



## Differentiation of Self and Peter Pan Syndrome In Men of Emerging Adulthood: The Mediating Role of Interpersonal Competence

### *Beliren Yetişkinlik Dönemindeki Erkeklerde Benlik Farklılaşması ve Peter Pan Sendromu: Kişilerarası Yetkinliğin Aracı Rolü*

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#### Abstract

Peter Pan syndrome is a critical problem that negatively affects the mental health and relationships of men, especially in emerging adulthood. Therefore, it is important to examine the relationship between the trigger and alleviating variables of this syndrome, which may have negative consequences in the field of mental health. Considering that although it is a serious mental health problem, there is not enough research on this subject in Türkiye, it is clear that it is important to fill an important gap in the literature and draw attention to this issue. Therefore, in a non-clinical sample, this study aims to examine the mediating role of interpersonal competence in the association between differentiation of self and Peter Pan syndrome. It is assumed that individuals with self-differentiation have higher interpersonal competence, as a result, a lower risk of developing Peter Pan syndrome. All of the participants are male. A total of 425 individuals between the ages of 18-30, who were romantically involved or married, participated in the study. The study's result showed that interpersonal competence and differentiation of self are positively correlated with each other, and that Peter Pan syndrome is negatively correlated with both of them. As a result of the mediation analysis, the mediating role of interpersonal competence in the relationship between self-differentiation and Peter Pan syndrome was found to be statistically significant. Researchers and experts in the field of mental health are anticipated to use the study's findings as a guide.

**Keywords:** Differentiation of self, interpersonal competence, and Peter Pan Syndrome.

**Paper Type:** Research

#### Öz

Peter Pan sendromu, özellikle beliren yetişkinlik dönemindeki erkeklerin ruh sağlığını ve diğerleriyle ilişkilerini olumsuz etkileyen kritik bir sorundur. Bu nedenle ruh sağlığı alanında olumsuz sonuçlar doğurabilecek bu sendromun tetikleyici ve hafifletici değişkenlerle ilişkisinin incelenmesi önemlidir. Ciddi bir ruh sağlığı sorunu olmasına rağmen Türkiye'de bu konuda yeterli araştırma bulunmadığı göz önüne alındığında, alan yazındaki önemli bir boşluğun doldurulmasının ve bu konuya dikkat çekilmesinin önemi açıktır. Dolayısıyla bu çalışma, klinik olmayan bir örnekleme, benlik farklılaşması ile Peter Pan sendromu arasındaki ilişkide kişilerarası yetkinliğin aracı rolünü incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Benlik farklılaşmasına sahip bireylerin kişilerarası yetkinliğinin daha yüksek olduğu ve sonuç olarak Peter Pan sendromuna yakalanma risklerinin daha düşük olduğu varsayılmaktadır. Katılımcıların tamamı erkektir. Araştırmaya yaşları 18-30 arasında olan, romantik ilişki yaşayan veya evli toplam 425 kişi katılmıştır. Çalışmanın sonucu, kişilerarası yetkinlik ve benlik farklılaşmasının birbiriyle pozitif, Peter Pan sendromunun her ikisiyle de negatif korelasyon ortaya koyduğunu göstermiştir. Aracılık analizi sonucunda, benlik farklılaşması ile Peter Pan sendromu arasındaki ilişkide kişilerarası yetkinliğin aracı rolü istatistiksel olarak anlamlı bulunmuştur. Ruh sağlığı alanındaki araştırmacı ve uzmanların, çalışmanın bulgularını bir rehber olarak kullanmaları beklenmektedir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Benlik farklılaşması, kişilerarası yetkinlik ve Peter Pan Sendromu.

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## **Introduction**

The concept of "emerging adulthood", revealed by Arnett (1994), covers a period of development between adolescence and adulthood. This is a transitional period to challenges, new experiences, and change for the individuals as well as their family (Arnett, 2000; Carter and McGoldrick, 1999). Central developmental tasks including developing healthy, mature, close relationships and consolidating one's own identity, which occur at the same time as leaving home/launching, the stage of the family life cycle, indicate the transition from adolescent to young adulthood (Carter and McGoldrick, 1999). The young adult must decide whether to leave their family of origin during this developmental transition in the family system in order to take on their own emotional and financial responsibilities, forge close relationships with their peers, stand out within the family of origin, and become financially independent (Becvar and Becvar, 2003; Nichols and Schwartz, 2004). Young adults have been demonstrated to experience stress during this time (Seiffge-Krenke, 2006), and it is believed that healthy connections and young adults' independence are strongly influenced by the caliber of their familial relationships (Grolnick, 2003).

