

## Phubbing as a Threat to Marital Self-Disclosure: The Mediating and Moderating Role of Self-Differentiation

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**Abstract:** As technology assumes an increasingly significant and influential role in communication, individual behavior has consequently been shaped by technological advances, while the attitudes developed at an early age play a critical role in determining future behaviors. This study aimed to examine whether differentiation of self acts as a mediator and moderator in the relationship between phubbing behavior and marital self-disclosure. A total of 571 individuals from a city center in the Central Anatolia Region participated in the research. Of these participants, 289 (50.6%) were women, and 282 (49.4%) were men. The mean age was 37.62 years. The Marital Self-Disclosure Scale, Differentiation of Self Inventory, and Phubbing Scale were used as measurement instruments. The Hayes PROCESS macro (model 1/model 4) was employed to determine the mediating and moderating effects in the data analysis. Differentiation of self was found to be significantly negatively correlated with phubbing, while it was positively associated with marital self-disclosure. The findings revealed that phubbing negatively affects marital self-disclosure. The analysis results indicate that differentiation of self exerts both mediating and moderating effects on the relationship between phubbing and marital self-disclosure. The findings were discussed in detail within the framework of the literature.

**Keywords:** Phubbing, marital self-disclosure, differentiation of self, marriage

## Evlilikte Kendini Açmaya Yönelik Bir Tehdit Olarak Sosyotelizm: Benlik Ayrışmasının Aracı ve Düzenleyici Rolü

**Öz:** Teknolojinin iletişimde giderek daha önemli ve etkili bir rol üstlenmesiyle birlikte, bireysel davranışlar teknolojik gelişmelerden etkilenerek şekillenmekte ve erken yaşta geliştirilen tutumlar gelecekteki davranışları belirlemede kritik bir rol oynamaktadır. Bu çalışma, benliğin ayrışmasının phubbing davranışı ile evlilik içi kendini açma arasındaki ilişkide aracı ve düzenleyici olarak rol oynayıp oynamadığını incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Araştırmaya İç Anadolu Bölgesinde bir şehir merkezinden toplam 571 kişi katılmıştır. Katılımcıların 289'u (%50,6) kadın, 282'si (%49,4) erkektir. Yaş ortalaması 37,62'dir. Çalışmada, Evlilikte Kendini Açma Ölçeği, Benliğin Ayrışması Envanteri ve Phubbing Ölçeği ölçme araçları olarak kullanılmıştır. Veri analizinde aracı ve düzenleyici etkileri belirlemek için Hayes'in PROCESS makrosu (model 1/model 4) kullanılmıştır. Benliğin ayrışmasının phubbing ile anlamlı düzeyde negatif korelasyonlu olduğu, evlilik içi kendini açma ile ise pozitif korelasyonlu olduğu bulunmuştur. Bulgular, bir davranış problemi olan phubbing'in evlilik içi kendini açmayı olumsuz etkilediğini ortaya koymuştur. Analiz sonuçları, benlik ayrışmasının phubbing ile evlilik içi kendini açma arasındaki ilişkide hem aracı hem de düzenleyici etkilere sahip olduğunu göstermektedir. Bulgular alanyazın çerçevesinde detaylı bir biçimde tartışılmıştır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Phubbing, evlilikte kendini açma, benlik ayrışması, evlilik

## Introduction

Marriage and family relationships constitute one of the most fundamental elements of all societies. Although marriage marks the formal beginning of a family, maintaining this union requires transparency and open, honest communication between partners. Such communication enables spouses to support each other in various aspects of life. Accordingly, marital self-disclosure—defined as the sharing of personal information, feelings, and thoughts with one's spouse (Derlega et al., 1993; Pennebaker, 1997)—represents an individual's personal, private, and emotional expression of the self. Research indicates that one of the most important ways for couples to foster intimacy and closeness is through self-disclosure, which involves sharing thoughts and emotions and maintaining transparent communication (Denes et al., 2023). Therefore, marital self-disclosure is associated with enhanced marital quality, intimacy, and functioning (Manne et al., 2019). However, despite the well-established importance of self-disclosure for marital functioning, several contemporary factors may interfere with couples' ability to engage in such open communication. In contemporary society, individuals may be subjected to phubbing, defined as the behavior of ignoring the other person by focusing their attention on their phone (Roberts & David, 2016); this occurs when spouses concentrate on their phones instead of engaging in meaningful communication. This behavior may lead to conflict between spouses and hinder attempts at self-disclosure. However, individuals with higher differentiation of self, who possess stronger self-regulation and emotional awareness, may be better able to manage this situation and reduce the likelihood of relationship problems. This study is theoretically grounded in Social Penetration Theory (Altman & Taylor, 1973), which explains how interpersonal relationships develop through mutual and gradual self-disclosure, and Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986), which examines the reciprocal relationships between behavior, cognitive processes, and environmental factors. Within this framework, phubbing behavior may negatively affect marital self-disclosure by disrupting face-to-face communication, while differentiation of self may shape how individuals behave and react to such situations. The study aims to shed light on the challenges that may arise in romantic relationships due to the intrusion of technology, focusing specifically on how phubbing affects marital self-disclosure. Its unique contribution lies in examining differentiation of self as both a mediating and moderating variable—an area underexplored in previous research. The findings will provide insights into how technology affects marital communication and highlight the importance of self-differentiation in managing these interactions, offering implications for both theory and marital therapy practice.

### Differentiation of self

In marriage and family relationships, achieving individuation—defined as differentiation of self—is essential for developing satisfactory and healthy partnerships. First introduced by Bowen (1976), differentiation of self refers to individual's ability to balance emotional, intellectual, and intimate aspects within relationships (Skowron & Friedlander, 1998). This capacity reflects how well individuals distinguish and manage emotions and thoughts during stressful situations (Bridge, 2019). People with higher differentiation of self can form healthier relationships, express emotions appropriately, and maintain stable romantic partnerships (Bowen, 1978). According to Bowen's Multigenerational family systems theory, spouses' ability to sustain reciprocity in marriage is strongly influenced by their level of differentiation (Gubbins et al., 2010). Research shows that individuals with higher differentiation of self possess greater interpersonal competence, emotional maturity, and psychological resilience. Conversely, those with lower differentiation experience discomfort with intimacy and autonomy, face challenges regulating emotions, and struggle in interpersonal relationships (Kim-Appel et al., 2007). Empirical studies consistently support family systems theory, showing that well-differentiated individuals experience fewer relationship problems (Skowron, 2000), less conflict (Wei et al., 2005), and more harmonious interactions. They also tend to be more socially compatible, have better problem-solving skills (Skowron, 2004), and demonstrate stronger abilities to maintain social bonds (Williamson et al., 2007). Recent research further indicates that individuals with higher differentiation of self are better equipped to handle challenges and solve problems effectively (Aryamanesh et al., 2012; Gubbins et al., 2010; Klein et al., 2024; Peleg, 2008; Süloğlu & Güler, 2021).

