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DIFFERENTIATION OF SELF AS A PREDICTOR OF CAPACITY FOR MENTALIZATION

Abstract

The purpose of this research was to explore if the differentiation of self has a role in predicting capacity for mentalization in female samples. The data was collected using The Reflective Functioning Questionnaire (RFQ) and The Differentiation of Self Inventory (DSI) on a sample of 105 female participants, aged 18-50 years ($M = 30.61$, $SD = 8.09$). Both models containing self-differentiation as predictors were significant. The first model that predicted certainty about mental states explains 32.1% of the variance ($R^2 = .32$, $F(6,98) = 7.732$, $p = .000$), with I position ($\beta = .459$, $p = .000$) and emotional cutoff ($\beta = -.245$, $p = .024$) as significant predictors. The second model that predicted uncertainty about mental states explains 40.4% of the variance ($R^2 = .40$, $F(6,98) = 11.086$, $p = .000$), with age ($\beta = .233$, $p = .007$), education ($\beta = -.208$, $p = .024$), and emotional reactivity ($\beta = .323$, $p = .005$) as significant predictors. The obtained results indicate that different aspects of the differentiation of self can predict certainty and uncertainty about mental states in the female sample, but also that when it comes to phenomenon such as capacity for mentalization, certain sociodemographic variables (e.g., age, education) might play more important role than it was previously thought. Further research on this matter, with a bigger and more diverse sample, is strongly advised.

Keywords: mentalization, self-differentiation, emotional reactivity, emotional cutoff

Introduction

This research aimed to explore the relationship between the capacity for mentalization and the level of self-differentiation. These two concepts are similar in the way that they both refer to both internal, psychological processes and the interpersonal level of functioning of an individual. Both concepts refer to successful control of certain internal states and maintenance of adequate relationships with others, so it is assumed that these phenomena could be related.

The concept of **self-differentiation** is defined as a degree to which a person can balance emotional and intellectual functioning, but also intimacy and autonomy in relationships with others (Bowen, 1993). On an internal, psychological level,

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self-differentiation includes the (intrapersonal) capacity to distinguish thoughts from feelings (the choice of being driven by emotions or intellect) and includes the (interpersonal) ability to preserve autonomy in the context of deep intimacy with significant others (Bowen, 1976). Self-differentiation refers to the ability to experience intimacy with others, but also to be able to maintain a clearly defined feeling of self and independence from the person with whom the intimate relationship is formed. Hence, differentiation enables flexible boundaries that allow intimacy and physical unity, and connection with others, without the fear of merging with them (Kerr, 1988, as cited in Skowron & Friedlander, 1998; Bowen, 1993). This concept resembles the capacity to maintain autonomous thinking and achieve a clear, coherent sense of self in the context of emotional relationships with significant others (Bowen, 1976).

People with low self-differentiation stay emotionally stuck in the positions that they used to take in their families of origin, have few firm beliefs, and seek acceptance and approval above all, whilst conforming to the environment and basing their self-confidence on acceptance from others (Bowen, 1976). Also, people with low differentiation can be extremely emotionally distant, and isolated from others, denying the importance of the family while often bragging about their emancipation and independence from their parents (Nichols & Schwartz, 1984). In both cases, whether the person experiences separation as terrifying and overwhelming or intimacy as threatening, it describes a person with low self-differentiation. Low differentiation involves higher emotional reactivity and greater difficulty in maintaining a stable sense of self in close relationships, in remaining calm and thinking clearly in stressful situations, therefore the more pronounced psychological and physical symptoms (e.g., anxiety, somatization, depression, alcoholism, psychoticism) (Kerr & Bowen, 1988, as cited in Skowron & Dendy, 2004; Bowen, 1993).

Higher differentiation includes the ability to meaningfully consider various situations, the ability to maintain awareness of one's emotions, to experience and regulate strong emotions, or to easily "switch" to calm, logical reasoning during stressful situations. More differentiated people are more flexible, adjustable, and better at handling stress and they operate with equal success on both emotional and rational levels maintaining autonomy in intimate relationships. They are more capable of reflecting on, experiencing, and modulating their own emotions, dealing with uncertainty and ambiguity, and maintaining calmness in close relationships (Kerr & Bowen, 1988, as cited in Skowron & Dendy, 2004; Bowen, 1993). People with higher self-differentiation are better at problem-solving, demonstrate better psychological adjustment, more often maintain a good relationship with their family of origin, and form more satisfying marriages (Bowen, 1976).

