

Differentiation of Self, Career Adaptability and Optimism: The Mediating Role of Self-Construal

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Research Article

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Abstract

One of the variables in a better understanding of career adaptability and optimism levels is family-of-origin experiences. Differentiation of self (DoS) is one of the variables linked to career development. University students with higher DoS maintain an authentic intimacy with significant others while they succeed in individuation. The current study examined the mediator role of self-construal (i.e., interrelational, and self-developmental orientations) on the relationship between the differentiation of self and career adaptability. Our sample was composed of university students; 750 young adults (550 females, 73.3%; 190 males, 25.3%; and ten were missing) participated. The data were gathered from these young adults using the Career Adaptability and Optimism Scale, Differentiation of Self Inventory, Balanced Integrated Differentiation Scale, and Demographic Information Form. Contrary to our hypotheses, findings revealed that self-construal orientations mediated the relationship between differentiation of self and career adaptability in a negative direction. We concluded that a lack of balanced-integrated differentiation (self-construal) complicate the relationship between self-differentiation and career adaptability; we delineated our results considering the literature.

Keywords: differentiation of self, career adaptability, self-construal, interrelational orientation, self-developmental orientation

Benlik Ayrımlaşması, Kariyer Uyumu ve İyimserliği: Benlik Kurgularının Aracı Rolü

Öz

Üniversite öğrencilerinin kariyer uyumu ve iyimserliklerinin daha iyi anlaşılabilmesinde önemli değişkenlerden biri de köken aile deneyimleridir. Benlik ayrışması, üniversite öğrencilerinin kendileri için önemli olan kişilerle otantik bir yakınlığı sürdürürken, bireyselliklerini de sürdürebildikleri bir beceridir ve kariyer gelişimleriyle ilişkili değişkenlerden biridir. Bu çalışmada, benliğin farklılaşması ve kariyer uyumluluğu arasındaki ilişkide benlik kurgusunun (ilişkiler arası ve kendini geliştirme yönelimlerinin) aracı rolü kurulan yapısal eşitlik modeli ile incelenmiştir. Çalışma grubu 750 beliren yetişkinlik dönemindeki üniversite öğrencisinden oluşmaktadır. Öğrencilerin 550'si kadın 190'ı erkek olmak üzere 10 öğrenci cinsiyetini belirtmemiştir. Verilerin elde edilmesinde Kariyer Uyum Yeteneği ve İyimserlik Ölçeği, Benlik Farklılaşması Envanteri, Dengeli Bütünleşme Ayrışma Ölçeği ve Demografik Bilgi Formu kullanılmıştır. Hipotezlerimizin aksine bulgular, benlik kurgusu yönelimlerinin benlik farklılaşması ile kariyer uyumluluğu arasındaki ilişkiye negatif yönde aracılık ettiğini ortaya koydu. Dengeli-bütünleşik farklılaşma eksikliğinin (benlik kurgusu), benlik ayrışması ve kariyer uyumluluğu arasındaki ilişkiyi karmaşıkladığı ortaya konulmuştur. Elde edilen sonuçlar literatür ışığında tartışılmıştır.

Anahtar kelimeler: benlik farklılaşması, kariyer uyumu, benlik kurgusu, kişilerarası ilişki, öz gelişim

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INTRODUCTION

Career development is a long-lasting journey, and theories attempt to crystallize the process. Definitions of career development highlight ‘career exploration’ that includes (tasks of) solidifying, specifying career choices, and putting one’s choices into action from adolescence to adulthood (12 to 24) (Bacanlı, 2006). In understanding one’s career development, Savickas (2011) suggests that counselors evaluate their clients’ stories from three perspectives: (1) *actor* refers to the sense of self which is shaped within the family of origin, (2) *agent* reflects the sense of control to handle transitional processes with building specific goals accompanied by self-regulation abilities to adapt developmental tasks (3) *author* reflects young adult creates a unique identity and meaning in a career journey. The transition from university to work is also essential to undergraduate students' developmental process. Graduates must be able to apply their academic and career competencies in order to transition from university to the working world successfully. Career-related developmental competencies such as critical thinking, leadership, or communication are crucial for these students as such competencies prepare university students for a healthy career transition. Otherwise, this young population may become more vulnerable to career anxiety or a limited view of the future, for instance, in self-realizing career-related goals (Boo et al., 2021). One factor that regulates this context of developmental competencies is the construct of *career adaptability*. The term refers to the ability to handle anticipated work-related tasks such as participation in working roles and situations. The term indicates individuals’ readiness to adapt to unexpected changes triggered in the working environment (Savickas, 1997). The career adaptability that Savickas describes has often been cited as a necessary source for healthy career development, reacted positively to a range of career and business challenges, and enhanced well-being.

Therefore, career adaptation is not only a factor that facilitates transition but also helps individuals cope with the requirements of the business world. Moreover, graduate students with greater career adaptability had more outstanding employment quality (Koen et al., 2012). Career adaptability’s effect on university students is also related to their emotional functioning (e.g., negative or positive affect; Konstam et al., 2015). Anxiety may be one of the most challenging emotions that undecided university students must deal with during unemployment (Saka & Gati, 2007). The role of anxiety here is that it causes undergraduate students to cling to their negative past or (negative) future perceptions (Taber & Blankemeyer, 2015). Anxiety in career development may be linked to several factors, and research mainly emphasizes the effect of families. For instance, when young adults experienced pressure to meet parents’ expectations (i.e., intimidation) and fusion, they had more significant trait anxiety and difficulties with career decision-making (Larson & Wilson, 1998).