### Phubbing

Phubbing, a term derived from the words phone and snubbing, refers to excessively focusing on a mobile phone and ignoring another person during social interactions (Roberts & David, 2016). For this behavior to occur, an individual must disregard the presence of others, even when simply glancing at their smartphone. Phubbing does not necessarily indicate digital addiction; individuals may engage in it to avoid communication (Chotpitayasunondh & Douglas, 2016). In such cases, a person withdraws from social interaction and seeks comfort in their phone. Recent research shows that phubbing behavior disrupts family dynamics and interaction patterns. Phubbing reduces family cohesion and emotional closeness, which in turn contributes to adolescents' depression and bullying behaviors (Yu et al., 2025; Pang et al., 2025). Moreover, the quality of interpersonal and family relationships plays a significant role in predicting phubbing behavior, emphasizing the central importance of family interaction in understanding this phenomenon (Odaci et al., 2024). Exposure to phubbing undermines individuals' need for belonging, leading them to perceive the behavior as disrespectful and harmful to trust, communication, and closeness (Chotpitayasunondh & Douglas, 2018a). People often phub their close relationships,

particularly family members (Al-Saggaf & O'Donnell, 2019). This behavior reduces relationship and communication satisfaction (McDaniel & Coyne, 2016; Vanden Abele et al., 2016) and may cause feelings of worthlessness (Karadağ et al., 2016). Being phubbed often leads to conflict (Chotpitayasunondh & Douglas, 2018b) and violates relational expectations (Vanden Abele, 2020). As a result, phubbing disrupts healthy communication, reduces intimacy, and negatively affects well-being (Krasnova et al., 2016; Wang et al., 2017). The partner subjected to phubbing may feel undervalued, inadequate, and insignificant (Parmaksız, 2022).

### **Marital Self-disclosure**

Self-disclosure, first conceptualized by Jourard (1958), is the sharing of significant personal information, including private experiences, attitudes, emotions, and past events (Derlega & Chaikin, 1976; Laurenceau et al., 1998; Waring et al., 1998). It is a key component of relational closeness and understanding (Harvey & Omarzu, 1999). As individuals become closer, their self-disclosure deepens (Milholland, 1979). Recent studies also support these findings, showing that marital self-disclosure continues to play a crucial role in relationship quality and satisfaction (Candel & Turliuc, 2021; Jia et al., 2025). Self-disclosure enhances the development, stability, and security of interpersonal relationships (Çetinkaya, 2005). Hendrick (1981) emphasized that self-disclosure is a complex behavior and becomes especially critical in marriage, which requires the highest level of mutual disclosure (Jourard & Lasakow, 1958). In marriage, sharing personal information fosters feelings of being valued and trusted, thereby strengthening relational closeness (Laurenceau et al., 1998) and improving problem-solving (Coupland et al., 1988). For example, Candel & Turliuc (2021) found that perceived partner responsiveness and relational entitlement significantly influenced marital satisfaction via self-disclosure, highlighting its ongoing relevance in contemporary couples. Studies across friendships (Hamid, 2000; Kito, 2005), romantic relationships (Bradford et al., 2002), and close relationships (Sprecher & Hendrick, 2004) consistently show that self-disclosure enhances relationship quality. Conversely, phubbing reduces self-disclosure and relationship satisfaction.

### **The Present Study**

The emergence of phubbing as a detrimental issue affecting relationships among married individuals necessitates an investigation into how this behavior impacts marital dynamics. Examining the effects of phubbing exhibited by married individuals toward their spouses has become a significant area of inquiry. This study is theoretically grounded in Social Penetration Theory (Altman & Taylor, 1973), which explains the development of interpersonal relationships, and Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986), which examines the relationship between individual behaviors and cognitive processes. Social Penetration Theory posits that the deepening of a relationship is made possible through a mutual and gradual process of self-disclosure. In this context, phubbing behavior hinders face-to-face communication and can negatively affect self-disclosure among spouses. Social Cognitive Theory asserts that individual behaviors, such as phubbing, are reciprocally shaped by personal factors (self-differentiation) and environmental interactions. These frameworks help explain the potential mediating and moderating role of differentiation of self in the relationship between marital self-disclosure and phubbing. Differentiation of self is proposed to have both mediating and moderating effects (Hooper & DePuy, 2010; Skowron et al., 2004). Conceptualized by Bowen (1978), differentiation of self clarifies dynamics within family relationships and encompasses intrapersonal and interpersonal dimensions, emotional regulation capacities, and the ability to balance relational separation and togetherness (Jankowski & Hooper, 2012). Individuals with high differentiation possess sufficient self-regulation skills in autonomy, emotional control, and intimacy (Sandage & Harden, 2011). Lower differentiation of self may lead to reduced marital self-disclosure, which in turn may trigger a propensity for phubbing by one or both spouses. Current studies support the relationship between differentiation of self and phubbing (Hatipoğlu et al., 2024; Peleg & Boniel-Nissim, 2024). In marriages where differentiation of self is insufficient, spouses are more susceptible to emotional disharmony and external influences. Conversely, in marriages where self-differentiation is well-developed, intimacy and autonomy are higher, and negative reactivity is lower (Skowron & Friedlander, 1998). Furthermore, empirical research indicates that spousal phubbing threatens intimacy (Beukeboom & Pollmann, 2021; David & Roberts, 2021; Wang et al., 2021; Wang & Zhao, 2023; Wang et al., 2024), which inhibits marital self-disclosure. Differentiation of self is correlated with self-disclosure, serving as a predictor and exerting a direct effect (Zhu, 2019). High differentiation allows individuals to maintain both independence and intimacy in relationships (Skowron et al., 2004), increasing the likelihood of self-revelation. Self-disclosure is crucial for healthy marital functioning (Jourard & Jourard, 1971); low levels are associated with reduced relational satisfaction and intimacy (Quek et al., 2015). Individuals with higher differentiation also exhibit secure attachment, better mental health, and more effective family and marital functioning (Bowen, 1991). Research demonstrates that greater differentiation enhances partner adjustment (Castro-Dávila & Oliver, 2022; Duch-Ceballos et al., 2021; Mozas-Alonso et al., 2022; Oliver et al., 2023), which reduces impulsive behaviors such as phubbing. Therefore, differentiation of self is expected to both mediate and moderate the relationship between marital self-disclosure and phubbing, clarifying why low self-disclosure may lead to increased phubbing and why high differentiation can buffer its negative effects.