Arnett (2004) draw attention to the separation-individuation process, and the psychological maturity process, which includes characteristics such as taking responsibility, impulse control, and having a decentralized perspective, as important psychological determinants in the transition to adulthood. Kiley (1997) introduced the notion of Peter Pan Syndrome to describe men who do not fit these adult features. James M. Barrie's personal life served as the inspiration for his fictional character Peter Pan. Barrie can't accept responsibility for growing up and can't maintain an emotional connection with a woman since he imitates his departed brother and never grows up in this role (Skinner, 1957). Based on the story, "Peter Pan Syndrome" refers to men who have achieved adulthood but are unable to deal with adult responsibilities and emotions, "never grow up". These men's ages and levels of maturity clearly don't correspond. It is also described by Mirkin (1983) as a syndrome that includes continuing to act like a child in order to retain parental protection. Therefore, it can be said that they have low tolerance to growth. Individuals with this syndrome need the acceptance of others in order to feel valued. Nevertheless, they have difficulties in interpersonal interactions due to their striving for perfection, such as chauvinism and narcissism. In addition, they always tend to place the blame on something or someone else because they do not want to own up to their own faults (Kiley, 1997). These people have trouble expressing their feelings; therefore, they may tend towards only sexually focused relations rather than emotional intimacy (Quadrio, 1982). However, they expect a woman to act like a mother, and they take into their lives compassionate women who can protect them from inner conflicts due to her emotional weaknesses and obedience (Kiley, 1997).

According to theory (Aylmer, 1998; Carter and McGoldrick, 1999) and research findings (Arnett, 1998; Grolnick, 2003; Mattanah, Hancock, and Brand, 2004), relative success of persons in developing interpersonal competence in emerging adulthood depends on experiences with opportunities for autonomy, emotional regulation, connection, and support in their family of origin. According to Bowen's theory of family systems (Bowen, 1978), one's experiences in family connections marked by emotion regulation capacity and a balance of autonomy and closeness are what lead to mature functioning in emerging adulthood. Self-differentiation a concept from Bowen's theory is characterized as a family system's and its members' capacity to control emotional reactivity, maintain composure in the face of intense emotions, and feel both autonomy and closeness in relations. People with more differentiation are less emotionally reactive, have better control over their emotions, think more clearly under pressure, and are better able to maintain bonds with important people while keeping a distinct sense of self, both inside and outside of relations (Bowen, 1978; Kerr and Bowen, 1988).

It is believed that more self-differentiation results in greater emotional maturity, interpersonal competence, and less psychological discomfort since it helps one regulate the emotional arousal experienced in difficult interpersonal circumstances. On the other hand, less differentiated people are viewed as being less successful in relationships, less at ease with intimacy and/or autonomy, have more interpersonal issues, and have a harder time controlling their emotions (Bowen, 1978; Kerr and Bowen, 1988). Less differentiated people are regarded to become more emotionally reactive and emotionally fused or separated with others in emotionally charged interpersonal settings as a stress response (Nichols and Schwartz, 2004).

Differentiation of self enables young people to engage in constructive debate, and engage in open communication with parents and peers without feeling excessively defenseless or threatened by opposing perspectives. Successful individuation during youth and emerging adulthood depends on these accomplishments (Scharf, Mayseless, and Kivenson-Baron, 2004). However, lack of differentiation of self is associated with negative psychosocial consequences associated with emotional reactivity in close relationships (Johnson and Buboltz, 2000), relationship dissatisfaction (Skowron, 2000), and dissociation in intimacy (Garbarino, Gaa, Swank, McPherson, and Gratch, 1995).