One of the aspects of self-differentiation is emotional reactivity which is often conceptualized as a dimension of temperament and refers to an individual's characteristic threshold, intensity, and duration of affective arousal (Rothbart & Derryberry, 1981, as cited in Calkins et al., 2001). This dimension reflects the degree to which a person responds to environmental stimuli with emotional flooding, emotional lability, or hypersensitivity. The second aspect is the "I" position, which reflects a clearly defined sense of self and the ability to thoughtfully adhere to one's

own convictions when pressured to do otherwise (Skowron & Friedlander, 1998). This dimension indicates the ability to take the “I” position in different situations, indicates greater differentiation of self (Skowron & Schmitt, 2003), and implies expressing the individual’s emotions and thoughts responsibly and encouraging others to do the same. Both emotional reactivity and “I” position are considered intrapsychic dimensions (Yusuf et al., 2018).

The interpersonal dimensions of the relationship between the person and others are the following dimensions: Fusion with others and Emotional cutoff. Poorly differentiated individuals tend to engage in Fusion or Emotional cutoff, when overwhelmed by emotionality in their relationships (Kerr & Bowen, 1988, as cited in Skowron & Friedlander, 1998). The emotional cutoff reflects feeling threatened by intimacy and feeling excessive vulnerability in relations with others, hence the preference to stay away from others and deny the importance of closeness (Bowen, 1976). These items reflect fears of engulfment and behavioral defenses like distancing, denial, or over-functioning. Fusion with others is the last aspect of self-differentiation and reflects emotional over-involvement with others, which includes triangulation and over-identification with parents, i.e., accepting parents’ values, beliefs, and expectations without any questions (Skowron & Friedlander, 1998). These individuals perceive distancing themselves from others as a threatening element (Bowen, 1976).

When it comes to **capacity for mentalization**, it resembles the ability to form mental states as explanations for our own and others’ behavior. This term is defined as an aspect of preconscious imaginative mental activity and interpretation of human behavior in terms of intentional mental states (e.g., needs, wishes, feelings, beliefs, goals, purposes, and reasons). This concept is defined as “imaginative” because it requires thinking (imagination) of what other people might be thinking or feeling (Fonagy, 2006). This ability to understand one’s own mental states and the mental states of others arises from interpersonal experience, primarily from the relationship with primary objects and it is developed from infancy through childhood, crucially depending upon interaction with more mature minds (Fonagy, 2003, 2006). It contains self-reflective and interpersonal components and enables a person to interpret implicitly or explicitly their own or someone else’s actions as meaningful based on intentional mental states, such as wishes, needs, beliefs, or feelings (Bateman et al., 2007). Therefore, mentalization represents the base of our relationship with self and others. It allows us to understand our own and others’ behavior, to clearly distinguish outer from inner reality, internal mental and emotional states from interpersonal events, and allows us to hypothesize about the future behavior of others, based on specific cognitive skills (Fonagy, 2006).

Mentalization is a “meta-cognitive” activity because it implies the interpretation of thoughts and actions (thinking about thinking), allows us to give meaning to actions and thoughts (thinking about reasons why someone is thinking and acting in a specific manner), and is a key attribute of a person, opposed to the inanimate world. It relates to the “intentional stance” which is defined as a capacity to have projects, desires, and wishes (Dennet, 1987). Lastly, it is not a fixed element

of the mind, but perhaps a process, capacity, or ability that can be more or less present (Holmes, 2005).

Mentalization represents a fundamental psychological process that allows individuals to have a developed self and is necessary for establishing complex interpersonal interactions (Fonagy et al., 2005). This is the reason why more and more authors agree that processes of mentalization have a significant role in many mental disorders, especially personality disorders (e.g., borderline; Fonagy, 1989, as cited in Fonagy, 2006). Important indicators of high-quality mentalization are understanding that we cannot absolutely know what is happening in different minds and treating others as “objects” whose behaviors are under influence of their wishes and beliefs (Dennett, 1987).