Whiston and Keller (2004) speculate that there is a theoretical gap in the literature in understanding how families affect (positively or negatively) children’s career development, even though many counselors claim the role of the family of origin. We speculate that Bowen Family System Theory (BFST) may explain the links between a family’s role and anxiety on one’s career development. One of the main concepts of this theory is the differentiation of self (DoS). The intrapsychic dynamics of DoS suggest a capacity to distinguish between people's emotional and cognitive development in their responses to contentious situations or interpersonal relationships (Kerr & Bowen, 1988). This process also includes regulating emotions and learning appropriate coping methods. Individuals with greater DoS manage chronic anxiety more effectively (Kerr & Bowen, 1988). Lower DoS and higher anxiety may be two underlying mechanisms that reveal nonadaptive behavior in career decision-making for university students (Larson & Wilson, 1998). Lower DoS and higher anxiety in the context of family of origin may indicate university students’ lack of readiness and independence in their career development, which may be related to their capacity to differentiate themselves from their significant others, especially their parents. Both career adaptability and DoS may require the ability to take one's steps by using one's internal dynamics and convictions despite uncertainty and stressful conditions. Therefore, university students with well-differentiated self may feel less emotional symptoms (such as chronic anxiety). Otherwise, pseudo-self (fused self in unhealthy relationships), for instance, may emerge as the origin of emotional dysfunctionality in different domains of their life (Kerr & Bowen, 1988). The DoS-inspired literature led to our perspective on career adaptability as the predicted variable. Current findings on career adaptability may contribute to scientific knowledge on the dynamics of career adaptability and university students’ emotional dysregulation strategies.

Career Adaptability

The Career Adaptability construct was initially developed by Super and Knasel (1981) and further illustrated by Savickas (2013) as part of his Career Construction Theory (CCT). The construct reflects the adaptability benefits based on four essential domains (Savickas, 2013): (1) *Concern* is the prime component that indicates one’s planful attitudes, future orientation, and optimism, with a sense that individuals recognize it is vital to prepare for the future. (2) *Control* is the second prime component that refers to individuals’ autonomy with

accompanying characteristics of self-discipline, diligence, determination, or organization to cope with career development tasks (Savickas, 2013). (3) *Career curiosity* characterizes itself with individuals' openness to having more knowledge about themselves (i.e., abilities, values) and a fit of balance with occupational requirements. Besides the previous components, (4) *career confidence* may also reflect DoS emphasizing the individuals' sense of self-efficacy to solve problems and pursue their goals. Savickas' (1997) comprehensive categorization of career adaptability also involves career planning, exploring, and creating career-related decisions. Some studies considered career adaptability as a second-order factor (e.g., Creed et al., 2009) or assessed it in attendance of other constructs (i.e., optimism) in a single dimension (Zorver & Korkut-Owen, 2014), as optimism reflects one crucial component of individuals' career adaptability levels. According to Savickas and Porfeli (2012), career adaptability is a psychosocial concept in CCT because individuals' resources (on career adaptability) are placed at the intersection of the self and surrounding environment. CCT integrates career development within personal needs and social norms, in which career development is a product that maintains adaptability to the environment (Savickas, 2015). In the present study, we aimed to investigate career adaptability that clarifies the process for university students to seek employment and contributes to many intrapersonal dynamics (i.e., self-awareness) in career development. Thus, it is crucial to reveal the factors that affect career adaptability in undergraduate years. Researchers and several career theorists (e.g., Osipow, 1983; Super, 1980) emphasized the contextual components of interrelationship characteristics or the links between family influence, self (concept), and career. Researchers have attempted to reveal predictors of career adaptability and focus on individual characteristics or contextual factors (Johnston, 2018). A series of related studies have examined the association between family influence and the career adaptability of youth (e.g., Garcia et al., 2019; Guan et al., 2015; Guan et al., 2018). Definitions of career adaptability point to self-regulating mechanisms emphasizing the significant contribution of reciprocal actions between the person and their environment (Creed et al., 2009). Career adaptability develops through interactions between individuals' inner and surrounding worlds (Savickas & Porfelli, 2012); the process inevitably links to a family system where individuals are assumed to interact most. We speculate that one of the families' system-related underlying factors for career topics is that the DoS can directly or indirectly affect the career adaptability of undergraduate students.