- H-1. Phubbing has a significant negative association with marital self-disclosure.
- H-2. Differentiation of self has a significant negative association with phubbing.
- H-3. Differentiation of self has a significant positive association with marital self-disclosure.
- H-4. Differentiation of self mediates the relationship between phubbing and marital self-disclosure.
- H-5. Differentiation of self moderates the negative effect of phubbing on marital self-disclosure by weakening this effect.

## Method

### Participants and Procedure

A total of 571 married individuals from Türkiye participated in the research. Among the participants, 289 (50.6%) were women and 282 (49.4%) were men. The ages of those included in the study ranged from 20 to 65 years (see Table 1). Adult married individuals were selected as participants through convenience sampling, following a rigorous sampling procedure. This process is essential for the reproducibility of the study. The sample consists of married individuals aged between 20 and 65, living in various regions of Türkiye. Participants were not drawn from a specific database; instead, the dataset was compiled by aggregating the information of individuals who were randomly contacted by psychological counselors across different regions. Random selection was implemented to ensure that the sample accurately represented the general population. This method facilitates the acquisition of an unbiased sample, thereby enhancing the reliability of the study. The sampling process was meticulously detailed to enable independent researchers to replicate the study by adhering to the same methodology.

The data for this study were obtained from volunteer participants who provided informed consent. Participants completed the scales in face-to-face sessions. Research data were collected from various provinces of Türkiye. During the scale administration, the purpose of the study was first explained. Subsequently, the Phubbing Scale (PS), Marital Self-Disclosure Scale (MSDS), Differentiation of Self Inventory (DSI), and the Socio-Demographic Data Form were administered. To mitigate social desirability bias, it was emphasized that the responses would be kept confidential prior to data collection. This process took approximately 25 minutes for each participant.

**Table 1.**  
*Socio-demographic Data (N = 571)*

Variables	%	N	Variables	(%)	N
Gender			Employment status		
Male	49.4	282	Employed	67.4	385
Female	50.6	289	Unemployed	32.6	186
Age			Educational attainment		
20-29	28.4	162	Primary School	20.0	114
30-39	31.5	180	Elementary School	12.6	72
40-49	28.0	160	High School School	21.9	125
50-59	9.6	55	Undergraduate/ Associate Degree	39.4	225
60 and above	2.4	14	Master	6.1	35
The duration of marriage (year)			Perceived socio economic status		
1-5	31.4	179	Low	3.2	18
6-10	22.0	126	Medium	51.4	294
11-15	8.8	50	High	41.0	234
16 and above	37.8	216	Very High	4.4	25
			Parental status		
			Yes	84.9	485
			No	15.1	86

## Data Collection Tools

### *Marital self-disclosure scale (MSDS)*

This scale was developed by Çağ and Yıldırım (2017). It consists of three sub-dimensions: "nature of the relationship, awareness, and openness." The score obtained from the scale is between 29 and 145. The scale is a five-point Likert-type instrument. Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA), Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA), and similar scale analyses were performed to assess the construct validity. According to the findings obtained as a result of the analysis, the Self-Disclosure Scale (MSDS) explained 54% of the total variance. At the conclusion of the analysis for MSDS validity, a moderately significant positive association was determined among the two scales ( $r = .60$ ,  $p < .001$ ). The scale was found to be valid ( $\chi^2/df = 2.89$ ,  $NFI = .96$ ,  $NNFI = .97$ ,  $CFI = .97$ ,  $RMSEA = .07$ , and  $SRMR = .06$ ). In the reliability analysis, the Cronbach's alpha value was calculated as .97 for the EFA group ( $n = 468$ ) and .95 for the CFA group ( $n = 346$ ). In the reliability study, the half-test internal consistency coefficient was checked, and the Spearman-Brown coefficient was calculated as .96 after applying the correction formula. The Cronbach's alpha value of this study is .89. In this study, the total score of the scale was used.

### *Differentiation of self inventory (DSI)*

The scale adapted by Işık and Bulduk (2015) comprises 20 items organized into four sub-dimensions. This instrument utilizes a 6-point Likert scale. The Cronbach's alpha value for the entire scale was calculated to be .81. The current form of the scale has been validated, demonstrating fit indices as follows:  $\chi^2/df = 1.65$ ,  $GFI = .93$ ,  $AGFI = .91$ ,  $CFI = .92$ , and  $RMSEA = .04$ . The internal consistency coefficients for the sub-dimensions are as follows: .78 for emotional reactivity, .75 for the "I position," .77 for dependence on others, and .74 for emotional cutoff. The overall reliability coefficient of the scale is .74, while the Cronbach's alpha value obtained in the present study is .73 (Işık & Bulduk, 2015). In this study, the total score of the scale was utilized.

### *Phubbing scale (PS)*

The scale was developed by Karadağ et al. (2015) to measure the level of phubbing tendency. This scale, which employs principal component analysis with oblimin rotation in the exploratory factor analysis (EFA) stage, consists of a two-factor structure. The scale is a five-point Likert scale. These sub-dimensions account for 56.19% of the total variance. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted to assess model data fit. The goodness of fit indices are within acceptable limits ( $RMSEA = .06$ ,  $\chi^2/df = 3.20$ ,  $GFI = .92$ ,  $AGFI = .91$ ,  $CFI = .94$ ). This ten-item scale has two five-item subscales: communication disorder ( $\alpha = .87$ ) and phone addiction ( $\alpha = .85$ ). The scale has a five-point Likert structure, with scores ranging from 10 to 50. Scores of 40 and above indicate the addiction level of individuals' phubbing tendency. The Cronbach's alpha value in the present study is .81. In this study, the total score of the scale was utilized.

### *Socio-demographic data form*

This form was developed to determine socio-demographic data. This form includes information such as gender, employment status, age, educational attainment, duration of marriage, perceived socio-economic status, and parental status.

## Data Analysis

This study aimed to determine the relationship between outcome, predictor, and mediator/moderator variables. First, the homogeneity of the data was tested for normal distribution. Since the skewness value (-.46 to .30) and the kurtosis value (-.02 to .82) in this data set are close to  $\pm 1$ , the distribution is approximately normal (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). The points in the Q-Q plot are mostly aligned along a diagonal line, indicating that the residuals conform to a normal distribution. According to the Mahalanobis technique, three data points with extreme values were detected. Correlation analysis was conducted to determine whether there was a significant relationship between phubbing, self-disclosure in marriage, and differentiation of self. Subsequently, covariate variables were identified. The mediating effect of differentiation of self between phubbing and marital self-disclosure was examined. In this study, the mediation relationship between the dependent variable and the independent variable (M) (Hayes, 2012) was tested using the method defined by Hayes (2013) as Model 4 in SPSS Process. When the confidence interval of the indirect effect does not include zero, a mediating effect can be identified (Hayes, 2009). In the moderation analysis, the Z variable is posited to have an influence on the strength of the relationship between X and Y. Moderation analysis was performed using the Process Macro (Model 1), and this relationship was accepted as  $< .05$ . A Harman's single-factor test, conducted to assess the risk of common method bias, showed that the first factor explained only 9.024% of the variance, indicating that this bias is not a significant concern.

