



Research Article

The Relationship Between Differentiation of Self and Authentic Personality: The Mediating Role of Self-Compassion

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Abstract

This study explored how self-compassion may explain the link between differentiation of self and authentic personality. Although both constructs have strong theoretical relevance, little is known about how differentiation contributes to authenticity. Given that authenticity involves expressing a coherent and integrated sense of self across emotional, cognitive, behavioral, and moral domains, differentiation may provide its structural foundation. Therefore, it was examined whether self-compassion serves as a mediating regulatory mechanism through which differentiated capacities translate into authentic self-expression. Participants were 591 university students who completed measures of differentiation of self, self-compassion, and authentic personality. Results showed that self-compassion was positively related to authentic personality and partially mediated the relationship between I-position and authenticity. However, no significant mediation effects were found for emotional reactivity, emotional cut-off, or fusion with others. These findings suggest that maintaining a clear sense of self may foster authenticity, particularly when individuals relate to themselves with compassion, highlighting self-compassion as a pathway linking self-differentiation to authentic living.

Keywords: Differentiation of Self; Self-Compassion; Authentic Personality; Personality; Self and Family



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Authentic personality reflects the capacity to remain true to oneself across contexts by acting in accordance with deeply held values and identity rather than external pressures. Encompassing emotional awareness, cognitive clarity, behavioral congruence, and moral integrity, it represents an integrated functioning of the self and a core foundation of psychological well-being ([Kernis & Goldman, 2006](#); [Wood et al., 2008](#)). Understanding the processes that support this integration is therefore essential.

One potential foundation is self-differentiation. Within [Bowen's \(1976\)](#) framework, differentiation refers to maintaining a clear sense of self while remaining emotionally connected to others. The I-position reflects the capacity to regulate emotional reactivity without compromising relational balance, thereby facilitating the integration of emotion and reason. Yet structural capacity alone may not ensure authentic functioning. Self-compassion - defined by [Neff \(2003\)](#) as a kind and non-judgmental stance toward oneself – may serve as a regulatory pathway that softens



emotional intensity and promotes reflective processing, enabling differentiated capacities to translate into authentic self-expression.

Although differentiation and authentic personality have been examined separately (e.g., [Wood et al., 2008](#)), research on the mechanisms linking them remains limited. Focusing on young adults, a period of continued identity consolidation ([Arnett, 2000](#)), the present study examines self-compassion as a mediator between self-differentiation and authentic personality.

Accordingly, this study examines the relationship between self-differentiation and authentic personality, with self-compassion as a potential mediator. The next section outlines the theoretical framework and presents the research questions and hypotheses guiding the study.

Self- Differentiation

According to Bowen's Theory of Differentiation of Self, differentiation refers to an individual's ability to develop an autonomous sense of self while maintaining emotional connections with the family ([Bowen, 1976](#)). Differentiation is conceptualized along two dimensions: intrapersonal and interpersonal. The intrapersonal dimension reflects the capacity to balance emotions and cognitions, whereas the interpersonal dimension concerns the ability to balance autonomy and closeness in relationships ([Bowen, 1976](#); [Choi & Murdock, 2017](#); [Kerr & Bowen, 1988](#)). Intrapersonal differentiation involves I-position and emotional reactivity. I-position reflects the ability to think rationally and remain calm under stress, rather than responding impulsively, whereas emotional reactivity refers to being overwhelmed by strong emotions and responding automatically to external demands. Interpersonally, differentiation encompasses fusion with others and emotional cut-off. Fusion describes excessive enmeshment, in which personal boundaries blur and individuality is constrained. Emotional cut-off, in contrast, involves withdrawing or distancing oneself under relational stress, often as a defensive strategy. While such distancing may appear as independence, it often signals difficulty in managing relational emotions ([Bowen, 1976](#); [Kerr & Bowen, 1988](#)).

Individuals who achieve emotional differentiation within their family are able to adopt an I-position in both intrapersonal and interpersonal contexts. The I-position reflects a clear sense of self, firmly held values, and behavior guided by internal processes. Highly differentiated individuals can separate thoughts from emotions, remain calm under stress, and maintain a balance between individuality and togetherness in relationships. By contrast, individuals with lower differentiation may become fused in relationships, display heightened emotional reactivity, or withdraw emotionally when faced with intense relational demands ([Bowen, 1976](#); Hall, 1981; Kerr & Bowen,

1988). Research has demonstrated that high differentiation is associated with greater functionality, psychological resilience, hope, and well-being, whereas low differentiation relates to difficulties in goal pursuit, vulnerability to external influence, interpersonal challenges, and heightened negative affect including anger, depression, anxiety, and stress ([Bowen, 1976](#); [Boyes et al., 2017](#); [Choi & Murdock, 2017](#); [Hall, 1981](#); [Kerr & Bowen, 1988](#); [Lampis & Cataudella, 2019](#); [Sadeghi et al., 2020](#)). [Bowen \(1976\)](#) further distinguished between the solid (core) self and the pseudo self, corresponding to high and low self-differentiation. The solid self reflects one's beliefs, needs, and desires, independent of others' pressures or approval, while the pseudo self is shaped by relationally acquired values, aiming to gain approval or rewards. Individuals with high anxiety who are fused with others may lose their I-position and operate from the pseudo self ([Bowen, 1976](#); [Hall, 1981](#); [Kerr & Bowen, 1988](#)).