Interpersonal competence is generally defined in the literature as a capacity to engage with others in an appropriate and successful manner (Rose-Krasnor, 1997; Spitzberg and Cupach, 1989). Many systems, including individual, peer, family, and environmental systems, have been theorized to be effective in the development of interpersonal competence (Green and Burleson, 2003; Spitzberg and Cupach, 1989). In young adulthood, which is a transitional period between adolescence and adulthood, people become increasingly sensitive to other people. According to Erikson (1984), people during this time have a sense of intimacy that includes the capacity to relate to, share with, and love others without fear of hopelessness. On the other hand, some people during this time may have a propensity to avoid and isolate themselves from such experiences by staying away from social settings out of concern that they will lose themselves. At this point, the degree to which some fundamental needs are being met, which determines personal and social abilities, the behavioral patterns and competencies of individuals in their interpersonal relations are notable in understanding individuals and their development (Burger, 2006). To create and manage interpersonal connections, people need to possess a number of crucial emotional, cognitive, and social skill qualities. In the framework of the abilities required for the contact and communication process with others, the concept of interpersonal competence thus comes to the fore.

Interpersonal competence serves as the foundation for the abilities people need in order to keep up healthy relationships (Ilhan, 2016). It is generally defined as the growth of social and communicative skills, including elements like people's perceptions of their own and others' success, the degree of adequate emotional control required for psychosocial adaptation to their social circle, and how these elements manifest as behavior (Sahin and Gizir, 2014). According to Papero (1988), as differentiation of self decreases, people's perspectives become more limited, egocentric, and prone to "all or nothing" thinking in interpersonal interactions. This may impede interpersonal competence. That is, the skills required for effective interpersonal connections (i.e., managing conflict, emotionally supporting the other, self-disclosure) may be hindered by this increasing egocentrism. Moreover, lack of differentiation of self is thought to encourage relationship fusion. Fusion makes it challenging to separate oneself from others. Boundaries can sometimes become so vague that the tasks required to reward interpersonal relationships (i.e., self-disclosure, making an impact (referred to as negative assertion), conflict management) can become too risky. That is, if a partner feels threatened and shares their deepest worries about the relationship, they run the possibility of being rejected, which, from the perspective of the person with weak differentiation, means the destruction of the self. Lower differentiation of the self may also be related with increased emotional reactivity (Bartle-Haring and Sabatelli, 1997). Bartle (1996) showed that for men, increased emotional reactivity to parents lowers their ability to trust

a flirting partner. Moreover, Hoffman (1984) showed that for both men and women, youths' freedom from responsibility, anxiety, guilt, insecurity, resentment, anger and inhibition about both parents reported better in love relationships using a general indicator of satisfaction in those relationships. As a result, it can be said that differentiation of self is a protective factor for interpersonal competence.

When the literature is examined, there seems to be a limited number of research on Peter Pan syndrome. In fact, there is no quantitative research in Türkiye apart from the scale development study (Kalkan, Batik, Kaya, and Turan, 2021). Therefore, there are no research results regarding its direct relationship with differentiation of self and interpersonal competence. However, there is some evidence that it is indirectly related to these variables. For example, individuals with Peter Pan syndrome are extremely egocentric. These men feel very lonely, they are worried about their loneliness. However, it can be said that they cannot make real friends despite their desire and need to belong. The fact that they avoid openly admitting their faults and taking responsibility for their behaviors makes their social relationships difficult. Although they want to share their feelings with a woman, they refuse these needs because they are afraid that their friends will see them weak. Despite their fear of being rejected by women, they can act in an unkind and judgmental manner toward them. They cannot exhibit consistent attitudes in their relations with the women (Kiley, 1997). Therefore, it is clear that people with the syndrome have difficulties in interpersonal relationships, including close relationships. This is in line with the characteristics of people who lack low differentiation of self and interpersonal competence skills put forward by Papero (1998). In addition, many studies draw attention to the link between high level of self-differentiation and relationship satisfaction (Dekel, 2010; Rodríguez-González, Skowron, Cagigal de Gregorio, and Muñoz San Roque, 2016; Skowron, 2000; Skowron and Friedlander, 1998). As mentioned above, Arnet (2004) points out that it is important to have a high level of separation, individualization and psychological maturity in the transition to emerging adulthood. So much so that these features are among the characteristics of people who have a high level of self-differentiation (Bomar and Sabatelli, 1996; Bowen, 1978). Schnarch (2009) suggests that individuals with higher levels of differentiation can maintain a strong sense of self even when they are closely connected to others, are able to calm and regulate themselves when they are emotionally hurt, and are able to respond calmly and tolerate growth when difficult interactions with a partner. In addition, Bomar and Sabatelli (1996) suggest that adolescents who perceive more differentiation with parents have better psychosocial maturity than adolescents who perceive less differentiation, and the problematic relationship between spouses and mother-son is an indicator of poor psychosocial maturity for boys. It can be said that men with Peter Pan syndrome experience a problematic mother-son relationship with low differentiation. The individual with Peter Pan syndrome wants to get rid of his mother's influence; but when he tries to do that, he feels guilty. This is particularly evident when approaching a woman. He expects the woman to act the way he wants and puts her in his mother's place within the limits he draws. If the woman doesn't live up to his expectations, he gets angry.