**Results**

**Preliminary Analyses**

Correlation analysis reveals that marital self-disclosure and differentiation of self are significantly negatively related to phubbing. Additionally, marital self-disclosure is significantly positively associated with differentiation of self.

**Table 2.**  
*Correlations (H<sub>1-2,3</sub>) / Descriptive Statistics*

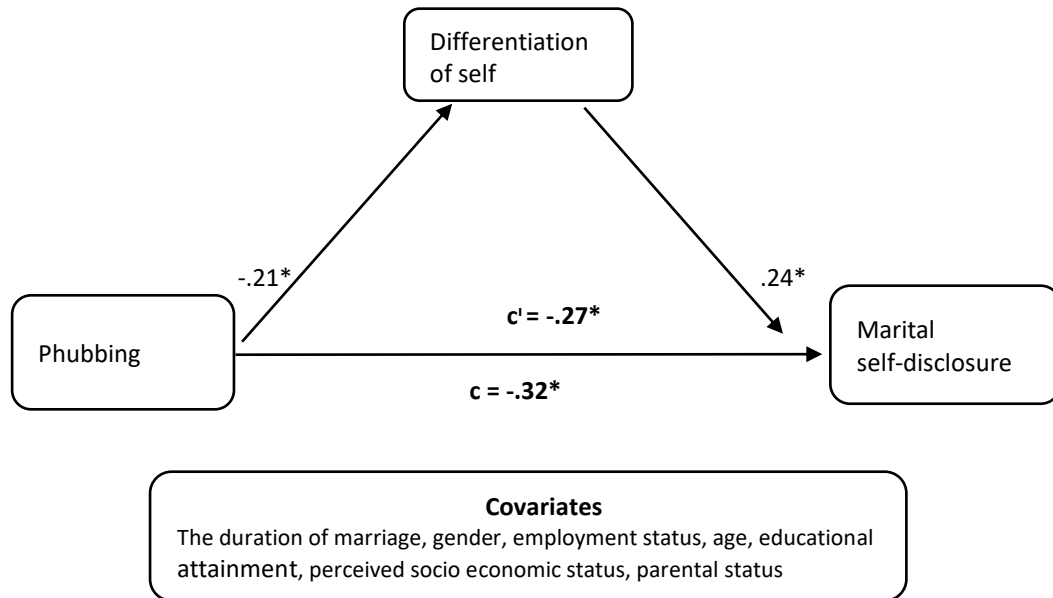
Variables	<i>P</i>	<i>MSDC</i>	<i>DS</i>	$\bar{X}$	<i>Sd</i>	<i>Skewness</i>	<i>Kurtosis</i>
<i>P</i>	1			25.68	7.12	.46	.14
<i>MSDC</i>	-.29*	1		113.90	14.87	-.59	.82
<i>DS</i>	-.14*	.25*	1	83.56	12.05	-.30	-.02

Note: *P* = Phubbing, *MSDC* = Marital self-disclosure, *DS* = Differentiation of self, \* = *p* < .01.

**Mediation Analysis**

After preliminary analysis, it was decided to conduct a mediation analysis to determine whether the effect of phubbing on marital self-disclosure was mediated by differentiation of self. Covariates were included in the analysis as control variables, given their relationship with the predictive variable. These sociodemographic data were converted into dummy variables before analysis. The results of the analysis are presented in Table 3. The present study used 5,000 bootstrapped samples with a 95% confidence interval. If the confidence interval for the indirect effect does not include zero, a significant mediating effect is indicated (Hayes, 2009). In this study, the confidence interval did not include zero. The total effect was -.675, the direct effect was -.567 (84%), and the indirect effect was -.108 (16%). The indirect effect of phubbing on marital self-disclosure, along with differentiation of self, was significant. The results of this analysis indicate that differentiation of self serves as a partial mediator in the association between phubbing and self-disclosure in marriage.

**Figure 1.**  
*Mediating Effect of Differentiation of Self (H<sub>4</sub>)*



\**p* < .001, *B* values: Standardized coefficients

**Table 3.**  
*Mediation Analysis Results*

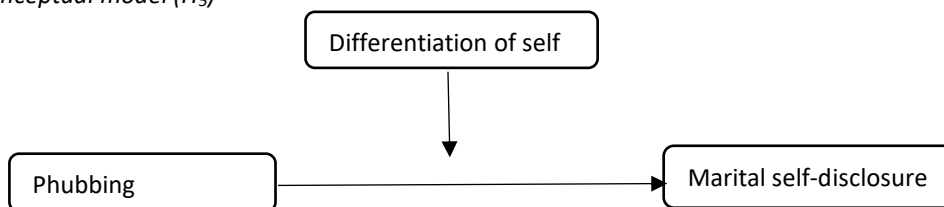
Outcome Variable (Y)	Mediators (M)	Predictor Variable (X)	a (SE)	b (SE)	c (SE)	c' (SE)	95%CI	
Marital self-disclosure	Differentiation of self	Phubbing	-.36 (.07)*	.30 (.05)*	-.68 (.09)*	-.57 (.09)*	-.16 -0.06	
			(c) R <sup>2</sup> = .15, F = 12.82*					
			(c') R <sup>2</sup> = .21, F = 16.13*					
Completely Standardized Indirect Effect (-.052)							-.08	-.03

\* p < .001 β values(paths): Unstandardized coefficients, 5000 bootstrap. SE: Standard error

Effect size close to .09 indicates a medium effect (Preacher and Kelley, 2011). In the tested model, the effect (K<sup>2</sup> = .052) can be considered as medium effect.