Authentic Personality

The concept of authentic personality has been discussed in ways that mirror Bowen's distinction between the solid and pseudo self (e.g., [Harter, 2002](#)). Various frameworks have addressed authenticity ([Kernis & Goldman, 2006](#); [Wood et al., 2008](#)). The Individual-Centered Authentic Personality Model ([Wood et al., 2008](#)), adopted in this study, comprises three dimensions: self-alienation, authentic living, and accepting external influence. Self-alienation captures clarity regarding internal processes and self-knowledge, authentic living reflects acting consistently with internal experiences, and accepting external influence represents the degree to which behavior is shaped by others' expectations. Higher authentic personality is indicated by low self-alienation, low acceptance of external influence, and high authentic living ([Wood et al., 2008](#)). Individuals with higher authentic personality report greater psychological and subjective well-being and lower levels of negative mental health outcomes such as depression and anxiety ([Kernis & Goldman, 2006](#); [Rathi & Lee, 2021](#); [Wood et al., 2008](#)). Research on the predictors of authenticity is still limited ([Boyraz & Kuhl, 2015](#); [Curun et al., 2020](#); [Zhang et al., 2019](#)). Based on differentiation of self, higher family differentiation is expected to predict higher authentic personality. High self-differentiation allows individuals to take an I-position, promoting loyalty to oneself and authentic behavior, while fusion and emotional reactivity may distance individuals from their true selves. [Mert \(2024\)](#) demonstrated that differentiation of self positively predicts authentic personality, with social anxiety partially mediating this relationship.

Understanding the mechanisms linking self-differentiation to authentic personality is essential.

Self-compassion as a mediator

Self-compassion – the ability to approach oneself with care and manage negative experiences without suppression or exaggeration – has been linked to both differentiation of self and authenticity ([Chew & Ang, 2023](#); [Neff, 2003, 2023](#); [Teixeira & Pereira, 2015](#); [Zhang et al., 2019](#)). [Neff \(2003, 2023\)](#) conceptualized self-compassion across three dimensions: self-kindness versus self-judgment, common humanity versus isolation, and mindfulness versus over-identification. Self-compassion promotes emotional resilience and well-being, distinct from self-esteem ([Barnard & Curry, 2011](#); [Neff, 2011](#); [Özdemir & Sağlam, 2024](#)). Conceptually, self-compassion aligns with the I-position, allowing individuals to act rationally rather than reactively and supporting authentic expression.

Individuals who cannot take an I-position often over-identify with difficulties, remain fused with others, or withdraw emotionally, limiting authentic self-expression. Research indicates that self-compassion mediates the link between differentiation of self and authenticity ([Teixeira & Pereira, 2015](#); [Zhang et al., 2019](#)). When examining the relationship between self-differentiation and self-compassion, both share the core of maintaining a clear sense of self while regulating emotional reactivity. Self-compassion fosters self-acceptance and reduces negative emotional intensity, supporting balanced and rational responses ([Neff, 2003](#)). It is particularly beneficial for individuals with lower differentiation, who may be more prone to emotional fusion. Limited evidence suggests that self-compassion mediates the link between self-differentiation and outcomes such as self-concealment ([Yildiz, 2023](#)) and subjective well-being ([Okan Er & Deniz, 2022](#)).

In terms of the relationship between self-compassion and authenticity, [Bayır-Toper et al. \(2022\)](#) found that authenticity moderates the relationship between self-compassion and compassion for others, while [Zhang et al. \(2019\)](#) showed that self-compassion enhances authenticity by reducing fear of negative evaluation and increasing optimism. Similarly, [Teixeira & Pereira \(2015\)](#), [Barnard & Curry \(2011\)](#), and [Muris & Petrocchi \(2017\)](#) reported that self-compassion fosters self-acceptance, balanced awareness, and buffers against mental health difficulties. Taken together, these theoretical and empirical findings suggest that self-compassion may function as a meaningful psychological pathway through which the regulatory capacities inherent in self-differentiation are reflected in authentic personality functioning

Present study

Building on the theoretical and empirical framework outlined above, the present study examines the mediating role of self-compassion in the relationship between differentiation of self and

authentic personality. As discussed above, self-compassion may function as a meaningful psychological mechanism linking differentiation of self to authentic personality. Although prior research has demonstrated significant associations among differentiation of self, self-compassion, and authenticity (e.g., [Okan Er & Deniz, 2022](#); [Teixeira & Pereira, 2015](#); [Yıldız, 2023](#); [Zhang et al., 2019](#)), the mediating role of self-compassion in the relationship between differentiation of self and authentic personality has not been sufficiently examined.

