Self-Dissociation as a Predictor of Alienation and Sense of Belonging in University Students

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Abstract

Alienation and a sense of belonging are important psychological factors supporting students' well-being. In the present study, the purpose was to examine the predictive role of Self-Dissociation on alienation and a sense of belonging in university students. A correlational study design was used in the present study. The data on self-dissociation were collected with the Self-Dissociation Inventory-Short Form (SDI-SF), the data on the level of belonging were collected with the General Belonging Scale, and the data on alienation levels were collected with the Student Alienation Scale. A positive relationship was detected in the present study between Self-Dissociation, belonging, and alienation. Also, it was concluded in the study that Self-Dissociation predicted alienation and a sense of belonging. The findings obtained in the study indicate that it is necessary for the experts who will work on alienation and sense of belonging to take into account the self-dissociation concept in their studies.

Key Words: Alienation, Belonging, Self-Dissociation.

Introduction

Today, students' experiences surrounding their relationships are important in the university environment. It seems that university students who care about developing meaningful and positive relationships with their environment and peers often face alienation in their learning environment (Gravett & Winstone, 2022). To reduce alienation, students must feel that they are personally accepted, respected, included, and supported by others in a social setting such as school (Goodenow & Grady, 1993). Alienation and sense of belonging variables depend on the awareness and perceptions of an individual's self (Schall et al., 2016). Alienation occurs when people do not communicate and move away from each other (O'ralovna, 2022). Belonging is a basic human need that all people are driven to satisfy (Allen et al., 2021). "Self" is each of the individual, social, and collective-theoretical understandings that exist together in one single individual (Mehri et al., 2011). Alienation, sense of belonging, and self-dissociation are interrelated concepts.

The concept of alienation has been discussed comprehensively in the literature of social philosophy, psychology, and sociology. According to the common and basic understanding, the "alienation" concept is mostly used to refer to feelings of alienation or detachment from oneself, from others, from society in general, loss of self, hopelessness, apathy, loneliness, rootlessness, powerlessness, pessimism, neutrality, discontent, withdrawal, separation, indifference, anxiety, depersonalization, isolation, distance or detachment from others/something, and meaninglessness (Chiaburu et al., 2014). Social alienation

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consists of people's communication with each other, and psychological alienation consists of spontaneous alienation. The greater the alienation process, the deeper and greater the deterioration (O'ralovna, 2022).

The concept of alienation has a long interdisciplinary history. the alienation of employees (Aiken & Hage, 1966; Blauner, 1964; Bonjean & Grimes, 1970; Moeller & Charters, 1966), voters (Dean, 1960; Horton & Thompson, 1962), young people (Keniston, 1965; Oppenheimer, 1968), the elderly (Lowenthal, 1964; Rosow, 1967), and black people (Bullough, 1967; Middleton, 1963) was investigated in previous studies. It was found that working-class students at the university were not more alienated than those from other social backgrounds. Urban middle-class students seemed more alienated than small-town and lower-class students (Hoy, 1972).

The question of whether alienation is a social or a psychological concept stem from the diversity of meanings. In this way, while the psychologist neglects the social context-shaping power of alienation, s/he does not take advantage of the individual dimensions of this concept. Erich Fromm explained this problem very well. According to Fromm (1994), under the influence of a social structure that is always hostile to him/her, individuals have a worldview regarding every level of self-alienation (O'ralovna, 2022). Psychological and social alienation seems to be very compatible with each other. If people become alienated from each other in relationships and communication, they also become alienated from themselves because they may become lonely, and bored and their interest in life may fade as a result of people's alienation from each other.