These people are unhappy with their own selves and the marriage of their parents in the background. It is clear that there is no emotional warmth or sharing in the family. The child feels crushed by his mother because he perceives her as all-powerful, hostile, and controlling (Quadrio, 1982). As a result of the disconnection with the father and negative feelings towards the mother, a low self-perception develops, and then, sense of belonging is lost (Kiley, 1997). Considering all these studies, it can be said that differentiation of self is a variable that predicts Peter Pan syndrome. In addition, having a psychosocial maturity level also requires interpersonal competence. It is clear that the egocentric nature of individuals with Peter Pan syndrome, their avoidance of taking responsibility, their unwillingness to admit their mistakes, and their hypersensitivity to rejection mean that they are inadequate in all dimensions of interpersonal competence. Therefore, it is assumed that interpersonal competence is a variable mediating the relationship between differentiation of self and Peter Pan syndrome. As a result, this research has two hypotheses:

*Hypothesis 1: Differentiation of self predicts Peter Pan syndrome negatively and significantly.*

*Hypothesis 2: Interpersonal competence mediates the relationship between the differentiation of self and Peter Pan syndrome.*

## **1. The Current Study**

Peter Pan syndrome is a major problem commonly seen in males in emerging adulthood. It negatively affects the functionality of the individual in all areas and prevents him from developing healthy relationships with other people and becomes a source of distress for both the individual and the people in his life. With the importance of the problem situation, it is seen that this is only one study on this issue in Türkiye (Kalkan et al., 2021). Therefore, there is no direct research result regarding its relationship with other variables (differentiation of self and interpersonal competence) discussed in this study. However, it is aimed to present an original study supported by striking findings regarding the indirect relationship with these variables. It is hoped that the findings from this research will fill a crucial gap in the field of mental health and guide the research and intervention programs of experts. This study sought to investigate the mediating role of interpersonal competence in the link between differentiation of self and Peter Pan syndrome based on theoretical and empirical findings. The basic assumption of the current study is that Peter Pan syndrome will decrease as the level of differentiation of self and interpersonal competence increases.

## **2. Method**

### **2.1. Research Design**

A correlational research design was employed in this study. Using mediation analysis, the links between Peter Pan syndrome (outcome variable), interpersonal competence (mediator variable) and differentiation of self (predictor variable) were investigated.

### **2.2 Participants and Procedure**

The present study comprised 425 men who were romantically involved and married. The age ranged from 18 to 30, with a mean of 20.55 (SD = 2.64). Of the participants 417 (98.1%) were single and 8 (1.9) were married.

### **2.3 Measures**

**2.3.1 Differentiation of Self Inventory-Revised (DSI-R):** Skowron and Friedlander (1998) developed DSI, which was later revised as DSI-R by Skowron and Schmitt (2003) and, adapted to Turkish by Isik and Bulduk (2015). It is a 6-point Likert-type scale consist of 20 items. The fit values were seen to be at sufficient levels because of CFA ( $\chi^2/df = 1.51$ , GFI = .93, AGFI = .90, CFI = .93 and RMSEA = .046). Cronbach's alpha value of the original form of the scale was .81, and the Turkish form was .80. In the present study was .71.

**2.3.2 Interpersonal Competence Questionnaire-Short Form:** The scale was developed by Buhrmester, Furman, Wittenberg, and Reis (1988) and adapted to Turkish by Sahin and Gizir (2013). The scale includes 25 items and five-point Likert. The fit values were seen to be at sufficient levels as a consequence of CFA ( $\chi^2/df = 1.77$ , GFI = .94, AGFI = .93, CFI = .96 and RMSEA = .036). The Cronbach's alpha of the Turkish form of the scale was .87. In the present study was .88.