**Moderation Analysis**

**Figure 2.**  
*Moderated / Conceptual model (H<sub>5</sub>)*



Firstly, according to the correlation results, marital self-disclosure and phubbing correlated negatively (see Table 2). The covariate variables were related to the dependent variable. In the next step, the moderating effect was tested using Model 1 (Hayes, 2013). At this stage, phubbing (X) was defined as the predictor, differentiation of self acted as the moderator (M), and marital self-disclosure was the outcome (Y) (see Figure 2). Performing the moderation analysis showed that adding a moderating variable between phubbing and marital self-disclosure had a 1% effect on the variance of marital self-disclosure (see Table 3). This contribution was statistically significant. The present study used 5,000 bootstrapped resamples with a 95% confidence interval. If there is no zero in the confidence interval, there is a significant moderating effect (Hayes, 2009). The findings from the moderation analysis confirmed that spouses with higher differentiation of self exhibited higher scores in marital self-disclosure compared to spouses with lower differentiation of self (see Figure 3).

**Table 4.**  
*Moderation Analysis Results*

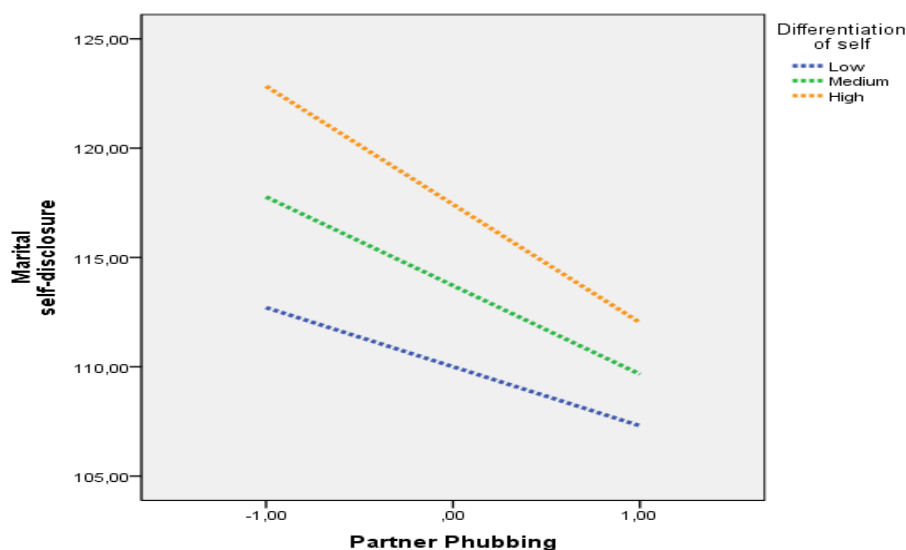
Predictors	Model 1 ( Marital self-disclosure)				
	B	t	SE	95% CI	
Constant	110.47	25.90***	4.27	102.10	118.85
Gender	-3.21	-2.32*	1.39	-5.93	-.49
Age	1.44	.87	1.64	-1,78	4,668
Educational attainment	2.99	2.27*	1.32	.40	. 5.59
The duration of marriage	4.02	2.70**	1.50	1.09	6.95
Perceived socio economic status	2.11	1.81	1.70	-.18	4.41
Parental status	.86	.47	1.82	-2.71	4.43
Employment status	1.60	1.05	1.53	-1.4	4.60
Phubbing	<b>-4.12</b>	<b>-6.73***</b>	<b>.61</b>	<b>-5.32</b>	<b>-2.92</b>

Differentiation of self	<b>3.70</b>	<b>6.15***</b>	<b>.60</b>	<b>2,51</b>	<b>4.87</b>
Phubbing × Differentiation of self	<b>-1.37</b>	<b>-2.43*</b>	<b>.57</b>	<b>-2.48</b>	<b>-.26</b>
R <sup>2</sup>			.21		
F			15.230***		

\*=p < .05. \*\*=p < .01. \*\*\*=p < .001. *β* values: Unstandardized coefficients

**Figure 3.**

*The Association Between Marital Self Disclosure And Partner Phubbing As Moderated By The Differentiation Of Self (H<sub>2</sub>)*



### Discussion and Conclusion

Within the framework of this research, the present study focuses on the mediating and moderating effects of differentiation of self on the relationship between marital self-disclosure and the tendency to engage in phubbing within marital relationships. Based on these findings, phubbing behavior disrupts the dynamics between spouses and adversely affects couples' self-disclosure abilities.

(H<sub>1</sub>) There are numerous studies in the literature confirming that phubbing negatively affects the quality of couple relationships (e.g., McDaniel & Coyne, 2016; Roberts & David, 2016; Vanden Abeele et al., 2016). Spouses' tendency to engage in phubbing leads to disagreements and, consequently, causes couples to experience mutual negative emotions (Chotpitayasunondh & Douglas, 2018b; Roberts & David, 2016). Research indicates that spouses with a high tendency to engage in phubbing experience dissatisfaction in their relationships and communication (Chotpitayasunondh & Douglas, 2018b). All these negative emotions contribute to mutual disagreements in marital relationships because individuals feel neglected by the people they love (Vaterlaus & Tulane, 2019). As an expected consequence of these adverse effects, phubbing negatively affects couple relationships (Vanden Abeele et al., 2019) by weakening communication skills and diminishing marital satisfaction (McDaniel & Coyne, 2016; Vanden Abeele et al., 2016). Phubbing behavior between spouses may hinder self-disclosure and generate communication conflicts, thereby significantly reducing marital satisfaction and impairing their ability to engage in open communication.

(H<sub>2</sub>) Current studies have confirmed the relationship between the differentiation of self and phubbing (Hatipoğlu et al., 2024; Peleg & Boniel-Nissim, 2024). It has been revealed that individuals with higher levels of differentiation of self tend to engage in phubbing, which is associated with a negative mood (Knausenberger et al., 2022) and feelings of worthlessness (Karadağ et al., 2016). Adult individuals who experience difficulties in the differentiation of self are more likely to engage in phubbing, which is a behavioral problem. In this context, psychological support aimed at enhancing the differentiation of self—a critical factor in distinguishing individuals from their family of origin, promoting individuation, and establishing healthy marital relationships—can significantly contribute to improving couple relationships. Thus, individuals may adopt behaviors that strengthen their bonds with their partners by reducing their tendency toward impulsive behaviors, such as phubbing.