Hoy (1972) argued that alienation has five main dimensions (powerlessness, meaninglessness, irregularity, isolation, and self-alienation). Today, to achieve real development and freedom, society is rapidly overcoming these alienation processes, resolutely overcoming the existing difficulties (O'ralovna, 2022). As a result, society can develop in a healthy setting if various alienation processes in social life are eliminated faster based on knowledge and harmony. Also, the problem of alienation has been accepted as a strong obstacle to educational success (McInerney, 2009; Türk, 2014) as it affects learning behavior and school performance negatively, as well as affecting teacher-student relations and school career negatively, increasing school dropouts (Hascher & Hadjar, 2018; Legault et al., 2006). Conceptualizing the alienation process involves a diminished sense of belonging, which means a loss of satisfaction with learning, and participation in relationships with teachers and classmates at school (Hascher & Hadjar, 2018). There are three main areas that alienation from school is associated with (academic learning, teachers, and classmates) (Tomaszek, 2020). Lack of motivation to learn, low student participation and commitment, and discipline problems are considered behavioral consequences of alienation from school (Hascher & Hadjar, 2018).

To avert alienation, it is necessary to develop an attitude toward social heritage and be aware of the spiritual values of each member of society, the relations of people with each other, and their problems. In this way, individuals will sincerely feel that each individual is valuable to others by respecting "self-differentiation" (O'ralovna, 2022).

Differentiation/dissociation can be understood as a process and as a personality trait. The first place where an individual's differentiation occurs is in the process of differentiation from an individual's own family, which requires the individual to emerge from a multi-generational family system characterized by varying levels of affective attachments and reflections of anxiety (Jenkins et al., 2005). The

differentiation process requires the individual to become a differentiated self without being separated from his/her family members (Bowen, 1978; Kerr & Bowen, 1988). In this sense, when self-dissociation is considered an individual's self-realization and a development process, the influence of the environment in which s/he lives, especially the certain people in the environment (e.g., mother, father, friend, teacher) is inevitable (Kuzgun, 1985; Yanbastı, 1996). Self-dissociation also refers to the capacity of individuals to manage their emotions, remain thoughtful when experiencing strong emotions, and experience intimacy and independence in relationships. Successfully differentiating individuals can separate themselves from affective ties in their families, have less affective reactivity, and regulate their emotions without breaking important relationships. They can also think clearly under stressful conditions and can form close relationships with others by maintaining a clearly different sense of self (Skowron, Stanley, & Shapiro, 2009). However, individuals who struggle with the differentiation process tend to fuse (i.e., fusion) and/or affective separation from these relationships with their parents (Johnson & Waldo, 1998; Kerr & Bowen, 1988). They also experience more affective reactivity and are less able to regulate their emotions (Bowen Center for the Study of the Family, 2011). One way they can be more reactive is by being emotionally interrupted or shutting down when under stress. Less differentiated individuals have more difficulty in intimacy. They are also uncomfortable with intimacy and/or autonomy (Skowron et al., 2009). Differentiation has also been conceptualized as a personality variable that represents various levels of certain intrapsychic and interpersonal characteristics (Bowen, 1978; Johnson & Waldo, 1998). Although intrapsychic differentiation means the ability to balance thoughts and emotions, interpersonal differentiation means the ability to experience deep intimacy without compromising an individual's sense of independence (Skowron & Freidlander, 1998). In the center of intrapsychic and interpersonal differentiation, there is the individual's level of affective reactivity. Higher levels of differentiation are associated with lower levels of reactivity. Skowron and Friedlander (1998) identified the key components of differentiation as (a) a clear "self-positioning", (b) affective separation from others, (c) fusion with others, and (d) the amount of affective reactivity. Self-dissociation refers to individuals' capacity to handle their feelings and thoughts in relationships (Simon et al., 2019).

Feelings of alienation can separate, distance, and differentiate individuals from their environment, causing social isolation, a feeling of powerlessness, a sense of lack of social support or social connection, and more. This sense of alienation can change when individuals feel wanted by the environment and are invited to join the environment (Berry & Sabatier, 2010; Dean, 1961; Sabatier & Berry, 2008; Viner et al., 2012). Alienation and differentiation can be expanded to cover relationships, human ties, and elements of belonging from people's environment and self (Nair & Vohra, 2012). In Mann's (2001) study, alienation was referred to as a state of being deprived of social relations or an activity to which individuals want to belong.