This study was conducted with university students, who are typically in the emerging adulthood phase ([Arnett, 2000](#)). Identity exploration begins in adolescence, but most decisions about love, work, and worldviews occur during emerging adulthood. As [Arnett \(2000\)](#) notes, emerging adults who maintain frequent contact with parents – particularly those still living at home – may experience lower psychological adjustment, and close family relationships are not guaranteed. These transitional experiences make differentiation of self and self-compassion particularly important for authentic personality development.

Accordingly, the present study aims to test this mediating mechanism within a structural regression (SR) model. The following hypotheses were proposed:

H₁. The proposed SR model will demonstrate acceptable fit to the data.

H₂. Differentiation of self will have a significant direct effect on self-compassion.

H₃. Self-compassion will have a significant direct effect on authentic personality.

H₄. Self-compassion will have a significant mediating effect on the relationship between differentiation of self and authentic personality.

Method

Design

This study employed a cross-sectional correlational design ([Fraenkel et al. 2012](#)) to examine the mediating role of self-compassion in the relationship between differentiation of self and authentic personality using structural regression model (SR model).

Participants

The final analytical sample consisted of 591 students enrolled in undergraduate, graduate, and pedagogical formation certificate programs at a public university during the 2022–2023 academic year. One participant was excluded due to substantial missing responses across measurement

instruments. All structural equation modeling (SEM) analyses were conducted with the final sample.

Of the participants, 449 (76%) were female and 142 (24%) were male. The mean age was 23.88 years ($SD = 5.88$). Regarding marital status, 506 (86%) were single and 85 (14%) were married. Thirty-six participants (6.1%) did not report the program they attended. Therefore, program-based descriptive analyses were conducted with 555 participants. Among these participants, 419 (75.5%) were female and 136 (24.5%) were male. Of the 36 participants who did not report their program of study, 30 were female and 6 were male; these participants were excluded only from program-level descriptive analyses.

Table 1.

Gender and Program Distribution of Participants Who Reported Their Academic Program

Program	Gender					
	Female		Male		Total	
	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%
Guidance and Psychological Counseling	60	10.8	14	2.5	74	13.4
Science Education	34	6.1	7	1.3	41	7.4
Preschool Education	31	5.6	2	0.4	33	6
Special Education	73	13.2	26	4.7	99	17.8
Mathematics Education	4	0.7	1	0.2	5	0.9
Basic Education	3	0.5	1	0.2	4	0.7
Fine Arts Education	3	0.5	1	0.2	4	0.7
Philosophy and Related Sciences Education	11	2.0	5	0.9	16	2.9
French Language Education	7	1.3	1	0.2	8	1.4
Turkish Language and Literature Education	6	1.1	0	0	6	1.1
Geography Education	7	1.3	3	0.5	10	1.8
History Education	7	1.3	7	1.3	14	2.5
Arabic Language Education	36	6.5	14	2.5	50	9
English Language Education	7	1.3	1	0.2	8	1.4
Pedagogical Formation Education Certificate Program	85	15.3	35	6.3	120	21.6
Graduate Programs	45	8.1	18	3.2	63	11.4
Total	419	75.5	136	24.5	555	100

Instruments

In this study, Turkish versions of the Authenticity Scale (AS), Self-Compassion Scale - Short Form (SCS-SF), and Differentiation of Self Inventory–Short Form (DSI-SF) were used as measurement instruments. These instruments, along with a personal information form, were administered voluntarily to participants in face-to-face sessions during the 2022–2023 academic year, following approval from the Ethics Committee. Ethical approval was obtained from the relevant institutional review board prior to data collection. Participants were informed about the voluntary nature of the study, confidentiality of responses, and their right to withdraw at any time.

The Self-Compassion Scale Short Form (SCS-SF; [Neff, 2003](#)) consists of 12 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale. This short form was developed by selecting items from the long form that capture the six dimensions of self-compassion: self-kindness, self-judgment, common humanity, isolation, mindfulness, and over-identification. Items in the self-judgment, isolation, and over-identification subscales are reverse-coded, so higher total scores indicate greater self-compassion. Cronbach's α for the English version ranges from .54 to .86. A second-order CFA model, with six dimensions as first-order factors and overall self-compassion as a higher-order construct, demonstrated good fit (CFI = .97, NNFI = .96, RMSEA = .08, SRMR = .077). In the Turkish adaptation ([Yildirim & Sari, 2018](#)), an 11-item version (one item removed due to low factor loading) retained the bipolar structure of self-compassion, with acceptable fit indices (CFI = .95, NNFI = .94, RMSEA = .06) and Cronbach's α values between .71 and .75. In the present study, the 12-item version of the scale was administered.