(H<sub>3</sub>) Differentiation of self is positively associated with marital self-disclosure. In other words, as individuals' level of differentiation of self increases, their ability to disclose personal information in their spousal relationships also increases. Poorly differentiated individuals may be more emotionally reactive in their relationships (Bowen, 1976; Kerr & Bowen, 1988) and may tend to overly intervene or emotionally distance themselves from those around them when experiencing stress or anxiety (Skowron & Friedlander, 1998). Close relationships with spouses are significantly influenced by early experiences more than any other type of relationship (Solomon & Tatkin, 2011). Therefore, individuals who have developed a sense of independence can demonstrate their self-disclosure skills more freely in their spousal relationships. Furthermore, several studies conducted from the past to the present have revealed that as the level of intimacy in a marriage relationship increases, the rates of self-disclosure also deepen (Collins & Miller, 1994; Milholland, 1979). Recent research has concluded that differentiation of self is related to the quality of romantic relationships and that individuals with high levels of differentiation of self are more satisfied with their close relationships (Lampis et al., 2017; Rodríguez-Gonzalez et al., 2016). In this context, differentiation of self is crucial to an individual's capacity to achieve intimacy and reciprocity in marriage. As evidenced by the literature and the results of the present research, the ability of individuals to disclose themselves to their spouse is vital in couple relationships. Individuals whose self is sufficiently differentiated exhibit healthier interaction skills. In this respect, an individual's differentiation of self, independence from their family of origin, and autonomous behavior positively affect their capacity for self-disclosure in couple relationships.

#### *The Differentiated Self: A Dual Role*

1. Mediator Role: The differentiated self acts as a mechanism that explains the relationship between phubbing and self-disclosure in marriage. Individuals with a low level of differentiation are more sensitive to relational stress (Skowron & Friedlander, 1998). Therefore, a negative behavior like phubbing can emotionally overwhelm the individual, reducing their capacity for self-disclosure. In this context, the differentiated self explains the causal pathway by which phubbing negatively impacts self-disclosure.

2. Moderator Role: The differentiated self acts as a buffer that affects the strength of the relationship between phubbing and self-disclosure in marriage. High levels of differentiation enable individuals to manage their reactions to a partner's phubbing behavior more effectively, thanks to their strong self-regulation skills in areas like autonomy, emotional regulation, and intimacy (Sandage & Harden, 2011; Kerr & Bowen, 1988). As a result, a higher level of differentiation weakens or mitigates the harmful effects of phubbing on self-disclosure.

(H<sub>4.5</sub>) Phubbing has been proven to weaken relational intimacy (Przybylski & Weinstein, 2013) because the spouse behaves differently than expected, leading to disappointment. Therefore, phubbing negatively affects relationship satisfaction, as it poses a threat to the meaning of existence (Chotpitayasunondh & Douglas, 2018b; Vaterlaus & Tulane, 2019). This phenomenon seriously reduces the motivation for communication among spouses (Kılıçarslan & Parmaksız, 2023). Individuals who isolate themselves from communication in this manner are unlikely to open up to their spouses. Moreover, individuals who are less likely to disclose to their spouses also tend to experience lower levels of closeness (Quek et al., 2015).

In this context, it is posited that individuals with a differentiated self may have certain advantages. Differentiation of self serves as the foundation for achieving closeness and reciprocity in couple relationships (Bowen, 1978). In marriages where the self is sufficiently differentiated, greater intimacy and reduced negative reactivity have been observed (Skowron & Friedlander, 1998). Some studies have found that individuals with higher levels of differentiation of self exhibit better partner adjustment (Castro-Dávila & Oliver, 2022; Duch-Ceballos et al., 2021; Mozas-Alonso et al., 2022; Oliver et al., 2023).

Differentiation of self is a predictor of self-disclosure, and differentiation of self has a direct effect on self-disclosure. Individuals with a higher degree of self-differentiation are more likely to engage in self-disclosure (Zhu, 2019). It is assumed that individuals with higher differentiation of self possess more secure attachment styles, better mental health, and enhanced family and marital functioning (Bowen, 1991).

In this context, based on the research available in the literature, differentiation of self in spousal relationships and marital self-disclosure skills play a protective role against the negative effects of phubbing behavior. Consequently, the findings of the present study indicate that well-differentiated individuals will likely enhance the level of self-disclosure in

couple relationships and may reduce the tendency to engage in phubbing, which has been shown to incite conflicts in couple relationships in recent years.

### **Limitations, Future Directions, and Implications**

Today, marital relationships are affected by numerous factors. Especially in the last quarter-century, as technology and smartphones have become more prevalent in human life, couple relationships have been significantly impacted by this process. The results of this study should be evaluated carefully within the framework of its limitations. First, the data for this study were collected from a small sample in the Central Anatolia region using a cross-sectional research model. Therefore, the findings can only be generalized to similar age and cultural groups. In the future, longitudinal studies could be conducted to reveal how different subcultures and relationship dynamics may affect individuals over longer periods. Given that the process of differentiation of self is an important dynamic that begins in adolescence and subsequently influences relationships and marriages in young adulthood and adulthood, the impact of phubbing on relationships -as a problem exacerbated by technology- can be examined in greater detail during all these developmental stages.

It is crucial for individuals to complete their development in differentiation of self for a healthy marital life, which encompasses various dimensions, including social, emotional, sexual, economic, and spiritual aspects. Thus, it would be beneficial to provide psychological support to both couples and other close relationships, such as family members, enabling them to separate from their family of origin and develop autonomy. Access to family psychological counseling services, which include members of the family of origin, is vital during young adulthood—a period regarded as a process of separation from the family. These services can positively affect the romantic relationships of young individuals and contribute to the quality of their marriages. Furthermore, it is essential to increase individuals' awareness, particularly regarding the conscious use of technology, before and during marriage.

Currently, raising couples' awareness about the detrimental effects of phubbing—which they are frequently exposed to and which can damage relationships—can foster more satisfying partnerships. As indicated by the research findings, phubbing is associated with negative emotional characteristics, such as loneliness, unhappiness, difficulties in coping with stress, and depression. Therefore, promoting activities that enhance the quality of social life and facilitate healthy interaction can distract married individuals from these behavioral problems. In this manner, individuals can be encouraged to engage in more fulfilling social, emotional, and relational experiences, rather than relying on the alternatives offered by technology and the virtual world.

### **Ethics Committee Approval Information**

The research was approved by the "Nigde Omer Halisdemir University Ethics Committee" on 29.03.2024 with meeting number 2024/07-45.

### **Conflict of Interest**

No conflict of interest exists for this manuscript for any of the authors.

### **Funding**

The authors received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

### **Author Contributions**

All authors contributed equally.