In general, belonging provides individuals with guidance to determine social, cultural, environmental, and geographical structures, who and what is acceptable, the nature of right and wrong, and a sense of belonging or alienation (Allen, 2020). The sense of self originates from an individual's dominant social and environmental contexts and strengthens and challenges the subjective sense of belonging (Allen et al., 2021). However, alienation refers to a sense of lack of belonging, which is expressed by alienation from the environment and people around and not being a part of the social sphere. The sense of belonging can also be defined as the subjective feeling and basic human need predicting mental, physical, social, economic, and behavioral consequences as an integral part of the systems of an

individual, including family, friends, school, work, communities, cultural groups, and physical places (Allen et al., 2021; Hagerty, Williams & Oe, 2002). Most people have a strong urge to feel a positive but often fluid and temporary sense of belonging with other people, places, and/or experiences (Allen, 2020; Slavich & Cole, 2013). There is a consensus that belonging is a basic human need that almost all people try to satisfy (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Leary & Kelly, 2009).

The need to belong has been observed in neural, environmental, biological (Blackhart et al., 2007; Kross et al., 2007; Slavich et al., 2014; Slavich et al., 2010) as well as behavioral and social domains (Brewer, 2007; Filstad et al., 2019). Previous studies suggest that the human brain and immune system keep the body safe both in biological and physical terms by motivating people to avert social threats and seek social security, connection, and belonging (Slavich, 2020). A sense of belonging is as important as food, shelter, and physical security for supporting long-term health and survival (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Maslow, 1954). In other words, belonging exists because of and in connection with the systems humans have (Kern et al., 2020).

In social terms, a significant part of people suffers from alienation, loneliness, and a lack of connection with others (Anderson & Thayer, 2018). For a variety of reasons, including social mobility, changes in technology, fragmented family and community structures, and the speed of modern life, social "dissociation" is becoming an alarming trend in many advanced cultures (Baumeister & Robson, 2021). Although belonging is not merely the opposite of loneliness, alienation, or feelings of disconnection, it has been conceptualized in the literature to represent its various aspects (Allen & Kern, 2017, 2019; Goodenow, 1993; Hagerty & Patusky, 1995; Lim et al., 2021; Malone et al, 2012; Nichols & Webster, 2013). Many studies conducted on belonging has included students and school environments (Abdollahi et al., 2020; Arslan et al., 2020; Yeager et al., 2018). Belonging usually involves school-based experiences, peers, relationships with teachers, and students' affective ties or feelings with their schools (Allen & Bowles, 2012; Allen et al., 2018, 2016; O'Brien & Bowles, 2013; Slaten et al., 2016). In light of the information given in previous studies, it is considered that the present study will contribute to the literature.

The age to attend a university is a very important period in terms of development and psychology during which young individuals go through a series of psychological and physiological changes and discover their adult roles, which, then brings along a turbulent, painful, and very rapid change process. Because although young individuals experience psycho-social development characteristics and the psychological conflicts brought by the transition to adulthood, they also face a series of difficulties in which they alienate from themselves and their environment from time to time, with the pain of discovering their self by creating a sense of belonging in their social environment. Studies conducted on university students are important in this respect. When the literature was reviewed, no study was detected investigating the relationship between alienation, sense of belonging, and self-dissociation in university students. Based on this point of view, in the present study, the purpose was to examine self-dissociation as a predictor of alienation and sense of belonging in university students.

For this purpose, answers to the following questions were sought in the study.

- Is there a significant relationship between self-dissociation and belonging among university students?

- Is there a significant relationship between self-dissociation and alienation among university students?

- Does self-dissociation predict alienation and a sense of belonging in university students?

Method

In line with the purpose of the present study, the correlational survey model, which is one of the general survey models in quantitative research methods, was used. The correlational survey model refers to the processes that describe a past or present situation as it exists, applied to the realization of learning and the development of desired behaviors in individuals. The whole population or a group of samples is scanned in a general survey model to make a general judgment about the universe in a population consisting of many elements. The correlational survey model is a screening approach aiming to determine the existence of co-variance between two or more variables. In this model, the purpose is to determine whether the variables change together, and if there is a change, to determine how it happened (Karasar, 2011).