The differentiation of Self (DoS)

The family is where an individual's sense of agency involving career development (i.e., identity) begins to form (Garcia et al., 2019). For instance, elders' career behaviors (i.e., decision-making) may implicitly affect youngsters' career adaptability via parents' adaptability levels and role modeling (Garcia et al., 2019). Although it is a leading family system approach, little research focused on the association between BFST and career development, especially in developing countries like Türkiye. A guiding perspective of the family-of-origin concepts (i.e., DoS) to understand the factors linked to career-related variables has merit. The DoS configuration emphasizes two distinct abilities of individuals (Bowen, 1978; Kerr & Bowen, 1988). The first is that intrapsychic dynamics indicate an ability to differentiate individuals' emotional and cognitive progress on their reactions to conflictual situations or relationships. Interpersonal dynamics refer to maintaining the individuation orientation of self while maintaining authentic intimacy with significant others. Higher DoS levels indicate an equilibrium between togetherness and separateness. The advantage of this equilibrium is that individuals can make their own decisions even in challenging or conflictual interpersonal situations (Kerr & Bowen, 1988), resulting in successful career transitions. A balance is needed involving functional forms of secure attachment and healthy independence from significant others (e.g., parents) for developmental career tasks (Lee & Hughey, 2001). Individuals with low-level DoS will also potentially fail to make critical decisions, such as career decision-making (Johnson et al., 2014). A supportive mother's attitude to young adults' independence with a higher intergenerational intimacy has also contributed to young adults' self-efficacy in career decision-making (Lease & Dahlbeck, 2009). The research also proved DoS's explanative role in career exploration (Keller, 2006) and career decision-making (Kwon & Lee, 2014). Even previous literature emphasized the link between DoS and university students' career development; however, further research is still needed. Our study speculates that the cultural background in understanding the relationship between DoS and career development (i.e., career adaptability) at the societal and family levels noteworthy. Social norms and demands regulate this relationship because the reciprocal progress between DoS and culture is much more complicated than it emerges. The DoS reflects the cultural context in which self-construal is also suited, involving such dynamic structural practices (e.g., childbearing and children' value) (Erdem & Safi, 2018). We propose that career development is not free from those cultural norms, demands, and self-view of individuals that can provide a comprehensive context to better understand the reciprocal process between DoS and career development during the transition period for university students from school to work.

Integrating Study Variables, Including Self-Construal

The 'self' is a familiar variable to career-related topics; some leading approaches (i.e., CCT) already explain some aspects of career adaptability in the context of self-related constructs (e.g., self-construction, self-clarity). From a career counseling perspective, CCT emphasizes a reciprocal process in individuals' way of constructing themselves into who they are will also be decisive to what kind of self they will also construct in their careers through three types of selves (i.e., actor, agent, and author) (Savickas, 2013). The reciprocal dynamic between culture and self has also emerged as a well-known concept of *self-construal*. We also see a similar notion in the CCT, indicating that the self is culturally and socially constructed (Savickas, 2013), as a part of the self-making process in career progress. One of the questions that career counseling scholars investigate is 'how does self-construal affect one's career development?'. Ma and Yeh (2005) illustrated a piece of evidence that relational-interdependent self-construal prompted Chinese youths to have 'career certainty'. However, independent self-construal was the variable with career decision self-efficacy making the most substantial contribution to young Mexican American women's life satisfaction levels (Piña-Watson et al., 2014).

Self-construal could exist synchronously in a particular cultural heritage (İmamoğlu, 2003; Kağıtçıbaşı, 2007) rather than in a uniform form. The Balanced Integration and Differentiation Model (BID; İmamoğlu, 1998; 2003) has theoretical intersection points with DoS (Bowen, 1978); both refer to an inherent human drive to be together with significant others while being differentiated. The difference between the two approaches is Bowen's (1978) prominent emphasis in favor of individuation, in which İmamoğlu's (1998) model (balanced and integrated differentiation) was born into Türkiye's culture that depicts both collectivist and individualistic characteristics (Kağıtçıbaşı, 2007). İmamoğlu (1998) broadened her model from the intergenerational family context to the social normative references, in which individuals realize their potential more without social norms and reference points. Definitions of self in collectivistic or individualistic standards should not be limited to togetherness or separateness because one orientation is not essential over another or vice versa. Research should also consider culture-centered and complex variables regarding individuals' self-views, such as career development or adaptability. The BID model suggests two self-construal types: self-developmental and interrelational orientations. The self-developmental orientation displays predominantly individualistic characteristics and self-realization without social/familial expectations. The interrelational orientation refers mainly to collectivistic parts; harmony and a need for approval are more predominant in relationships with reference points of social/familial expectations (İmamoğlu, 1998).