**2.3.3 Peter Pan Syndrome Scale:** The scale was developed by Kalkan et al. (2021). The scale includes 22 items and five-point Likert. It was determined by CFA that the fit values were at sufficient levels ( $\chi^2/df = 1.26$ , GFI = .91, AGC = .86, CFI = .96 and RMSEA = .03). The Cronbach's alpha of the scale was .88. In the present study was .83.

### **2.4 Procedure and Ethics**

The researcher's university's ethics committee approved the study (Date: 20/09/2022, Number: 05/01-02). The researcher used a web-based survey to gather research data. Both the participants' willingness to volunteer for the study and the confidentiality of their identities were guaranteed. The duration of the data gathering was roughly 30 minutes.

## 2.5 Statistical Analysis

When the values in Table 1 are taken into account, it may be said that the data exhibit normal distribution and that the allowable range of kurtosis and skewness values is from -1.5 to +1.5 (Tabachnick and Fidell, 2013). Executing "MultipleMediation Model 4" through PROCESS Macro allowed the tested model's mediation effects' statistical significance to be achieved in the study (Hayes, 2017).

## 3. Results

### 3.1 Descriptives and Correlations

The correlations between differentiation of self, interpersonal competence, and Peter Pan syndrome were found using Pearson's correlation coefficients.

Table 1. Correlations among variables and descriptive statistics

	1	2	3
1. Differentiation of self	-		
2. Interpersonal competence	.26**	-	
3. Peter Pan syndrome	-.45**	-.26**	-
Mean	79.26	86.04	50.09
SD	11.91	14.65	12.44
Skewness	-.05	-.27	.33
Kurtosis	-.18	1.2	.06

$N = 425$ , \*\* $p < .01$

Table 1 shows that differentiation of self is positively correlated with interpersonal competence ( $r = .26$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and negatively correlated with Peter Pan syndrome ( $r = -.45$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Interpersonal competence is negatively correlated with Peter Pan syndrome ( $r = -.26$ ,  $p < .01$ ).

### 3.2 Mediation Model Analysis

Results of the model, which is believed to play a mediating role of interpersonal competence in the relationship between differentiation of self and Peter Pan syndrome, are shown in Figure 1.

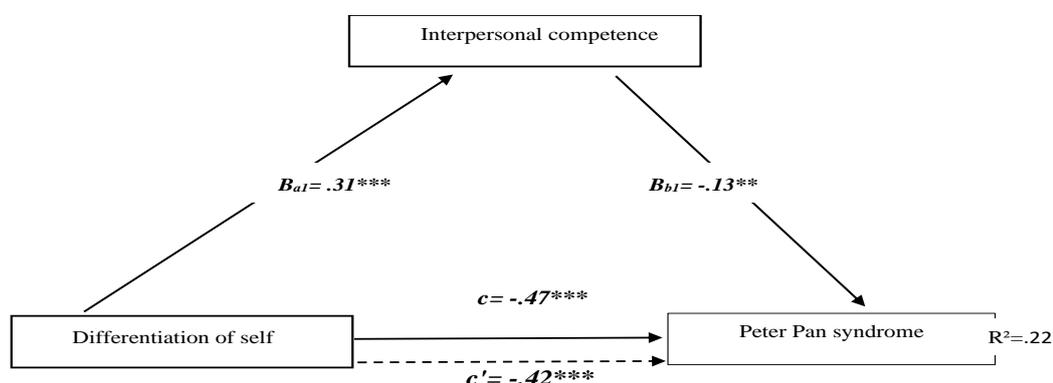


Figure 1. The mediator role of interpersonal competence in the relationship between differentiation of self and Peter Pan syndrome

