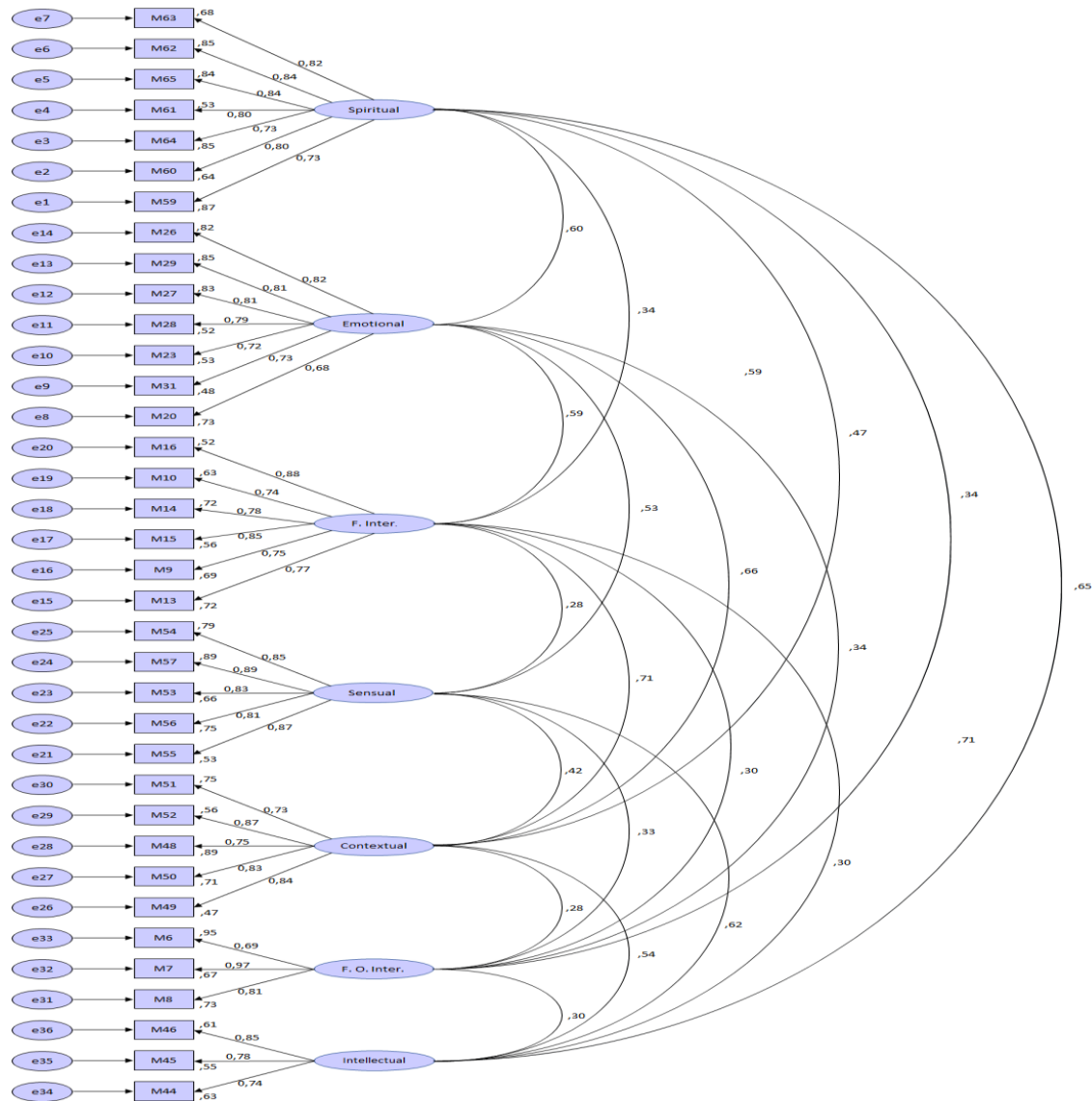
Figure 3. CFA path diagram for MSES

According to CFA, the structure of MSES consisting of 36 items and 7 sub-dimensions was tested and verified, and the inter-dimensional relationships of the 7 sub-dimensions of the MSES were also found to be significant. According to the CFA result, it is seen that the lowest load value for all items is .69. This shows that all items on the scale have a good level of loading. When the fit values obtained in the study were examined, the chi-square was found to be $(\chi2/sd) = 1.787$. The RMSEA value was determined as $=0.059$, the NFI as$= 0.844$, the CFI as$= 0.924$, the RFI as $= 0.827$ and the IFI as$= 0.925$. According to these results, MSES shows a good fit.