Research Questions

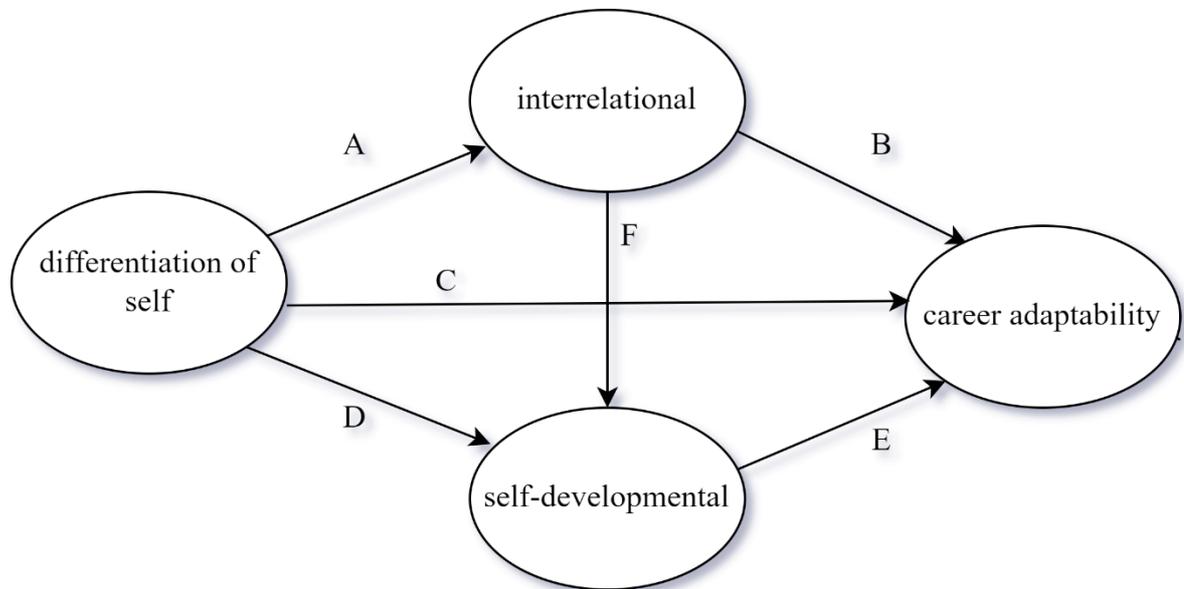
It is crucial to see that considering university students' self-views or promoting their DoS levels can result in higher career adaptability. Because both DoS and BID models were born in different cultural contexts, we speculate that examining the effect of DoS on another theoretical concept of career adaptability in line with self-construal may contribute to an integrationist view of data-based intergenerational family mechanisms and career adaptability interventions. We suppose that self-construal provides a challenging context where intergenerational conflicts on career-related topics appear most, and the underlying mechanism of family-of-origin progress and self-views in those origins become more visible. Young adults' self-construal (i.e., interrelational and self-developmental) orientations might also mediate the relationship between DoS and career adaptability. Our study involved the following four hypotheses in the structural model:

First Hypothesis: DoS has a direct effect on career adaptability. Our participants with higher DoS will have higher career adaptability levels.

The second Hypothesis: The interrelational orientation will mediate the association between DoS and career adaptability. Our participants with higher DoS will have lower interrelational orientation and higher career adaptability.

Third Hypothesis: The self-developmental orientation will mediate the association between DoS and career adaptability. Our participants with higher DoS will have higher self-developmental orientation and career adaptability.

Fourth Hypothesis: The association between DoS and career adaptability will be indirectly mediated (in serial) by the interrelational and self-developmental orientations.



Hypothesis 1 = C; Hypothesis 2 = A + B; Hypothesis 3 = D + E; Hypothesis 4 = A + F + E

Figure 1. Hypotheses of the structural model

METHOD

Participants

Our data was gathered by convenient sampling, in which the sample consisted of 750 university students (550 females, 73.3%; 190 males, 25.3%; and 10 was missing) enrolled in a midsize university in the north of Türkiye. The age range of the participants ($n = 750$; 9 was missing) was between 17 and 49 ($M = 20.43$, $SD = 2.41$). The relationship between DoS levels and career adaptability had been more intensified in child-focused (symptomology of family's emotional climate with lower DoS levels) families (Bowen, 1978), especially during developmental transition periods (e.g., career decision-making). Most participants reported being single ($n = 734$, 98.1%) and unemployed ($n = 702$, 93.6%). The class levels of the participants vary from freshman to senior year.

Data Collection Tools

Career Adaptability and Optimism Scale (CAOS)

The CAOS (Zorver & Korkut-Owen, 2014) assesses university students' career adaptability (with optimism) levels in the Turkish cultural context. Factor analyses supported the one-factor formation of the scale in three separate groups (for pilot, validity, and reliability studies), totaling 577 university students. The CAOS comprises eighteen items on a 5-point Likert scale. The total score is 18-90; higher scores represent higher career adaptability. Item examples include 'I have a plan for my career development'. The Cronbach alpha coefficient of the total score was .93. Zorver and Korkut-Owen (2014) revealed test-retest reliability .85. We found 0.95 of Cronbach's alpha correlation coefficient.

Balanced Integrated Differential Scale (BIDS)

BIDS (İmamoğlu, 1998, 2003) assesses individuals' balanced integration and differentiation levels. The Scale has 29 items, including two dimensions of interrelational (16 items) and self-developmental orientations (13 items). The total score in interrelational orientation is 16-80, and higher scores indicate higher relatedness (to the family, significant others, and cultural norms). Item example includes 'I feel emotionally disconnected from my significant others.' The total score in self-developmental orientation is 13-65, and higher scores indicate higher individuation or propensity to self-realization in the self-developmental orientation. Item example includes 'I can find interesting things to do on my own.' The Cronbach alpha coefficients of the scale were 0.91 for the interrelational and 0.74 for the self-developmental orientations. We preferred the BIDS to assess our participants' self-construal orientations. Cronbach's alpha coefficients were 0.87 for the interrelational and 0.71 for the self-developmental orientations in our research.