According to Figure 1, the total effect of differentiation of self on Peter Pan syndrome ( $c = -.47$ ,  $SH = .05$ ,  $t = -10.27$ ,  $p < .001$ ) is statistically significant (Step 1). The direct effect of differentiation of self on interpersonal competence is statistically significant ( $B = .31$ ,  $SH = .06$ ,  $t = 5.44$ ,  $p < .001$ ) (Step 2). The direct effect of interpersonal competence on Peter Pan syndrome ( $B = -.13$ ,  $SH = .04$ ,  $t = -3.58$ ,  $p < .01$ ) is statistically significant (Step 3). When interpersonal competence and differentiation of self were added to the model at the same time (Step 4), the association between differentiation of self and Peter Pan syndrome diminished in terms of direct effect, but the significant value was remained unchanged ( $c' = -.42$ ,  $SH = .05$ ,  $t = -9.15$ ,  $p < .001$ ). In addition, according to the first model, differentiation of self predicts interpersonal competence significantly and positively ( $F = 29.6436$ ,  $R^2 = .07$ ,  $p < .0001$ ) and differentiation of self explains .07% of the variance in interpersonal competence. According to the second model, differentiation of self and interpersonal competence predict Peter Pan syndrome significantly and negatively ( $F = 60.6394$ ,  $R^2 = .22$ ,  $p < .0001$ ) and differentiation of self and interpersonal competence explained 22% of the variance in Peter Pan syndrome. According to the third model, differentiation of self directly, significantly, and negatively predicts Peter Pan syndrome ( $F = 105.5055$ ,  $R^2 = .20$ ,  $p < .0001$ ) and differentiation of self explains 20% of total variance in Peter Pan syndrome. The bootstrap method was used to determine if the indirect effect is significant or not, and the values for the effects between the test model's variables are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. The comparison of direct and specific indirect effect of differentiation of self on Peter Pan syndrome through interpersonal competence

Effects	Point Estimate	SE	Product of Coefficients		Bootstrapping 95% BCa Confidence Interval	
			<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	Lower	Upper
Indirect Effect	-.0425	.0151	-	-	-.0758	-.0172
Total Effect	-.4666	.0454	-10,2716	.00***	-.5559	-.3773
Direct Effect	-.4241	.0463	-9,1509	.00***	-.5152	-.3330

N= 425, \*\*\* $p < .001$

For the mediating effect to be significant, the bootstrap confidence interval lower and upper limit values should be above or below zero and should not contain zero (Preacher and Hayes, 2008). It can be observed from Table 2 that the mediation effect is strong. The range for BootLLCI and BootULCI is as anticipated. The analysis's results show that the indirect effect of differentiation of self through interpersonal competence on the Peter Pan syndrome is statistically significant.

## Discussion

In this study, which examined the mediator role of interpersonal competence in the relationship between differentiation of self and Peter Pan syndrome in males in emerging adulthood, it was found that there was a positive link between differentiation of self and interpersonal competence, and both variables were negatively associated with Peter Pan syndrome, as expected. In addition, the mediating role of interpersonal competence was found to be statistically significant.

Papero (1988) draws attention to the fact that differentiation of self is positively related to interpersonal competence and that it is a predictor of interpersonal competence. Papero (1988) suggests that low differentiation of self may hinder interpersonal competence. Bowen (1978) argues that the blurring of interpersonal boundaries due to fusion creates internal and interpersonal anxiety. He argues that this situation, accompanied by emotional reactivity, may cause a lack of interpersonal skills and fears of interpersonal relationships in adolescents. As worry increases in interpersonal connections, risk-taking for interpersonal competence can become quite threatening, and this situation can increase anxiety and cause social withdrawal. Thus, interaction problems within the family can also be reflected in relationships outside the family owing to lack

of interpersonal skills and worry in relationships (Bartle-Haring and Sabatelli, 1997). They also revealed that low level of emotional reactivity towards parents had a positive effect on interpersonal competence. Yang (1999) revealed that differentiation has a positive and direct effect on interpersonal competence for male young adults and emotional reactivity was negatively related to interpersonal competence. Similarly, Dakin (2006) concluded that emotional reactivity is negatively related to interpersonal competence. Consistent with the studies discussed above, the results of this study also show that there is a positive link between differentiation of self and interpersonal competence.