Criterion validity. Relational Self-Change Scale and General Self-Efficacy Scale were used to determine the criterion validity of the MSES. Accordingly, significant relationships were found between MSES and Self-Expansion dimension of the Relational Self-Change Scale (r=.557; p<.001) Self Contraction dimension (r=-.391; p<.001), Self-Pruning dimension (r=.551; p<.001), Self-Adulteration dimension (r=-.347; p<.05), General Self-Efficacy Scale

(r=.599; p<.001), Ability and Confidence sub-dimension (r=.530; p<.001) and Effort and Resistance sub-dimension (r=.591; p<.001).

Internal consistency coefficient. In this research, the internal consistency coefficients of the MSES are at a very reliable level. When all sub-dimensions were examined, the lowest internal consistency coefficient was found to be .769; the total internal consistency coefficient was determined as,947 (Spiritual: .92, Familial Interactional: .88, Emotional: .87, Sensual: .90, Contextual: .87, Family of Origin Interactional: .76, Intellectual: .83).

Test-retest. As a result of the Pearson correlation analysis performed to determine the test-retest reliability of the scale, it was determined that the two applications showed a statistically significant relationship between each other (r=,840; p<.05). As a result of the related group t-test, there was no statistically significant difference between the means in the two applications (p>.05). According to these results, MSES is a stable and reliable scale.

Item analyzes. According to the item discrimination index in the research, as a result of the independent groups t-test performed to determine whether there is a significant difference between the arithmetic averages of the upper 27% and lower 27% groups, the differences between all groups were found to be statistically significant (p<0.001). These differences were in favor of the upper 27% groups. This result shows that the scale items and the total score are distinctive. According to the results of the item-total and item-remainder correlation analysis of the scale items in the research, the item-total correlations varied between .308 and .678, while the item-remainder correlations varied between .944 and .947. The significant correlation of all items at the p<0.001 level indicates that the items are in the same structure.

In addition, according to the results of the independent group t-test implemented, it was determined that MSES did not differ according to the gender variable (p>.05). This result shows that the scale is for all married individuals, regardless of male or female. As a result, the validity and reliability studies carried out in the quantitative stage, which is the second stage of the exploratory sequential design, show that MSES is a valid and reliable scale.

In summary, the MSES is a scale for married individuals. The 36-item scale is a 5-point Likert type (1 I strongly disagree–6 I totally agree) and consists of 7 dimensions: Spiritual (7 items), Familial Interactional (6 items), Emotional (7 items), Sensual (5 items), Contextual (5 items), Family of Origin Interactional (3 items), and Intellectual (3 items). In the scale which has no inverse item, as the total score and the score from the sub-dimensions increase, the level of marital self-expansion increases. While the sum of 36 items gives the total marital self-expansion score, the sum of the sub-scales separately gives the marital self-expansion score for each sub-scale. The table below shows the sample items of MSES:

Table 1

Sample items of MSES

Items	I strongly disagree	I do not agree	Indecisive	I agree	I totally agree
4. After I got married, I started to feel stronger.	1	2	3	4	5
8. After I got married, I started to express myself better to people.	1	2	3	4	5
11. After I got married, I started spending more quality time with my family of origin (mother, father, siblings).	1	2	3	4	5
16. We have a more conflict-free environment in my home with my spouse and (if any) children than in my family of origin.	1	2	3	4	5
20. After I got married, I started to feel freer in my home environment.	1	2	3	4	5
27. After I got married, I think my sense of taste improved.	1	2	3	4	5
36. After I got married, my bad habits that negatively affected my spirituality started to decrease.	1	2	3	4	5

Discussion

Qualitative Stage

Married individuals may experience expansion in the interactional dimension of their selves as a result of their relationships with spouse, children, family of origin, and others. In the literature, there are studies on the interactional dimension, especially the relationship with spouse and family of origin (Reissman et al., 1993; Aron et al., 2002; Rajabi et al., 2017). In addition, spouses who can balance between their newly formed family and their family of origin are successful in maintaining a qualified marital relationship (Brown et al., 2016; Fatima & Ajmal, 2012; McKay, 2012; Özdemir-Kemahlı, 2019). These results can be associated with self-expansion in the interactional dimension in married individuals.