Study Group

The study group consisted of a total of 546 university students (375 /68.55% females - 172 /31.45% males) who were studying in various departments of two state universities and voluntarily agreed to participate in the study. The distribution of the participants according to departments was as follows: A total of 247 students were from Guidance and Psychological Counseling (45.2%), 47 from Preschool Teaching Department (8.6%), 132 from Dentistry Department (23.9%), and 121 from New Media and Communication (22.1%). The distribution of the participants according to the grades was as follows: A total of 334 (61%) were first graders, 64 (12%) were second graders, 61 were third graders (11%), and 87 were fourth graders (16%). The ages of the participants ranged between 18 and 30, and the average age of the group was 20.36.

Data Collection Tools

The data collection tools were sent to the participants electronically so that the students could fill in the forms created on Google Forms. Students who agreed to participate in the study voluntarily were included. In line with the purpose of the study, the "Self-Dissociation Inventory-Short Form" was used to determine the Self-Dissociation levels of the students, the "General Belonging Scale" was used to determine the levels of belonging, and the "Student Alienation Scale" was used to determine the levels of alienation.

Self-Dissociation Inventory-Short Form (SDI-SF)

The form, which was developed by Skowron and Freidlander (1998), was revised by Skowron and Schmit (2003) and reduced to 20 items by Drake et al. (2015) for convenience, consisted of four sub-dimensions. The scale was adapted into Turkish by Sarıkaya et al. (2018). High scores on the scale indicate a high level of differentiation. Subscale scores are calculated by averaging based on the number of items and the average of the four subscale scores gives the scale total score (Drake et al., 2015). In the original scale, the Cronbach Alpha Internal Consistency Coefficients associated with the dimensions of self-positioning, affective separation, intertwinement, and affective reactivity and the scale total score were found to be .85, .81, .72, .74, and .82, respectively. When the reliability of the scale was evaluated, the Cronbach Alpha Coefficient was found to be .62 in the self-positioning subscale, .68 in the

intertwining subscale, .68 in the affective separation subscale, .81 in the affective reactivity subscale, and .81 in self-dissociation.

General Belonging Scale

The Turkish adaptation of the scale, which was originally developed by Malone et al. (2012), was made by Duru (2015). The Internal Consistency Coefficient for the acceptance dimension of the scale was .89 and .91 for the rejection dimension and the Internal Consistency Coefficient was found to be .92 for the entire scale. The test-retest reliability of the scale was found to be .70 for the acceptance dimension, .75 for the rejection dimension, .84 for the entire scale, and the total correlations were between .48 and .79. When the reliability of the scale was evaluated, the Cronbach Alpha Coefficient was found to be .85 for the acceptance sub-dimension, .86 for the rejection sub-dimension, and .90 for the overall score of belonging.

Student Alienation Scale

The scale was developed by Çağlar (2012) to determine the levels of student alienation and consists of four sub-dimensions (powerlessness, irregularity, isolation, and meaninglessness) with a total of 20 items. The internal consistency coefficient of the scale was .79 for the first dimension, .75 for the second dimension, .76 for the third dimension, .76 for the fourth dimension, and .86 for the overall scale. The highest score that can be obtained from the scale is 100 and the lowest score is 20. When the reliability of the scale was evaluated, the Cronbach Alpha Coefficient was found to be .78 in the powerlessness sub-dimension, .74 in the irregularity sub-dimension, .77 in the isolation sub-dimension, .73 in the meaninglessness sub-dimension, and .87 in the overall score of sense of belonging.

Analysis of Data

The data were tested at .05 and .01 significance levels and were analyzed by using the SPSS 24.0 program with correlation and multiple regression methods. The correlation statistics between dependent and independent variables and Pearson-Correlation were used in the study. Multiple Regression Analysis was also used to determine the power of self-dissociation to predict the general belonging and alienation levels of university students.

Ethics Committee

Ethics committee approval was obtained from Sivas Cumhuriyet University Educational Sciences Research Proposal Ethics Ethics Committee (Decision Date: 30.04.2023-290363; Number: E-50704946-100-290363; No: 23_04_01) before the research was conducted.

Findings

The Pearson Correlation Analysis was used to see the relationship between the participants' levels of Self-Dissociation (and General Belonging and Student and the results are given in Table 1.