The Authenticity Scale (AS; [Wood et al., 2008](#)) measures authenticity across three dimensions: self-alienation, authentic living, and accepting external influence, using 12 items rated on a 7-point Likert scale. Lower scores on self-alienation and accepting external influence indicate higher authenticity; therefore, items in these subscales were reverse-coded in the current study so that higher scores reflect higher authenticity. Factor analyses and parallel analyses in the original study supported a three-dimensional structure, and test–retest reliability ranged from .78 to .91. The Turkish adaptation with university students ([İlhan & Özdemir, 2013](#)) confirmed the three-dimensional structure (RMSEA = .06, CFI = .96, IFI = .96, GFI = .92), although subscale Cronbach's α values were slightly lower (.62–.79) but comparable to the original scale.

The Differentiation of Self Inventory – Short Form (DSI-SF; [Drake et al., 2015](#)) contains 20 items rated on a 6-point Likert scale, measuring differentiation of self across four dimensions: I-position,

emotional reactivity, emotional cut-off, and fusion with others. Items in the emotional reactivity, emotional cut-off, and fusion subscales, as well as one item in the I-position subscale (item 19), are reverse-coded. Higher scores across all subscales indicate higher levels of differentiation of self. In the Turkish adaptation with university students and adults ([Sarıkaya et al., 2018](#)), the four-factor structure demonstrated acceptable fit (RMSEA = .07, CFI = .91, NNFI = .90, GFI = .89, AGFI = .86, SRMR = .07), and Cronbach's α coefficients ranged from .68 to .80.

Finally, a personal information form developed by the researchers was used to collect demographic data from participants.

Procedure

Data were initially collected from **592 students** enrolled in undergraduate, graduate, and pedagogical formation certificate programs at a public university during the 2022–2023 academic year using a convenience sampling method. Students were approached during scheduled class sessions after permission had been obtained from course instructors. The researcher informed students about the purpose of the study, explained that participation was voluntary and confidential, and invited them to participate.

Data were collected in face-to-face sessions, and no incentives were provided. Inclusion criteria were being enrolled as a student at the university during the 2022–2023 academic year and providing informed consent. One participant was excluded due to substantial missing data across measurement instruments. Therefore, the final analytical sample consisted of **591 participants**. All structural equation modeling (SEM) analyses were conducted using this final sample.

Data Analysis

Prior to conducting the analyses, missing data were assessed, and a single participant with incomplete responses on the SCS-SF (six items), AS (two items), and DSI-SF (three items) was excluded, yielding a final sample of $N = 591$ for all subsequent analyses. The sample size was evaluated in terms of adequacy for structural equation modeling (SEM). Methodological guidelines recommend a minimum sample size of at least 200 cases or 10–20 participants per estimated parameter for stable SEM estimation ([Kline, 2011](#)). With a final analytical sample of $N = 591$, the study exceeds commonly recommended thresholds, ensuring adequate statistical power and model stability. One SCS-SF item also had missing data, which was imputed using the Expectation Maximization algorithm. Descriptive statistics, correlations, and internal

consistency (Cronbach's α) were then calculated using SPSS Version 22. In Model 2, self-compassion was treated as an observed variable based on factor scores, and reliability analyses were conducted for both the total scales and factor scores.

To evaluate the validity of the constructs, Confirmatory Factor Analyses (CFA) were conducted. For self-compassion, a second-order CFA was specified with six dimensions as first-order factors and overall self-compassion as a higher-order construct. Similarly, authentic personality was modeled as a higher-order construct with three dimensions: self-alienation, authentic living, and accepting external influence. Differentiation of self was represented with four factors: I-position, emotional reactivity, emotional cut-off, and fusion with others. Due to multivariate non-normality, Robust Maximum Likelihood estimation (MLR) was used in Mplus Version 7.0 ([Muthén & Muthén, 2012](#)), reporting Satorra-Bentler scaled χ^2 (S-B χ^2). Model fit was evaluated using established criteria: CFI \geq .90, TLI \geq .90, RMSEA \leq .08, and SRMR \leq .08 ([Browne & Cudeck, 1992](#); [Hu & Bentler, 1999](#)).

Next, a fully latent structural regression (SR) model was specified to test the mediating role of self-compassion between differentiation of self dimensions and authentic personality. SR models allow for the simultaneous estimation of relationships among latent variables while accounting for measurement error, making them ideal for testing mediation with constructs represented by multiple indicators ([Anderson & Gerbing, 1988](#); [Kline, 2011](#)). CFA results supported the existence of higher-order constructs for both self-compassion and authentic personality, which were represented with their dimensions and indicators in the SR model. The initial model showed poor fit, so alternative SR models were tested using MLR estimation. Direct and indirect effects were estimated as structural parameters ([Blömeke et al., 2021](#)).