It can be said that the emotional dimension of individuals' selves expands thanks to positive feelings such as trusting, compassionate, and belonging, which develop more with marriage and are also related to their personality traits. In connection with the subject, Dinçer (2017) also found that personality traits such as extraversion and agreeableness predict self-change processes.

It can be expressed that married individuals who find the suitable clothing style, are well-groomed, and take care of their body posture experience an expansion in the physical dimension of their selves. A healthy marital relationship can enable individuals to develop a positive perception of their physical characteristics. According to Çetin et al. (2011), there are some physical benefits that marriage provides to the individual, such as a strong immune system, anti-aging, getting the body in shape and becoming flexible, and controlled weight gain.

It can be expressed that individuals who acquire healthy eating habits such as natural, regular, and home-cooked nutrition, avoiding alcohol and smoking with marriage experience an expansion in the nutritional dimension of their

selves. The effort to eat healthy in marriage is considered to be related to protecting and raising family members. As a matter of fact, healthy nutrition means both the choice of foods and drinks that are beneficial to the body and avoiding foods and drinks that do not benefit the body and may harm body functions on the contrary (Satir, 1988; Akça-Koca, 2017a).

It can be expressed that individuals who develop the ability to achieve new things, problem solving, self-expression, attention, and organization after marriage, experience an expansion in the intellectual dimension of their selves. In the study of Aron and Aron (1997), the mindfulness-based couple intervention program provided couples with an experience of self-expansion through exciting activities. Sheets et al. (2012) found that openness to experience and sensation seeking were associated with self-expansion.

It can be said that individuals who have a more peaceful, organized, free and relaxing living space in their marriage experience an expansion in the contextual dimension of their selves. If the living space is very colorful or colorless, very noisy or quiet, very fast or slow, very clean or dirty, people are more or less affected by these context features (Satir, 1988; Akça-Koca, 2017b).

A healthy marital relationship can have positive effects on the sensual dimension of the self by increasing awareness of the senses. Particularly, the development of senses of smell and touch with the effect of regular sexuality experienced in the marriage process (Çetin et al., 2011) is an example of the expansion experienced in the sensual dimension with marriage.

In addition, it can be said that, with the marriage, individuals who feel loved by their creator more often, whose devotion to the creator and awareness of existence increase, who give up their bad habits by being busier with gratitude, worship and pray, experience an expansion in the spiritual dimension of their selves. Other studies in the literature say that spiritual beliefs and practices reduce the stress in a marriage, prevent family conflict by uniting couples, and affect communication between spouses positively (Balcı-Arvas & Hökelekli, 2017; Belen, 2014; Lambert & Dollahite, 2006). This provides an expansion in the spiritual dimension of the self.

Quantitative Stage

In the literature, there are some scales developed regarding self-expansion (Aron et al. 1992; Dinçer, 2017; Ledbetter, 2013; Lewandowski & Aron, 2002; Mattingly et al., 2014). In this research, MSES was developed and brought to the literature, too. MSES is a first in the literature as a scale that directly measures the self-expansion of married individuals. In the scales developed in the literature on self-change, it was observed that the direction of change was emphasized, but the aspects of the self were studied relatively superficially. On the other hand, the areas where self-expansion takes place are detailed in MSES. The concept of expansion approached in MSES is related to the self-expansion model of Aron and Aron (1986). Also, the self-concept discussed in the scale was inspired by Satir's self-mandala (1988). The sub-dimensions of the self-concept examined accordingly are based on qualitative research findings studied with a phenomenological pattern. Validity and reliability analyzes of the seven sub-dimensions and 36-item MSES created on the qualitative findings were made, and thus, a significant part of the qualitative findings was generalized to a larger sampling. In this context, in addition to its addressing married

individuals, MSES differs from other scales related to self-expansion in the way it handles the self-concept since the scale items are created on the basis of the self-mandala literature and qualitative research findings. Another feature that differentiates MSES from other scales is that it gives both a total marital self-expansion score and a marital self-expansion score in spiritual, familial interactional, emotional, sensual, contextual, family of origin interactional, and intellectual dimensions.