Table 1

Correlation Values Showing the Relationship Between Variables

	1	2	3	Mean	Sd.	Skew.	Kurt.
1: Self-Dissociation Total	1	.368**	.235**	69.17	10.39	0.265	0.219
2: General Belonging		2	.212**	45.79	6.22	0.04	1.927
3: Student Alienation			3	59.71	6.87	0.358	1.55

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

When Table 1 is evaluated, it is seen that a moderately significant positive relationship was detected between student Self-Dissociation ($r=.368$, $p<.01$) and student general belonging ($r=.368$, $p<.01$), a low level, significant and positive relationship was detected between student alienation and total ($r=.235$, $p<.01$), and a positive low-level and significant relationship was detected between the general student belonging level and the l student alienation score ($r=.212$, $p<.01$).

Before the analysis was made to determine the predictive role of Self-Dissociation in general belonging and alienation levels of university students, descriptive statistics of the variables were examined. Considering the kurtosis and skewness coefficients of the variables, it can be argued that the assumption of normality was met. The result of the analysis of the power of Self-Dissociation to predict the general belonging and alienation levels of university students is given in Table 2 below.

Table 2

The Multiple Regression Analysis Results on the Prediction of Self-Dissociation of University Students for General Belonging Level

Variables	B	SE	β	t	p	Tol.	VIF	Reg. Result
Affective separation	.193	.0082	.098	2.365	.018	.964	1.037	Dur.Wat. 1.909
Affective Reactivity	.242	.056	.232	4.319	.000	.571	1.751	
Intertwinement	-124	.007	-96	-1.766	.078	.553	1.809	$R=.326$
Self-Positioning	.237	.063	.159	3.738	.000	.913	1.095	$R^2=.106$ $F=16.133$

In line with the analysis results given in Table 2, when the assumptions regarding the regression equality were examined in the study, it was found that the tolerance values for the variables were

between .55 and 1.00, the Variance Increase Factor (VIF) values varied between 1.00 and 1.81. Considering that the tolerance values were greater than .20; the VIF values were less than 10, it can be argued that the conditions were met (Büyüköztürk, 2009). Also, considering the Durbin-Watson Statistical Result, it can be argued that there was no auto-correlation problem.

Considering the Multiple Regression Analysis, which was used to predict the level of belonging of the self-dissociation in Table 2, it was found that the dimensions of Self-Dissociation such as Self-Positioning, Affective Reactivity, dependence on others, and Affective separation predicted the level of belonging at a statistically significant level (*F*= 16.133, *R*= .326, *R²*=.106, *p*<.01). It was also found that all dimensions of self-dissociation explained approximately 11% of the total variance regarding the level of belonging. Based on this result, it can be argued that as the level of Self-Dissociation increased in university students, the level of general belonging also increased. It was seen that the variables that contributed significantly to this disclosure rate were Affective Reactivity (*β*= .242, *p*<.05), Self-Positioning (*β*= .237, *p*<.05), and Affective Separation (*β* =.193, *p* <.05), in order of relative importance.

Table 3

The Multiple Regression Analysis Result on the Prediction of Self-Dissociation for Alienation in University Students

Variables	B	S. E.	Beta	t	p	Tol.	VIF	Reg. Result
Affective separation	.377	.091	.173	4.127	.000	.964	1.037	Dur.Wat. 2.021
Affective Reactivity	0.099	0.063	0.086	1.578	0.115	.571	1.751	
Intertwinement	0.154	0.079	0.108	1.95	0.052	.553	1.809	*R*= .279
Self-Positioning	-0.064	0.071	-0.039	-0.901	0.368	.913	1.095	*R²*= .078 *F*= 11.473

In line with the results given in Table 3, when the assumptions of the regression equation were examined in the study, it was found that the tolerance values for the variables were between .55 and 1.00, the Variance Increase Factor (VIF) values varied between 1.00 and 1.81. Considering that the tolerance values were greater than .20, and the VIF values were less than 10, it can be argued that the conditions were met (Büyüköztürk, 2009). The Durbin-Watson Value was 1.727. It can be argued that the conditions for considering the mentioned values were met (Büyüköztürk, 2009; Field, 2009).