Although longitudinal data are preferred for testing mediation, cross-sectional designs can provide valid insights when temporal ordering is theoretically justified ([Fairchild & McDaniel, 2017](#); [Li et al., 2024](#); [Liu et al., 2024](#); [Poku et al., 2025](#); [Zhou et al., 2024](#)). In this study, temporal assumptions were informed by prior research on predictors of authenticity ([Boyraz & Kuhl, 2015](#); [Curun et al., 2020](#); Zhang et al., 2019), the relationship between differentiation of self and self-compassion ([Teixeira & Pereira, 2015](#)), and the effects of self-compassion on authenticity ([Chew & Ang, 2023](#); [Zhang et al., 2019](#)). Representing latent constructs with multiple indicators in SR modeling helps reduce potential bias due to measurement error, while the factor scores for self-compassion served as observed variables to preserve precision ([Hayes & Preacher, 2010](#); [Schuler et al.,](#)



2025). As such, the direct and indirect effects in this study are interpreted as associations rather than causal relationships.

To evaluate mediation with cross-sectional data, bias-corrected bootstrapping was used. This resampling approach repeatedly draws samples from the data to empirically estimate confidence intervals for mediation effects and is recommended for maintaining statistical power and controlling Type I error (Fairchild & McDaniel, 2017; MacKinnon et al., 2004, 2012). By combining SR modeling with bootstrapping, this study provides robust evidence for the mediating role of self-compassion while acknowledging the limitations inherent in cross-sectional data.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the Ethics Committee of Gazi University prior to data collection. All procedures were conducted in accordance with institutional ethical standards and the principles of the Declaration of Helsinki. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, and the confidentiality of their responses. Written informed consent was obtained from all participants before participation.

Data can be provided by the corresponding author upon request. However, since the study data was collected in the 2022-2023 academic year, and also since permission was obtained from the ethics committee by stating that data would be collected only once without obtaining the identity information of the participants within the confidentiality of the ethics committee, it is impossible to collect data from the same participants for the second time

Results

Psychometric Properties of Measures, Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

Initially, the psychometric properties of the measures used were examined. Also, descriptive statistics and correlations for the measures used to represent the constructs in the SR model were calculated. These findings are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2.

Descriptives, Cronbach α values, and the correlations for subscales' scores of Differentiation of Self Inventory-Short Form, Self-Compassion Scale-Short Form scores, and Authenticity Scale scores

Scale	M	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis	α	EC	FW	IP	SC	Authenticity
ER	17.39	5.94	.09	-.77	.81	.21**	.63**	.47**	.55**	0.53**
EC	10.24	3.47	-.31	-.89	.79	1.00	.20**	.10**	.24**	0.24**
FW	18.71	4.77	-.73	-.15	.78		1.00	.51**	.55**	0.67**
IP	24.37	4.33	-.98	.97	.70			1.00	.59**	0.56**
SC	0.00	.53	-.14	-.36	.84				1.00	0.59**
Authenticity	51.81	10.63	-0.34	-0.59	.82					1.00

Note. M and SD represent mean and standard deviation, respectively. ER: Emotional reaction, EC: Emotional cutoff, FW: Fusion with others, IP: I position; SC: Self-compassion; ** $p < .01$.

Descriptive statistics presented in Table 2 indicate that the measures related to the constructs specified in the SR model are approximately normally distributed except for the measures obtained from the "Authentic Living" subscale. It is seen that these scores have a left-skewed and peaked distribution. This does not cause a problem since the MLR estimation method used in this study can cope with the non-normality of the data especially with high kurtosis values. According to the correlations, "multicollinearity" is not a problem. Low and moderate relationships (mostly significant) were observed among these constructs. Cronbach α values calculated for the measures used in this study varied between $\alpha = .70$ -.81 for the subscales of DSI-SF, $\alpha = .57$ -.83 for the subscales of AS, and $\alpha = .84$ for the total score of SCS-SF. All Cronbach's alpha values, except for the α value for the Authentic Living (AL) subscale of the AS Scale, indicated that these scales and subscales can measure the relevant constructs and dimensions with an acceptable error. The fact that the authentic living dimension was not specified as an observed variable in the SR model but as a dimension of the latent construct of authenticity and represented through its indicators ensured that the error related to these measures was taken into account in the model estimation. For each construct included in the SR model, the measurement models were specified and tested using CFA. Findings obtained from CFAs are shown in Table 3.



Table 3.
Fit Indices for measurement models tested in this study

Scale	Model	SB- χ^2 (df)	CFI	TLI	RMSEA	SRMR	λ_s	ϵ_s
Differentiation of Self Inventory-Short Form	First-order CFA model: Four dimensions are factors	548.883** (163)	.90	.88	.063	.056	.39-.85	.28-.85
Authenticity Scale	Second-order CFA model: Authenticity is a higher-order factor, and three dimensions are first-order factors	124.620** (51)	.97	.96	.049	.038	.25-.94	.30-.93
Self-Compassion Scale-Short Form	Second-order CFA model: Self-compassion is a higher-order factor, and six dimensions are first-order factors	186.772** (48)	.91	.87	.070	.048	.43-.95	.38-.82

Note: ** $p < 0.01$

Considering the common criteria for model fit evaluation adopted in this study, fit indices given in Table 3 indicate that all CFA models show an acceptable fit to related data. These findings suggest that the four dimensions construct of differentiation of self could be specified as distinct latent variables, self-compassion could be considered a higher-order construct with its six dimensions and authenticity could also be taken into account as a higher-order construct with its three dimensions.