The Differentiation of Self Inventory-Revised (DSI-R)

The DSI assesses the DoS levels of individuals (Skowron & Friedlander, 1998). The Turkish DSI-R (Işık & Bulduk, 2013) includes 20 items with a four-factor (i.e., I position, emotional reactivity, fusion, and emotional cutoff) model on a 6-point Likert-type scale. The Cronbach alpha coefficient was 0.81 for the total score. The authors found a test-retest reliability of 0.75 in the adaptation study. Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0.74 for the total DSI-R in our study. The total score is 20-120; higher scores represent higher individual DoS. Item example includes: 'There is no point in worrying about things I cannot change.'

Demographic Information Form

We collected information about young adults using a demographic information form: age, gender, employment, number of siblings, and relationship status.

Procedure

The authors administered the paper-pencil forms (along with informed consent) in the classroom settings of various university departments just before the COVID-19 pandemic. Students were informed about the aim of the study, the content, and the total time commitment (approximately 20 minutes), and confirmed that participants' responses would be kept confidential and anonymous. Our participants were also informed that participation was voluntary and that they might leave the study at any time in response. The current study required no identifying personal information such as name/surname or e-mail address.

Data Analysis

We used structural equation modeling (SEM) because our study has an integrative theoretical model (BFST + BIDS + CCT) underlying particular psychological constructs. SEM has advantages over other analytical techniques when models have such complexity and require sophisticated models (Martens, 2005). Before mediation analysis, we checked preliminary analyses (i.e., descriptives, bivariate correlations, assumption checking) in SPSS 22 (IBM, 2013). We considered fit indices of χ^2/df -ratio < 5 (Schumacker & Lomax, 2004); CFI $\geq .93$ (Byrne, 1994); SRMR $< .08$ (Browne & Cudeck, 1993); NNFI $\geq .90$ of acceptable fit; and close fit: $.05 < RMSEA < .08$ (Schumacker & Lomax, 2004). We originated item parcels in our structural model to significantly minimize measurement errors. We also aimed with item parceling to manage the bias in structural parameters (Bandalos, 2002; Nasser-Abu Alhija & Wisenbaker, 2006) because we have numerous items placed on some of our latent variables (e.g., 18 items for CAOS; 16 items for interrelational; 13 items for self-developmental dimensions). Each latent factor comprises four parcels as measured indicators. According to the highest to lowest mean values, each item was randomly (an assignment technique) fixed to the parcels (Little et al., 2002).

Research Ethics

The research was carried out in compliance with the amended Declaration of Helsinki, and ethical permission was granted from the X University Ethics Committee of Social and Human Science (Approval number: 2020/86).

FINDINGS

Data Preparation, Descriptive Statistics and Bivariate Correlations

Missing values (less than 2%) for the data were first detected. Six items in the measures had no missing items, and only 5 exceeded 1% (in BIDS). However, Little's MCAR test was found significant $\chi^2 = 6599,272$ ($df = 5982$; $p < .001$), indicating that the missing data pattern is non-ignorable, assuming NMAR (not missing at random). Nevertheless, the chi-square test is sensitive to sample size (especially the samples more prominent than 200) and may produce a significant result (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). We investigated the missingness pattern (on study variables) by comparing missing values versus complete scores (Allison, 2002). A series of comparison tests (i.e., hierarchical regression analyses, ANOVA, and t-test) revealed similar results on the study variables considering the same significance levels. Thus, we preferred the expectation-maximization (EM) algorithm for data imputation (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). The sample size ($n = 750$) was more significant than required (about 200 cases) to have enough power to run the SEM (Kline, 2011). Partial regression plots indicated no violation of homoscedasticity and linearity (through bivariate scatter plots). We examined the multivariate normality through critical ratio values (Mardia's kurtosis statistics) in AMOS 24 (Arbuckle, 2016) in which all parcels were within the acceptable range of < 5 (Bentler, 2005) except for one (5.34). We presumed that multivariate normality was met. Furthermore, we applied maximum likelihood estimation (MLE) in AMOS 24 (Arbuckle, 2016) with bootstrapping because it is robust to (multivariate) nonnormality. The study variables produced lower

intercorrelations than the cut-off value of .90 ($r = .32$ max.), indicating that the multicollinearity assumption (Kline 2011) was met. Overall, the participants reported higher means of DoS ($M = 80.06$, $SD = 11.63$), interrelational orientation ($M = 65.03$, $SD = 9.17$), and low-level career adaptability ($M = 38.66$, $SD = 13.64$). The variables' associations were mainly significant ($p < .001$), as presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Preliminary Analyses of the Variables (N=750)

Variable	1	2	3	4
1. DoS	-			
2. Interrelational orientation	.26**	-		
3. Self-developmental orientation	.32**	.07	-	
4. Career adaptability/optimism	-.27**	-.29**	-.23**	-
Range	43–110	22–80	31–65	18–90
<i>M</i>	80.06	65.03	49.23	38.66
<i>SD</i>	11.63	9.17	6.32	13.64
Cronbach's alpha	.74	.87	.71	.95

** $p < .001$, DoS: Differentiation of Self

Results of the measurement invariance

We investigated the measurement invariance of our structural model using gender differences. Four-phase (configural, metric, scalar, and error variance) measurement invariance (Milfont & Fischer, 2010) was conducted by the JASP Team (2019) using multigroup confirmatory factor analysis. The changes in ΔCFI (0.009), ΔTLI (0.005), $\Delta RMSEA$ (0.003), and $\Delta SRMR$ (0.004) were between -0.01 and 0.01 (Cheung & Rensvold, 2002), and we assumed that the model confirmed the measurement invariance on gender.