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## Genişletilmiş Özet

### Giriş

Çağdaş toplumlar, iletişim teknolojilerinin, özellikle akıllı telefonların, insan ilişkileri üzerindeki etkileriyle şekillenmektedir. Bu teknolojik ilerlemeler, bireysel olarak davranışları dönüştürürken, erken yaşlarda edinilen bazı alışkanlıkların gelecekteki davranışları belirlemede kritik bir rol oynadığı gözlemlenmektedir. Bu bağlamda, sosyal ortamlarda partnerin veya diğer kişilerin varlığına rağmen sürekli olarak telefonla ilgilenme davranışı olan "phubbing," kişilerarası iletişimi olumsuz etkileyen bir fenomen olarak öne çıkmaktadır. Evlilik gibi yakın ilişkilerde phubbing davranışı, çiftler arasında anlaşmazlıklara ve iletişimin bozulmasına yol açarak, ilişki kalitesini ve yakınlığı tehdit edebilmektedir. Bu tür durumlarla başa çıkabilmek için bireylerin öz-düzenleme becerileri ve duygusal olgunluğu kritik öneme sahiptir. Bu beceriler, aile sistemleri teorisinin temel kavramlarından biri olan benlik ayırılması ile de açıklanabilir.

Bu çalışma, phubbing davranışının evlilikte eşe kendini açma becerisi üzerindeki olumsuz etkisini incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Özellikle, Bowen'ın çok kuşaklı (Transgenerasyonel) aile sistemleri teorisine dayanan benlik ayırılması kavramının, bu ilişki üzerinde hem aracı (mediator) hem de düzenleyici (moderator) bir rol oynayıp oynamadığını araştırmaktadır. Evlilik ilişkisi, bir ailenin resmi başlangıcı olsa da, bu birliği sürdürmek şeffaflık, açıklık ve dürüst iletişimi gerektirir. Eşe kendini açma, bireyin kişisel bilgilerini, duygularını ve düşüncelerini eşiyile paylaşması olarak tanımlanır. Araştırmalar, bu tür bir açık iletişimin, çiftler arasında yakınlığı ve ilişki kalitesini artırdığını göstermektedir. Phubbing davranışı ise, bu iletişimi engelleyerek eşe kendini açma sürecini sekteye uğratma potansiyeli taşır.

Çalışmanın teorik çerçevesi, kişilerarası ilişkilerin gelişimini açıklayan Sosyal Nüfuz Teorisi (Altman & Taylor, 1973) ve bireysel davranışlar ile bilişsel süreçler arasındaki ilişkiyi inceleyen Sosyal Bilişsel Teori'ye (Bandura, 1986) dayanmaktadır. Sosyal Nüfuz Teorisi'ne göre, ilişkiler karşılıklı ve kademeli bir eşe kendini açma süreciyle derinleşir. Phubbing, yüz yüze iletişimi engellediği için bu süreci olumsuz etkiler. Sosyal Bilişsel Teori ise, bireyin davranışlarının (ör. phubbing), kişisel faktörler (benlik ayırılması) ve çevresel etkileşimlerle karşılıklı olarak şekillendiğini savunur. Bu iki teori, benlik ayırılmasının, phubbing ve eşe kendini açma arasındaki ilişkide oynadığı ikili rolü anlamamızı sağlamaktadır.

Benlik ayırılması, bir yandan phubbing'in eşe kendini açmayı neden olumsuz etkilediğini açıklayan bir mekanizma (aracı) olarak işlev görür. Phubbing'e maruz kalmak, bireyin değersizlik hissini artırarak benlik ayırılmasını düşürebilir ve bu durum da eşe kendini açma kapasitesini azaltır. Öte yandan, benlik ayırılması, phubbing'in eşe kendini açma üzerindeki olumsuz etkisinin şiddetini azaltan bir düzenleyici faktör (moderator) olarak da rol oynar. Yüksek benlik ayırılmasına sahip bireyler, partnerlerinin phubbing davranışına karşı duygusal tepkilerini daha iyi yönetebilirler, bu da phubbing'in ilişki üzerindeki zararlı etkisini zayıflatır.

Bu çalışma, teknolojinin romantik ilişkilere sızmasıyla ortaya çıkan zorluklara ışık tutarak, dijitalleşmenin evlilik dinamikleri üzerindeki etkilerini incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Araştırmanın en özgün katkısı, benlik ayırılmasının hem aracı hem de düzenleyici bir değişken olarak ele alınmasıdır ki, bu alan önceki araştırmalarda yeterince incelenmemiştir. Bu araştırma bulguları, çiftlere teknolojinin evliliklerini nasıl etkilediğine dair derin bir anlayış sunacak ve bireysel düzeyde bu etkileşimleri yönetmek için benlik ayırılmasının önemini vurgulayacaktır. Elde edilen sonuçlar, modern teknolojinin evlilikteki iletişim üzerindeki karmaşık etkileşimlerine dair pratik ve teorik katkılar sağlayarak, çiftlerin teknolojiyle ilgili sorunlarla başa çıkma stratejileri geliştirmelerine yardımcı olacaktır.

### Yöntem

Araştırmaya İç Anadolu Bölgesinde bir şehir merkezinde yaşamakta olan 571 evli birey katılmıştır. Katılımcıların 289'u (%50.6) kadın, 282'si (%49.4) erkektir ve yaşları 20 ile 65 arasında değişmektedir. Katılımcılar, araştırmanın tekrarlanabilirliğini sağlamak amacıyla titiz bir kolay örnekleme prosedürü ile seçilmiştir. Örneklem, araştırmacılar tarafından farklı bölgelerde ulaşılan bireylerin bilgilerinin bir araya getirilmesiyle oluşturulmuştur. Bu yöntem, araştırma içeriğine uygun bir örneklem elde etmeyi hedeflemiştir. Veri toplama, gönüllü katılımcılardan bilgilendirilmiş onam alınarak yüz yüze gerçekleştirilmiştir. Her bir katılımcıya çalışmanın amacı açıklandıktan sonra, Phubbing Ölçeği (PÖ), Eşe Kendini Açma Ölçeği (EKÖ), Benlik ayırılması envanteri (BAE) ve Sosyodemografik Bilgi Formu uygulanmıştır. Sosyal beğenilirlik yanlılığını azaltmak için, yanıtların gizli kalacağı özellikle vurgulanmıştır. Veri toplama süreci, her katılımcı için yaklaşık 25 dakika sürmüştür.