Results of structural regression model estimation

In this study, a completely latent structural model (SR Model 1) was specified and tested for the first research question. In this model, differentiation of self was represented with four dimensions and indicators, self-compassion was represented as a higher-order construct with six dimensions and indicators, and authenticity was represented as a higher-order construct with three dimensions and indicators. Since model fit indices indicated poor fit (S-B $\chi^2 = 2154.170^*$ (df=882, $p < .000$), CFI = .85, TLI = .83, RMSEA = .05, SRMR = .06), the modification indices (MI) were examined. Modification indices were proposed to draw paths between the dimensions of the self-compassion construct and the MI values related to them were quite high (varied between MI=14.808-45.299). These high MI values indicated that the dimensions of the self-compassion

construct were strongly related internally, and it was more appropriate to define this construct as a general self-compassion construct in the SR model as suggested in the literature (Raes et al., 2011). Therefore, based on the second-order CFA model specified for the factor structure of the SCS-SF, self-compassion factor scores were obtained as a higher-order construct and the self-compassion construct was represented by this measure in Model 2. SR Model 2 is presented in Figure 1 below.

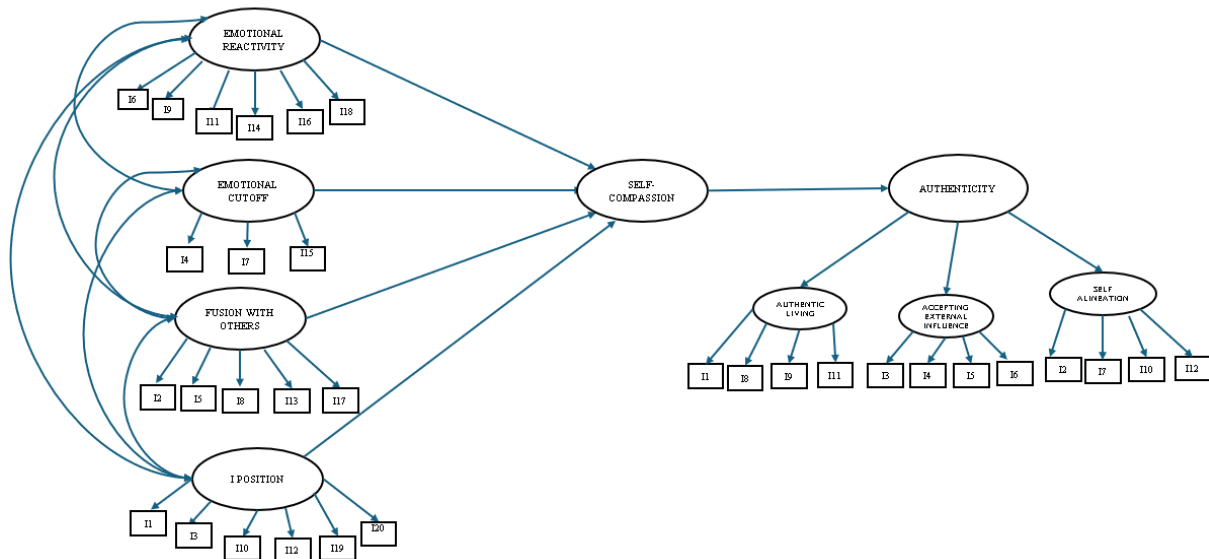


Figure 1.

Model 2: SR model specified for the relationships between the dimensions of differentiation of self, self-compassion, and authenticity

The initial model demonstrated inadequate fit ($S-B \chi^2 = 1370.057^*$, $df = 482$, $p < .001$; $CFI = .86$; $TLI = .84$; $RMSEA = .06$; $SRMR = .09$), prompting examination of modification indices. An MI-supported and theoretically defensible path from “fusion with others” to “authenticity” ($MI = 35.476$) was therefore added, yielding SR Model 3. This re-specification improved model fit ($S-B \chi^2 = 1172.352^*$, $df = 481$, $p < .001$; $CFI = .90$; $TLI = .88$; $RMSEA = .05$; $SRMR = .06$), and associations among differentiation-of-self dimensions, self-compassion, and higher-order authenticity were interpreted using the standardized estimates from this final model. As SEM is based on covariances, these relations are noncausal and reflect the extent to which one variable explains variance in another. Standardized estimates are presented in Table 4.