Considering the Multiple Regression Analysis used for the prediction of alienation by Self-Dissociation given in Table 3, it was found that the dimensions of Self-Dissociation such as Self-Positioning, Affective Reactivity, dependence on others, and Affective Separation predicted psychological well-being at a statistically significant level (*F*= 11,473, *R*= .37, *R²*= .878, *p*<.01). It was also found that all dimensions of Self-Dissociation explained approximately 9% of the total variance of alienation. Based on this result, it can be argued that as the level of Self-Dissociation increased in university students, the level of psychological well-being also increased. It was found that Self-Positioning (*β*= .35, *p*<.05), Affective

Reactivity (β= .14, p<.05), and Affective Separation (β= .13, p <.05), in order of relative importance of the variables that contributed significantly to this disclosure rate.

Discussion

As a result of the analysis of the data of the present study examining the self-dissociation as a predictor of alienation and sense of belonging in university students, although it was found that there was a positive and moderately significant relationship between the total score of self-dissociation and the total score of general belonging, it was also found that there was a positive low-level and significant relationship with the total alienation score. A significant relationship was also detected between self-dissociation, general belonging, and student alienation. All dimensions of self-dissociation explained approximately 11% of the total variance regarding the level of belonging. Based on this result, it can be argued that as the level of self-dissociation increases in university students, their level of general belonging also increases. The results are discussed by taking into consideration the findings in the literature.

According to the results obtained in the present study, it can be argued that as the level of self-dissociation/differentiation increases in university students, their level of general belonging also increases. Group belonging is among the most important needs of individuals. The social belonging and positioning of the people are determined in a qualitative sense in the traditional structure and relations system. Cultural belonging determines the interpersonal relations or the form of the relationship with the other according to the environment and ensures belonging to a certain culture, the world, and participation in the collective spirit. Differentiation or identification at the group level and culture are important as an indicator of belonging (Çelik, 2006). Previous studies show that low differentiation levels are associated with greater amounts of chronic anxiety, physical and psychological distress (Bohlander, 1999; Elieson & Rubin, 2001; Griffin & Apostal, 1993; Harvey & Bray, 1991; Harveyet al., 1991; Skowron & Friedlander, 1998; Skowron et al., 2003; Tuason & Freidlander, 2000), as well as high levels of affective reactivity (Johnson & Buboltz, 2000) and low marital satisfaction levels (Skowron, 2000). It is also important that individuals gain a solid and clearly defined sense of self (i.e., self-positioning). The focus of increasing self-dissociation is to use family knowledge of origin to help the individual choose his/her own path, rather than copying or reacting to his/her parents' wishes and choices (Jenkins et al., 2005). McGoldrick & Carter (2001) emphasized the need for the individual to act in line with his/her own inner beliefs, even when faced with pressure from family members for doing the opposite.

Individuals who have high levels of dissociation are aware of their thoughts and feelings and include both in their lives. However, they never allow their emotions to direct their logical processes. Their position when faced with various situations is clear and they can easily adapt to different situations (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 2008). A high level of differentiation also helps to relieve someone else's anxiety and to be resistant to the anxiety caused by others, which may be destructive (Bowen, 1976; Kerr & Bowen, 1988, Skowron, 2000). At the interpersonal level, self-dissociation includes the ability to become close to others and to have autonomy. Individuals who have a high level of differentiation can cope better with pressure and stress, have a high level of psychological adjustment and social belonging, do not experience anxiety, and have very few physical and psychological problems. Individuals who