Results of the measurement model

The measurement model clarified the relationships among the latent and observable variables (Schumacker & Lomax, 2004) in the JASP Team (2019) before we conducted our structural model. Results revealed an acceptable model fit of $\chi^2(98) = 441.04$, $p < .001$; χ^2/df -ratio = 4.50, CFI = .95, NNFI = .93, SRMR = .07, and RMSEA = .068 (90% CI = .062, .075).

Results of the structural model

Our mediation model (in Figure 1) investigated the indirect effect of DoS and self-construal in accounting for CAOS scores. Findings demonstrated a moderate model fit of $\chi^2(98) = 440.45$, $p < .001$; χ^2/df -ratio = 4.49, CFI = .95, NNFI = .93, SRMR = .07, and RMSEA = .068 (90% CI = .062, .075) with significant factor loadings (ranged between 0.34 and .93). The DoS explained 0.9% of the variance in interrelational and 14% of variance in self-developmental orientations. Overall, the DoS and two orientations together accounted 17% of the variance in CAOS scores.

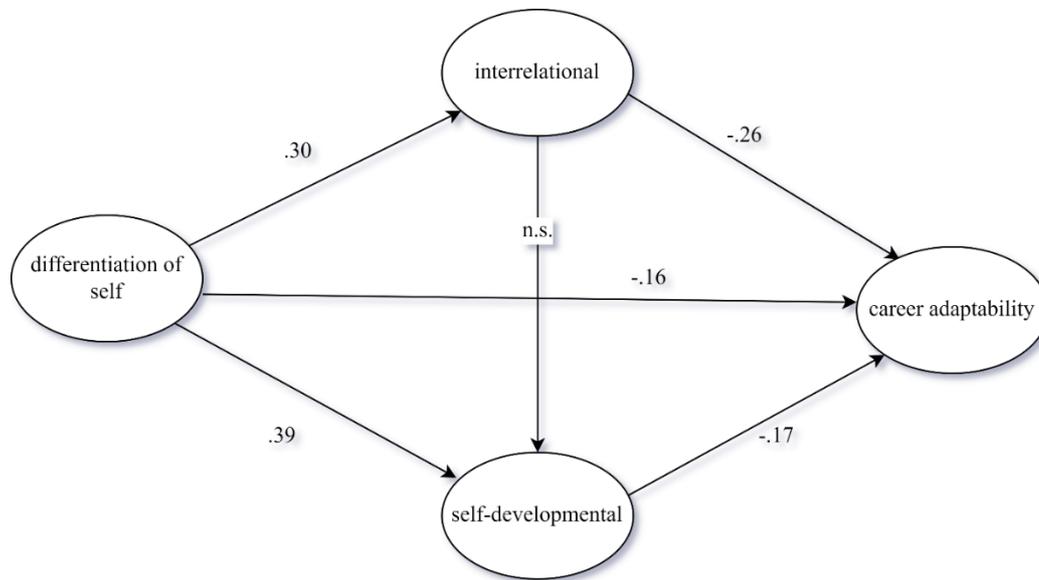


Figure 2. The Mediation Model of self-differentiation to self-construal orientations to career adaptability (with standardized coefficients)

First Hypothesis (DoS → career adaptability)

The association between DoS and career adaptability ($\beta = -.16, p < .001$) was significant, but unexpectedly indicating university students' higher DoS levels referring to lower career adaptability levels.

Second Hypothesis (DoS → interrelational orientation → career adaptability)

The indirect effect of DoS ($\beta = -.11, p < .010, [CI = -.08, -.17]$) on career adaptability over interrelational orientation was significant. The interrelational dimension partially mediated the link between DoS and career adaptability. Participants with higher DoS needed more approval from others and reported lower career adaptability.

Third Hypothesis (DoS → self-developmental orientation → career adaptability)

The indirect effect of DoS ($\beta = -.10, p < .010, [CI = -.05, -.16]$) on career adaptability over self-developmental orientation was significant. The self-developmental dimension partially mediated the link between DoS and career adaptability. Participants with a higher DoS had higher self-realization tendency and reported a lower career adaptability.

Fourth Hypothesis (DoS → interrelational → self-developmental → career adaptability)

The indirect effect of DoS ($\beta = .01, ns, [CI = .00, .02]$) on career adaptability over interrelational and self-developmental orientations (in serial) was not significant.

Table 2. Direct and indirect effects of the Structural Model

	β	95% CI	
		LL	UL
Indirect Effects			
DoS → interrelational orientation → career adaptability	-.11**	-.17	-.08
DoS → self-developmental orientation → career adaptability	-.10**	-.16	-.05
DoS → interrelational → self-developmental → career adaptability	.01 (ns.)	.00	.02
Direct Effects			
DoS → career adaptability	-.16**		
DoS → interrelational orientation	.30**		
DoS → self-developmental orientation	.39**		
Interrelational → self-developmental	-.07 (ns.)		