Table 4.
Parameter estimates for the SR Model 3

Parameter	Estimate	SE	Confidence Interval (95%)	p
Factor relationships				
Emotional reactivity - Emotional cutoff	0.254**	0.05	-----	.000
Emotional reactivity - Fusion with others	0.761**	0.03	-----	.000
Emotional reactivity - I position	0.622**	0.042	-----	.000
Emotional cutoff - Fusion with others	0.254**	0.052	-----	.000
Emotional cutoff - I position	0.182**	0.06	-----	.002
Fusion with others - I position	0.777**	0.042	-----	.000
Direct effects (β)				
Emotional reactivity \rightarrow Self-compassion	0.277**	0.07	-----	.000
Emotional Self \rightarrow Self-compassion cutoff	0.113**	0.041	-----	.005
Fusion with Others \rightarrow Self-compassion	-0.083	0.109	-----	.444
I position \rightarrow Self-compassion	0.595**	0.081	-----	.000
Self-compassion \rightarrow Authenticity	0.171**	.056	-----	.002
Fusion with others \rightarrow Authenticity	0.863**	0.052	0.758-0.967	.000
Indirect effects (β)				
Emotional reactivity \rightarrow Self-compassion \rightarrow Authenticity	0.047	0.02	0.007-0.088	.019
Emotional reactivity \rightarrow Self-compassion \rightarrow Authenticity cutoff	0.019	0.01	0.000-0.040	.047
Fusion with others \rightarrow Self-compassion \rightarrow Authenticity	-0.014	0.02	-0.059- 0.030	.476
I position \rightarrow Self-compassion \rightarrow Authenticity	0.102**	0.038	0.023-0.181	.008
Explained Variance (R^2)				
Self-compassion	0.579**	0.037	-----	.000
Authenticity	0.956***	0.05	-----	.000

Note: SE: Standard error; ** $p < .01$.

Table 4 indicates low-to-moderate positive correlations among the differentiation-of-self dimensions, with the strongest association observed between “fusion with others” and “I-position.” Addressing Research Question 2, both “emotional reactivity” and “emotional cut-off” significantly predicted self-compassion ($\beta = 0.277$, $SE = 0.07$, $p < .01$; $\beta = 0.113$, $SE = 0.04$, $p < .01$), although the magnitude of these effects was modest. Because higher scores represent lower levels of the respective characteristics, individuals demonstrating better emotional regulation and reduced reactive responding reported higher self-compassion. The path from emotional cut-off remained significant ($\beta = 0.113$, $SE = 0.041$, $p < .01$), whereas “fusion with others” was nonsignificant ($\beta = -0.083$, $SE = 0.109$, $p > .01$). “I-position” emerged as the strongest predictor of self-compassion ($\beta = 0.595$, $SE = 0.595$, $p < .01$), highlighting the centrality of maintaining a coherent, autonomous, and value-consistent sense of self.

Regarding Research Question 3, self-compassion significantly predicted authenticity ($\beta = 0.171$, $SE = 0.056$, $p < .01$). Individuals who accept personal limitations as part of the shared human condition reported higher levels of authenticity, consistent with the conceptual model of self-compassion as a facilitator of self-aligned behavior.

For Research Question 4, the indirect effects of “emotional reactivity” ($\beta = 0.047$, $SE = 0.02$, $p > .01$), “emotional cut-off” ($\beta = -0.014$, $SE = 0.02$, $p > .01$), and “fusion with others” ($\beta = -$, $SE = 0.002$, $p > .01$) were nonsignificant, indicating that self-compassion did not mediate these relationships. In contrast, the indirect effect of “I-position” was significant ($\beta = 0.102$, $SE = 0.038$, $p < .01$), demonstrating that a stable, differentiated, and self-directed stance enhances authenticity through greater self-compassion.

Overall, the four dimensions of differentiation of self accounted for 58% of the variance in self-compassion, and the full structural model accounted for 96% of the variance in authenticity. These high values likely reflect the modeling of differentiation of self and authenticity as higher-order latent constructs with multiple indicators and controlled measurement error, enabling a more precise estimation of their interrelations.



Discussion

This study examined the direct and indirect relationships among the dimensions of differentiation of self, authentic personality, and self-compassion, with a particular focus on the mediating role of self-compassion in the relationship between differentiation of self and authentic personality. After confirming that the structural model adequately fit the data, the research hypotheses were addressed sequentially.

In the present study, the first hypothesis tested is that differentiation of self will have a significant direct effect on self-compassion. As noted in the introduction, self-compassion helps regulate intense emotions and supports rational responding ([Neff, 2003](#)), suggesting a positive link with I-position. Similarly to our findings, [Okan Er & Deniz \(2022\)](#) found that differentiation of self significantly and positively predicts self-compassion. Emotional reactivity and emotional cut-off, reflecting difficulties in managing emotions, were expected to show weaker associations. Fusion with others, however, involves merging one's self with others and prioritizing others' emotions over one's own, which can limit self-awareness – a key prerequisite for self-compassion ([Hess & Pickett, 2010](#); [Younas & Rasheed, 2018](#)) – and was therefore not expected to show a direct relationship.

Consistent with these expectations, I-position showed a strong positive association with self-compassion, emotional reactivity and cut-off were modestly related, and fusion was not significant. These results suggest that a well-differentiated self facilitates self-compassion, while emotional difficulties may hinder it, and that individuals experiencing fusion may need to develop emotional separation before self-compassion can emerge. Overall, the hypothesis was partially supported.