Ölçme Araçları olarak Eşe Kendini Açma Ölçeği (EKÖ) Çağ ve Yıldırım (2017) tarafından geliştirilen bu ölçek, "ilişkinin doğası, farkındalık ve açıklık" olmak üzere üç alt boyuttan oluşmaktadır. Ölçek, 5'li Likert tipi bir yapıya sahiptir ve toplam puan 29 ile 145 arasındadır. Yapı geçerliliği ve güvenilirliği için EFA ve DFA gibi analizler yapılmıştır. Ölçeğin bu çalışmadaki Cronbach's alfa değeri .89 olarak hesaplanmıştır. Benlik Ayırılması Envanteri (BAE): Işık ve Bulduk (2015) tarafından uyarlanan bu ölçek, 20 maddeden ve dört alt boyuttan oluşmaktadır: duygusal tepkisellik, "ben" pozisyonu, diğerlerine bağımlılık ve duygusal kopukluk. Ölçek, 6'lı Likert tipi bir yapıya sahiptir ve toplam iç tutarlılık katsayısı .81'dir. Bu

çalışmada ölçeğin toplam puanı kullanılmıştır. Phubbing Ölçeği (PÖ): Karadağ ve arkadaşları (2015) tarafından phubbing eğilimini ölçmek amacıyla geliştirilen bu ölçek, iki faktörlü bir yapıya sahiptir: iletişim bozukluğu ve telefon bağımlılığı. Ölçek, 5'li Likert tipi 10 maddeden oluşmaktadır ve toplam puan 10 ile 50 arasındadır. Bu çalışmada Cronbach's alfa değeri .81 olarak bulunmuştur.

Verilerin Analizinde, tüm veriler, normal dağılım varsayımına göre test edilmiştir. Çarpıklık ve basıklık değerlerinin  $\pm 1$ 'e yakın olması, dağılımın yaklaşık olarak normal olduğunu göstermektedir. Analizlerde, phubbing, eşe kendini açma ve benlik ayrımlaşması arasındaki ilişkiyi belirlemek için korelasyon analizi yapılmıştır. Benlik ayrımlaşmasının aracı ve düzenleyici etkisini incelemek için ise Hayes'in (2013) Process Macro'su kullanılmıştır. Aracı etkinin anlamlılığı, güven aralığının sıfırı içermemesi durumunda belirlenmiştir. Düzenleme analizinde ise etkileşim teriminin anlamlılığına bakılmıştır.

### Bulgular

Ön Analizler çerçevesinde yapılan korelasyon analizi, phubbing'in hem eşe kendini açma hem de benlik ayrımlaşması ile negatif yönde anlamlı bir ilişkisi olduğunu ortaya koymuştur. Ayrıca, eşe kendini açma ile benlik ayrımlaşması arasında pozitif yönde anlamlı bir ilişki bulunmuştur. Aracılık Analizi: Benlik ayrımlaşmasının, phubbing'in eşe kendini açma üzerindeki etkisinde kısmi bir aracı rol oynadığı tespit edilmiştir. Toplam etkinin %16'sının dolaylı etki olduğu ve bu etkinin anlamlı olduğu görülmüştür. Bu bulgu, phubbing'in doğrudan eşe kendini açmayı azaltmasının yanı sıra, benlik ayrımlaşmasını düşürerek de bu etkiyi gösterdiğini desteklemektedir. Düzenleyici analiz sonuçları kapsamında, benlik ayrımlaşmasının, phubbing'in eşe kendini açma üzerindeki negatif etkisini düzenlediği (zayıflattığı) bulunmuştur. Bulgular, benlik ayrımlaşması düzeyi yüksek olan eşlerin, phubbing davranışına daha az olumsuz tepki verdiğini ve eşe kendini açma seviyelerinin daha yüksek olduğunu göstermektedir.

### Tartışma ve Sonuç

Bu çalışma, modern teknolojinin evlilik ilişkileri üzerindeki etkilerine dair önemli bulgular sunmaktadır. Elde edilen sonuçlar, phubbing davranışının eşe kendini açma becerisini olumsuz etkilediğini ve benlik ayrımlaşmasının bu ilişki üzerinde hem aracı hem de düzenleyici bir role sahip olduğunu açıkça göstermektedir. H1 ve H2 kapsamında sonuçlara bakıldığında; phubbing ve evlilik kalitesi arasındaki negatif ilişki, literatürdeki diğer çalışmalarla da tutarlıdır. Phubbing'e maruz kalan eş, kendini ihmal edilmiş hissedebilir, bu da anlaşmazlıklara yol açarak eşe kendini açma motivasyonunu azaltır. Ayrıca, benlik ayrımlaşması düzeyi düşük olan bireylerin phubbing davranışına daha yatkın olduğu da bu çalışmanın bulgularıyla doğrulanmıştır. H3 hipotezi, benlik ayrımlaşması ile eşe kendini açma arasındaki pozitif ilişki de literatürle uyumludur. Yüksek benlik ayrımlaşmasına sahip bireyler, duygusal tepkilerini daha iyi yönetebilir ve hem özerkliği hem de yakınlığı sürdürebilirler. Bu da onların eşlerine karşı daha açık ve şeffaf olmalarını sağlar. H4 ve H5 hipotezlerinde, benlik ayrımlaşmasının aracı ve düzenleyici rolü sonucu, çalışmanın en önemli bulgularındandır. Aracılık rolü bağlamında, phubbing'in, bireylerin değersizlik hissini artırarak benlik ayrımlaşmasını düşürdüğü ve bu durumun da eşe kendini açma becerisini azalttığı görülmüştür. Düzenleyicilik rolü ise, yüksek benlik ayrımlaşmasına sahip bireylerin, phubbing'in olumsuz etkilerine karşı daha dirençli olduğunu göstermektedir. Bu bireyler, duygusal tepkilerini kontrol ederek, phubbing'in evlilikteki iletişimi bozmasını engelleyebilirler. Bu bulgular, benlik ayrımlaşmasının evlilikte hem koruyucu hem de iyileştirici bir mekanizma olarak işlev gördüğünü ortaya koymaktadır. Bu çalışma, verilerin Türkiye'nin İç Anadolu bölgesinden küçük bir örnekleme toplanması nedeniyle bazı sınırlılıklar içermektedir. Elde edilen bulgular, yalnızca benzer yaş ve kültürel gruplara genellenebilir. Gelecekte, farklı alt kültürleri ve ilişki dinamiklerini daha uzun süreliğine inceleyen boylamsal çalışmalar yapılabilir. Çalışmanın sonuçları, benlik ayrımlaşmasının evlilik yaşamı için kritik bir kavram olduğunu göstermektedir. Bu nedenle, bireylere ergenlikten başlayarak benlik ayrımlaşması konusunda psikolojik destek sunulması önemlidir. Ayrıca, çiftlerin teknoloji kullanımına ilişkin farkındalıklarını artırmaya yönelik psiko-eğitim programları, phubbing gibi zararlı davranışların önüne geçilmesinde yardımcı olabilir. Phubbing'in olumsuz duygusal sonuçları (yalnızlık, depresyon, mutsuzluk) göz önüne alındığında, bireylere teknolojiden uzak, sosyal ve duygusal açıdan doyurucu deneyimler sunan alternatif aktiviteler teşvik edilmelidir. Bu sayede, evlilikler teknolojinin getirdiği zorluklara karşı daha dirençli hale getirilebilir.