Note: ** $p < .001$, DoS: Differentiation of Self

DISCUSSION

DoS to career adaptability (Hypothesis 1)

Previous research has indicated that higher DoS predicts higher career adaptability in the context of healthy family functioning (Fiorini & Patta Bardagi, 2018). For instance, married Turkish couples with higher DoS reported higher career adaptability (Akün et al., 2023). However, we found a negative relationship between DoS and career adaptability, contrary to our first hypothesis. The first reason might be that the university period is developmentally different from the marriage period. Married individuals are generally expected to be individuals who have a career and have solved many problems related to their career. On the other hand, university students are developmentally just in the early stages of their careers. Second, we conclude that the cultural background of our participants and reflection of DoS in Turkish culture revealed this result. Social norms and parental expectations are also highly involved in children's career choices. Moreover, being economically dependent on parents in academic life may also affect their preferences (Bacanlı et al., 2013; Bacanlı et al., 2018). Although students may perceive their DoS levels to be high in different areas of their lives, they may tend to meet the expectations of their family of origin more regarding career adaptability in the current sample. Thus, the young people may begin to put their significant others' expectations ahead of their own needs, which refer to the fusion (Bowen, 1978).

Although previous research supports the hypothesis that higher DoS estimates functional career development, the fusion (is a dimension of the DoS) may reflect an unexpected pattern even in the US young adult sample. No significant relationship between fusion and vocational identity was observed, and higher fusion predicted less career decisiveness (Johnson et al., 2014). Fusion refers to enmeshment, dependence, or over involvement patterns in the family of origin (Kerr & Bowen, 1988). We assumed that fusion (dependence or enmeshment) in a family context might be a sign of children's strategy to maintain their needs by borrowing significant others (e.g., parents) functioning (Johnson et al., 2014). It seemed that university students with higher fusion reported a certain level of vocational identity as they borrowed this functioning (in developing vocational identity) from their parents. They needed to struggle with their own career-related decisions that they had to make, whereas they were still based on their parents' values. Our study did not examine the DoS dimensions separately. However, the current sample exhibited lower DoS and higher fusion and emotional cutoff (reflecting the interpersonal dimension of DoS) levels on mean values. The DoS may have reflected our participants' intergenerational characteristics with fusion and emotional cutoff more predominantly. This characteristic of our sample is not a strange profile for Turkish families. Fused relationship patterns are considered a norm and observable in the family of origin (e.g., the children value) (Sunar & Fişek, 2005), and intergenerational hierarchy was not regarded as a risk to claim emotional interdependence (Kağıtçıbaşı, 2007) in Turkish cultural practices.

DoS to interrelational orientation to career adaptability (Hypothesis 2)

The current findings were also contrary to our second hypothesis. However, the findings supported the direct effect of DoS on career adaptability with the inclusion of interrelational orientation to the model. Our sample's interrelational orientation tendency might trigger or be a risk factor for our participants when they reported a higher DoS; they were less likely to report higher career adaptability. Our sample exhibited a higher relatedness, which predominantly contributes to the self-construal of individuals in Turkish culture, involving several components of their cognitions, expectations, emotions, or values (Karakitapoğlu-Aygun, 2004). We speculate that lower the DoS (or higher the fusion), interrelational orientation characteristics may predominantly emerge in Turkish culture's many social and familial domains and agents. For instance, daughter preference over boys among contemporary Turkish families has become preferable due to mothers' emotional support and old age security expectations (Ataca & Sunar, 1999). The reflection of DoS in Turkish culture may also have a volatile nature with situation-specific variability in self-construal orientations. Recent findings in Turkish culture may also have supported this notion. Spouses defined themselves with more relatedness when their marriages were concerned. However, this relatedness preference seemingly returned to more individuality when childrearing practices were considered (Kurşuncu & Sümer, 2021). Individuals' self-views may also affect career development, as in other issues (e.g., raising children).

Nevertheless, even if children act in a fused pattern (in line with family expectations), they may struggle to adapt. One can easily imagine that university students have already refrained entirely from making important career-related decisions because of their developmental stage characteristics. However, a healthy career adaptability process becomes more complicated when they have a predominant feeling of satisfying significant others' expectations. Our sample may have pictured that choosing a career becomes less personal in more interdependent individuals, and their attitudes reflect less involvement in the process (Hardin et al., 2001).

DoS to self-developmental orientation to career adaptability (Hypothesis 3)

The current findings were also contrary to our third hypothesis. We revealed that when Turkish university students had higher DoS, participants had higher self-realization but lower career adaptability. Although our participants illustrated a higher interrelational orientation (on mean values), self-developmental orientation (with DoS) was the dimension that almost explained the total variance in career adaptability. We suggest further evidence, but Turkish university students' preference in our sample may have also changed to higher individuation when their career adaptability was concerned. Nevertheless, this individuation preference was not independent of the expectations of significant others (e.g., family). This dilemma (between individuation and relatedness) is not a strange picture for Turkish university students as they are born in the culture of relational interdependence (Kağıtçıbaşı, 1996). We conclude that participants (in our sample) attempt a more individuated self in the context of relatedness when career adaptability is their concern. Still, they encounter more repression in their family environment to ensure interrelatedness. Thus, an unbalanced form between interrelatedness and individuation may have emerged as the pseudo-self (Kerr & Bowen, 1988) in our participants' interdependent family context where the need for individuation on career adaptability was ignored.