The second hypothesis tested in the present study is that self-compassion will have a significant direct effect on authentic personality. Consistent with expectations, higher levels of self-compassion were associated with higher authenticity. Authentic personality reflects a clear sense of self and adherence to one's values despite external pressures ([Wood et al., 2008](#)). Self-compassion likely fosters authenticity by reducing defensiveness and promoting self-enhancement. Prior research supports this notion; for instance, [Zhang et al. \(2019\)](#) demonstrated that self-compassion buffers against fear of negative evaluation, shame, and reduced optimism, all of which can impede authenticity. [Neff \(2011\)](#) similarly notes that self-compassion entails lower ego defensiveness and greater self-enhancement, strengthening the authentic self. [Guenther et](#)



[al. \(2024\)](#) further highlighted that self-enhancement positively relates to authenticity, reinforcing the idea that self-compassion can support authentic self-expression by fostering a balanced and positive self-concept. Furthermore, similarly to our findings, previous studies also found that authenticity and self-compassion were positively related (i.e., [Aydın Sünbül & Özcan, 2024](#); [Chew & Ang, 2023](#)).

The third hypothesis tested in the present study is that self-compassion will have a significant mediating effect on the relationship between differentiation of self and authentic personality. This expectation is based on the idea that differentiation of self, by promoting emotional regulation and a clear sense of self, provides the foundation for self-compassion to emerge. In turn, self-compassion facilitates authentic personality by enabling individuals to relate to their internal experiences with kindness, mindfulness, and balanced awareness, reducing defensiveness and fear-based self-presentation ([Neff, 2003](#); [Teixeira & Pereira, 2015](#); [Zhang et al., 2019](#)). The results revealed that self-compassion significantly mediated the relationship only for the I-position dimension; emotional reactivity, emotional cut-off, and fusion did not show significant indirect effects. This finding is consistent with both theory and previous empirical research. I-position reflects the ability to distinguish between thoughts and emotions, remain rational under stress, and respond thoughtfully rather than reactively ([Bowen, 1976](#); [Kerr and Bowen., 1988](#)). Individuals with high I-position can employ self-compassion to regulate emotional responses, maintain self-understanding, and engage in mindful reflection, thereby enhancing authentic self-expression (Neff, 2003). Relevant findings of previous studies are in line with our findings. For instance, [Okan Er & Deniz \(2022\)](#) found that self-compassion fully mediated the relationship between differentiation of self and subjective well-being. In another study, it was found that differentiation of self significantly impacted on authenticity ([Mert, 2024](#)).

In contrast, individuals high in emotional reactivity, cut-off, or fusion may respond automatically to emotional stimuli, limiting opportunities for self-calming, reflection, and self-compassion. As a result, the development of authenticity is constrained. [Teixeira and Pereira \(2015\)](#) similarly emphasize that self-understanding fosters authenticity by promoting balanced awareness of emotion and thought, a characteristic likely present in individuals with high differentiation of self.

Lastly, this study highlights the value of examining emerging adults, as identity exploration is more consolidated than in adolescence but continues in this period, making self-related capacities such

as self-differentiation and self-compassion particularly important for authentic personality development.

Overall, these findings suggest that the I-position dimension of self-differentiation plays a critical role in fostering an authentic personality through self-compassion. In other words, individuals capable of maintaining a clear sense of self, adhering to personal values, and regulating their emotions are more likely to cultivate self-compassion, which in turn supports authentic living.

Limitations and future research suggestions

This study has several limitations. First, convenience sampling limits generalizability, and future studies with more diverse samples are needed. Second, the cross-sectional design prevents causal inference, underscoring the need for longitudinal research on differentiation of self, self-compassion, and authentic personality.

Although the second-order CFA for the self-compassion scale showed acceptable fit, modeling self-compassion as a higher-order construct with six dimensions produced poor fit, which may have constrained mediation effects. Future work should consider alternative measures that better capture its multidimensional structure.

Finally, the three student subgroups (undergraduate, pedagogical formation, graduate) were too small for multi-group analyses. Future research could examine subgroup differences and integrate additional variables such as well-being, resilience, stress, and emotion regulation to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how I-position and self-compassion relate to authentic personality.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that I-position and self-compassion are positively associated with authentic functioning. Individuals who maintain a coherent sense of self and respond to personal difficulties with kindness appear better able to act in accordance with their values.

These findings contribute to the literature by suggesting that self-compassion may serve as an adaptive emotion regulation process that supports self-regulation and value-consistent behavior. In this way, authentic living can be understood not only as a personality disposition but also as a self-regulatory process shaped by how individuals relate to their own emotional experiences.

From an applied perspective, interventions that foster self-compassion alongside emotion regulation skills may strengthen self-differentiation and support authentic functioning. In this sense, furthermore, strengthening the levels of I-position in individuals through clinical or counseling practices simultaneously may increase their levels of self-compassion and in turn, they may be supportive in enabling authentic life. Such efforts may also contribute to psychological well-being throughout possible life crises that individuals may face.

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