Conclusion

The themes reached in the qualitative stage of the exploratory sequential design and the sub-dimensions of the scale developed in the quantitative stage generally coincide with each other. On the other hand, MSES, which was developed on the basis of qualitative findings at the quantitative stage, appears to have 7 sub-dimensions: 'spiritual', 'familial interactional', 'emotional', 'sensual', 'contextual', 'family of origin interactional' and 'intellectual'. While it was seen that the themes of the qualitative stage, 'spiritual', 'emotional', 'sensual', 'contextual' and 'intellectual', are included in the sub-dimensions of MSES with the same name, the interactional theme was divided into 'familial interactional' and 'origin familial interactional' sub-dimensions in MSES, and the themes of 'physical' and 'nutritional' could not be included in the MSES since their psychometric findings were not considered sufficient. The results that emerged when the qualitative stage findings were compared with the items belonging to the sub-dimensions of MSES are as follows:

Items such as "After I got married, my bad habits that negatively affected my spirituality started to decrease", which constitute the "spiritual" sub-dimension of MSES, are seen to be compatible with the "relationship with the creator" and "spiritual experiences" sub-themes in the "spiritual" theme at the qualitative stage. Items such as 'we have a more conflict-free environment in my home with my spouse and (if any) children than in my family of origin', which constitute the 'familial interactional' sub-dimension of the MSES, seem to be in compatible with the 'my family compared to my family of origin' sub-theme in the 'interactional' theme at the qualitative stage. Items such as "After I got married, I started to feel stronger", which constitute the "emotional" sub-dimension of MSES, seem to be compatible with the "positive emotions" sub-theme in the "emotional" theme in the qualitative stage. Items such as 'After I got married, I think my sense of taste improved', which constitute the 'sensual' sub-dimension of MSES, seem to be compatible with the 'five senses' sub-theme in the 'sensual' theme in the qualitative stage. Items such as 'After I got married, I started to feel freer in my home environment', which constitute the 'contextual' sub-dimension of the MSES, seem to be compatible with the 'living space' sub-theme in the 'contextual' theme in the qualitative stage. Items such as "After marriage, I started to spend more quality time with my family of origin (my mother, father, siblings)", which constitute the "origin familial interactional" sub-dimension of MSES, seem to be compatible with the sub-theme of 'current relationship with the family of origin' in the 'interactional' theme at the qualitative stage. Finally, the items such as "After I got married, I started to express myself better to people", which constitute the "intellectual" sub-dimension of MSES, seem to be compatible with the sub-themes of 'self-expression' and 'achieving new things' and 'problem-solving in the 'intellectual' theme in the qualitative stage.

In this study, Aron and Aron's (1986) concept of self-expansion was examined in-depth for married individuals based on Satir's (1988) self-mandala dimensions and the dimensions of the phenomenon of marital self-expansion,

which were also discovered with the MSES developed in this context, that can be generalized in a larger sample were revealed. After all, the effects of the marital relationship may cause different changes in the individual's self. As a positive change, expansion can be a significant return on the marital relationship. However, it cannot be said that all marriages expand the self of individuals. The results from the qualitative phase of the research explain the aspects of the expansion in marriages that make individuals experience self-expansion. Developed at the quantitative stage on the basis of qualitative findings, the aim of the MSES is to measure the possible self-expansion in married individuals.

Ethic

All procedures performed in the study involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and/or national research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards.

Author Contributions

This article was written with the joint contributions of two authors.

Conflict of Interest

As disclosure of potential conflicts of interest, the authors do not have any financial or other relationship with other organizations and people which may inappropriately affect the research. The authors declare that they do not have any conflict of interest with this paper.

Funding

This article has not been funded by any institution or organization.

Notes

The study was produced from the doctoral thesis named "The examination of marital self-expansion by mixed method".

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