have a low level of differentiation experience chronic anxiety, low psychological adjustment, difficulty in coping with stress and pressure situations, and often experience physical-psychological discomfort (Bowen, 1976, 1978; Kerr & Bowen, 1988; Murrayet al., 2006). Another study reported that less differentiated individuals had more psychiatric symptoms (Thornberg and Lyvers, 2010). As a result of previous studies, it was reported that individuals with low differentiation levels have depression (Hooper & DePuy, 2010; Hooper & Doehler, 2011; Norasakkunkit & Kalick, 2002), high psychopathology and stress (Kim-Appel et al., 2007; Tuason and Friedlander, 2000), excessive school stress (Skowron et al., 2004), poor adult relationships (Skowron, 2000; Tuason and Friedlander, 2000), excessive health problems (Murray et al., 2006), social anxiety (Peleg-Popko, 2002), state and trait anxiety (Işık & Bulduk, 2013; Peleg-Popko, 2002; Sarıkaya et al., 2018; Skowron & Friedlander, 1998), and behaviors of self-alienation and acceptance of external influences (Sarıkaya et al., 2018). Individuals who have high differentiation levels have low chronic anxiety and psychological symptoms (Skowron & Friedlander, 1998), cope better with stress and solve problems better (Murdock & Gore, 2004), have high relationship satisfaction, effective problem-solving skills, high academic achievement and psychological adjustment (Skowron, 2000), few relationship problems (Wei et al., 2005), high psychological maturity and fewer problem behaviors (Gavazziet al., 1993), high psychological well-being levels (Elieson & Rubin, 2001; Skowron et al., 2003; Skowron & Schmitt, 2003; Skowron et al., 2009), high self-esteem (Sarıkaya et al., 2018), and healthy interpersonal relations (Skowron et al., 2009) and it can also be argued that their general level of belonging is high.

According to another finding of the present study, it was found that as the level of self-dissociation increases in university students, their level of alienation also increases. When the literature was reviewed, Mann's (2001; 2005) study on the alienation of students in higher education argued that alienation in the learning environment might result from communication failure. An important factor that might alleviate the experience of alienation can be the presence of integrity or originality in relationships. A 3-year study on alienation among university students conducted by Keniston (1965) found that well-being, increased social change, lack of creativity at work, and declined utopian ideas contributed to apathy and withdrawal. Whyte's (1963) study on alienation conducted with university students reported that university students who had concrete targets were less alienated than students without clearly defined important roles. Rhea's (1968) study reported that the student's sense of powerlessness and meaninglessness elicited alienation potentially. Developing students' belief that they are in safe hands and that what they are doing has meaning may reduce the level of alienation. Weakness is understood as the probability or expectation that individuals' behaviors will have little effect on consequences. In other words, individuals with feelings of powerlessness believe that external forces (e.g., manipulation of others) determine their future. The students' sense of powerlessness stems from believing that they lack control over their work at school, are manipulated by teachers and administrators, and therefore have little they can do. Meaninglessness is defined as a state of alienation characterized by low expectations that predictions about the future are possible. A sense of inability to predict consequences tends to dominate much of student thinking. Students who have a sense of meaninglessness are not sure that a university education will help their future, and they are not sure about what they should believe about their future (Hoy, 1972). According to Bowen (1978), self-dissociation is the basis for relational and psychological adjustment, and a low-level differentiation theoretically brings with it problems such as chronic anxiety, psychological and physical distress, dissatisfaction, and affective reactivity (Miller et al., 2004). Another aspect of psychological adjustment,

which is theoretically (Bray & Harvey, 1992; Carter & McGoldrick, 1999) and empirically (Johnson et al., 2003) associated with dissociation, is identity development. Dissociation also appears to have unique effects on psychosocial development (Johnson & Buboltz, 2000; Johnson et al., 2003). For example, it can be argued that identity development and differentiation are important in affective reactions such as powerlessness and meaninglessness. Individuals who respond to environmental stimuli with affective variations or hypersensitivity (i.e., reactivity) appear to have less confidence in their self-autonomy with a less stable identity (self). Self-dissociation is also at the center of healthy psychosocial development (Jenkins et al., 2005).

As a result of the present study, it was found that there was a positive and moderately significant relationship between the total score of self-dissociation and the total score of general belonging, it was also found that there was a positive low-level and significant relationship with the total alienation score. A significant relationship was also detected between self-dissociation, general belonging, and student alienation. Based on this result, it can be argued that as the level of self-dissociation increases in university students, their level of general belonging also increases. The relationship between differentiation and a broader understanding of psychosocial development can be investigated. Also, studies investigating the role of healthy adult attachment and close relationships in the differentiation process seem to be necessary. As Bowen hypothesized, therapists may be advised to assist clients in resolving affective interruptions and the factors motivating them, especially those regarding identity formation.

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