The non-significant path (Hypothesis 4)

Interrelational (more relatedness) and self-developmental (more individuation) orientations are theoretically distinct (separate) and either complementary or integrated positions to each other (İmamoğlu, 1998, 2003), which may robustly reflect DoS. For instance, researchers found that relational self-orientation has a salient process to attachment security in the Turkish sample; moreover, this feeling of security became more substantial with individuation in the model (İmamoğlu & İmamoğlu, 2007). Our study found no significant association between interrelational and self-developmental orientations, but this may not change the fact that they are still complementary constructs. This finding may be related to the characteristics of the developmental period of our participants (i.e., transition from school to work). Although our sample exhibits a more interrelational orientation (on mean values), the self-developmental orientation explained the variance predominantly. Our participants may not have balanced these two orientations in their responses. These two dimensions may have reflected completely separate processes in our sample when career adaptability was concerned.

CONCLUSION

We speculate that there is no actual DoS pattern in our sample. This unclarity of DoS in our model becomes more evident, especially in the context of self-construal. We expected that as DoS increases, interrelational, and self-developmental orientations would increase, but career adaptability would remain the same. Turkish university students in our sample have tried both self-construal orientations. They attempt to meet family expectations as much as they try to have career adaptability in line with their dreams, expectations, and self-realization. However, neither effort works due to the failure to balance these two orientations. They either trying to act entirely according to family expectations or entirely with their self-realization. This disequilibrium is like trying to complete a long flight with one wing.

Limitations

Our findings illustrate a sample of university students who mostly lived apart from their family of origin. They were more likely and slightly away from the impacts of intergenerational family relationship patterns when career adaptability was concerned. Future research investigating DoS and self-construal in the context of career development should use samples with early and late adolescents who were more likely to live with their parents. University students' reports in our model were also based only on their self-perspectives (i.e., memories, opinions, experiences), which could be an obstacle for understanding multigenerational hypotheses on DoS and self-construal orientations. Our sample distribution was also unbalanced on gender because the vast majority included females. Our model was also limited to university students, and the sampling strategy was nonprobabilistic. We recommend more gender-balanced demographic characteristics to improve representability. Finally, we suggest that a longitudinal study might understand those changes in DoS levels, self-construal orientations, and career adaptability. Considering that parents are involved in career choices in Türkiye, studies can be expanded per other factors such as economic factors, Türkiye's educational system problems, and seeing some careers more prestigious.

Implications

Previous research has emphasized a demand for an integrative perspective in cross-cultural research for developing a comprehensive cultural background (Erdem & Safi, 2018). The fact that Türkiye is the only country

in the world located in both Europe and Asia has caused it to carry traces of both Eastern and Western cultures. Although our focus was not a comparison in different cultures, we concluded that there are still points that need comprehensive answers on applying DoS to our sample, reflecting a cultural background with more collectivist characteristics than Westernized cultures and more individualistic characteristics than Eastern cultures. We aspire that our results will encourage researchers to examine how DoS reflects those samples that picture different cultural elements that are alike and dissimilar to Türkiye. Our results suggest a valuable source for understanding how Turkish young adults' self-construal orientations interact with their DoS levels in the context of career adaptability. We expect that our integrative perspective (of self-construal and DoS) is worth the cross-validation of our results across multicultural societies.

Furthermore, our findings may assist notions that these integrative construct's function nearly the same way. Our results can also prompt researchers to evaluate their focus and practice regarding interventions. Practitioners should be sensitive to self-construal orientations and the DoS levels of university students, as they are likely to realize more career adaptability. Our results could also benefit career counseling interventions, specifically aimed at university students for more career adaptability. When more career adaptability is the effort of university students, practitioners can assist them in two interrelated ways. The first is counseling university students to improve their balanced and integrated self-definitions. The second is counseling university students to develop a higher sense of DoS without ignoring that BFST's emphasis on individuation might not be an ultimate goal of therapeutic progress in such cultures that reflect multidimensional self-construal dynamics. The main objective should be to maintain emotional relationships with significant others who impact career adaptability without symptomizing an emotional distance. More specifically, a career counselor should respect the client's attentiveness to the significant others' expectations concerning career-related issues. A university student with a higher interrelational orientation may present cultural suitability of relatedness (approval of others), not an unconformity in career development or pessimism.

Statements of Publication Ethics

Ethical approval was procured by the Ethics Committee of Humanity Sciences of Ordu University (dated 11/25/2020, 2020-86). All participants who took part in the study provided informed consent.

Researchers' Contribution Rate

The study conceptualization and design involved participation from all authors. Material preparation, data gathering, and analysis were carried out by [SB], [MAK], and [SDZ]. The original draft of the manuscript was written by [SB, MAK, SDZ], and each author provided feedback on earlier drafts. The final manuscript was read and approved by all authors.

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