According to the current study, there is a negative link between differentiation of self and Peter Pan syndrome, and differentiation of self is a negative predictor of Peter Pan syndrome. In the related literature, there is no direct research on the link between differentiation of self and Peter Pan syndrome and the link between the syndrome and interpersonal competence. However, there are studies that will enable us to make important inferences about the relationship between these variables. Arnett (2004) draws attention to the process of separation-completion of individuation and psychological maturity as crucial psychological determinants of transition to adulthood. Young adult men with Peter Pan syndrome experience distress in these processes. The psychosocial maturity process also includes interpersonal competence, and it is mentioned that family system differentiation and individualization are related to psychosocial maturity (Greenberger and Sorensen, 1974). The two most significant signs of inadequate psychosocial maturity for the men were a less distinct marital dyad and a strained mother-son connection (Bomar and Sabatelli, 1996). So much so that men with Peter Pan syndrome have a fused and troubled relationship with their mothers. Individuals with the syndrome are extremely egocentric, which is in line with the characteristics of people with low differentiation of self and low interpersonal competence as stated by Papero (1998). Men with Peter Pan syndrome avoid assuming the responsibilities of adulthood, do not have the ability to regulate emotions, and have difficulty in establishing a close relationship-autonomy balance (Kiley, 1997). Men with this syndrome feel valued depending on their acceptance by others. This is closely related to a low differentiation of self. Family members are encouraged to stand out for themselves and take ownership of their acts in well-differentiated households. In contrast, family members in undifferentiated households are emotionally fused or separated, which prevents age-appropriate individuation (Minuchin, 1974). Patterns of interaction that support tolerance for both individuality and closeness are also represented in well-differentiated family systems (Stierlin, Levi, and Savard, 1971). In a poorly differentiated family, strong cohesion or rigid triangulation in the family does not allow a growing child to feel, think, and act on his own. Age-appropriate individuation is not encouraged. The child has difficulty in acting autonomously and mostly functions in response to others (Kerr and Bowen, 1988). Boys with Peter Pan syndrome have the problem of not being able to enter their friend groups when they reach adolescence and even if they do, they cannot see themselves as a member of this group. This problem also manifests itself in close relationships at the beginning of emerging adulthood. These men are far from displaying consistent attitudes and reactions in their close relationships (Kiley, 1997). Thus, they experience serious problems in their marriage and romantic relationships (Dalla, Marchetti, Sechrest, and White, 2010). These problems they experience in friends and close relationships are closely related to both low self-differentiation and low interpersonal competence. Indeed, Papero (1988) reveals that lack of self differentiation hinders interpersonal competence with increased egocentrism, and both have a distorting effect on interpersonal relationships. Bartle (1996) shows that low differentiation for men reduces the ability to trust a dating partner. According to Bowen (1978), having high self-differentiation and interpersonal competence enable one to better control the emotional arousal felt in challenging interpersonal settings. Scharf et al. (2004) argue that differentiation of self give young adults an opportunity to discuss and resolve conflicts, and experience open communication in relationships without feeling extremely defenseless or threatened by opposing perspectives. These also include interpersonal competence (Bartle-Haring and Sabatelli, 1997). In addition, Wilson (2020) suggests that self-differentiation in challenging

interpersonal relationships enables even when the intensity is higher to a partner can still regulate when hurt and tolerate growth.

Finally, well-differentiated individuals do not hold others accountable for their actions and have a realistic self-image independent of the approval and acceptance of others (Bowen, 1978; Kerr and Bowen, 1988). However, because individuals with Peter Pan syndrome do not want to admit their own mistakes, they always tend to put the blame on something or someone else, and they feel valued to the extent that they are accepted by others (Kiley, 1997). Such that poorly differentiated individuals are overly sensitive to the assessments and criticisms of others. Therefore, their self-esteem is completely dependent on others (Bowen, 1978). Considering all these studies, it can be thought that the hypotheses that differentiation of self predicts Peter Pan syndrome negatively and that to this relationship is mediated by interpersonal competence are confirmed.

### Conclusion and Suggestions

According to findings of this study, interpersonal competence and differentiation of self are key elements in lowering Peter Pan syndrome. However, this research has some limitations. First off, as self-report scales were employed to collect the study's data, the concepts covered in the study are restricted to those instruments, and bias mistakes may result. Second, it can be difficult to predict cause-and-effect linkages because the cross-sectional design is used. Future study can examine the link between factors through experimental and longitudinal studies. Both quantitative and qualitative data can be gathered through mixed pattern research. This study was conducted on a non-clinical sample. In future studies, Peter Pan syndrome and its relationship with different variables can be investigated in clinical samples.

It may be advised that mental health specialists create protective and preventative programs to lessen Peter Pan syndrome based on these findings, as well as the predictor elements in this study. Future studies can concentrate on various protective and risk factors for Peter Pan syndrome, or they can improve the efficacy of the current study by including new variables that might be connected to the existing variables.

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