The term “reflective functioning” is often used synonymously with the term mentalizing because the notion of mentalizing refers to the capacity to reflect on internal mental states about both the self and others (e.g., feelings, goals, attitudes, wishes; Fonagy et al., 2016). Different self-report measures have been used to assess constructs related to mentalizing (e.g., mindfulness, empathy, theory of mind, alexithymia, etc.), but reflective functioning has only been observed through certainty and uncertainty about mental states (Fonagy et al., 2016).

Certainty about mental states is one of the aspects of mentalization and has been positively correlated with empathy (Morandotti et al., 2018), measures of mindfulness and perspective-taking, and negatively with borderline personality disorder (BDP) features (Fonagy et al., 2016), alexithymia, and symptoms of autistic spectrum disorder (Morandotti et al., 2018). On the other hand, uncertainty about mental states includes poor imaginative, communication, and social skills and is correlated positively with BDP, eating disorder features, depression and impulsivity (Fonagy et al., 2016), alexithymia, and symptoms of autistic spectrum disorder (Morandotti et al., 2018), while it correlated negatively with mindfulness and perspective-taking (Fonagy et al., 2016). Besides certainty and uncertainty about mental states, borderline personality disorder features were also associated negatively with certain aspects of self-differentiation (Bagheri & Khodai, 2021).

Relationship with Sociodemographic Variables

In some studies, males reported greater difficulties in the separation-individuation process when compared to females (Lapsley et al., 2001). In the adolescent sample, males also showed lower scores on the mentalizing task and made more hypermentalizing errors than females (Poznyak et al., 2019). The levels of mentalization and other related constructs, such as the theory of mind, empathy, and emotional intelligence were higher in women than in men (Dimitrijević et al., 2017; Proverbio, 2016), except for the Self-Related Mentalization scale, where men scored higher or there were no significant differences between men and women (Jańczak, 2021). These results suggest that women may have a better ability to identify mental states that concern their orientation towards other people and higher motivation to think about mental states in general, but not necessarily focus on their

own emotions and thoughts. Authors suggest that this could possibly be the result of socialization, where women develop a belief in the importance of being empathic in social interactions rather than focusing on themselves, which is reflected in self-report questionnaires (Jańczak, 2021). Therefore, this research is focusing on women, so the relationship between the differentiation of self and mentalization could be explored in this sample and in a manner where the ability to be reflective, modulate one's own emotions, and maintain calm and autonomous in intimate relationships is set to predict capacity for mentalization. The goal is to examine the role of self-differentiation aspects in predicting reflective functioning in women.

When it comes to age differences, Bowen (1976) proposed that the levels of differentiation are absolute and that differentiation levels achieved in adulthood remain essentially similar to those experienced in childhood with the family of origin, but there still isn't enough data to support this statement. It was found that differences related to age emerged only on the emotional cutoff when differentiation of self was measured (Sadeghi et al., 2020). When it comes to mentalization, some research shows that mentalizing performance improves with age (Poznyak et al., 2019). Both studies were conducted on the adolescent samples and the research on the adult samples are lacking.

The educational level was not significantly associated with any of the aspects of self-differentiation, but these results were found in the sample of people with substance abuse disorder (Thorberg & Lyvers, 2006). In the sample of people who recently became parents, the results showed that a higher level of education was significantly associated with a higher level of mentalization, in both men and women (Pajulo et al., 2018). Additionally, significantly higher mentalization, empathy, and emotional intelligence were reported by participants with higher educational levels (Dimitrijević et al., 2017).

The Aim of The Research

This research aimed to examine the role of self-differentiation in predicting the capacity for mentalization and the relation among different aspects of the differentiation of self and certainty and uncertainty about mental states in women samples. Also, the aim is to explore associations of age and level of education with the two constructs, since there is not much research engaged in exploring this matter. Previous research regarding these differences is conducted on very specific samples, such as people with a substance disorder, schizophrenia, and adolescents. The results are often inconclusive and sometimes differ from theoretical expectations.

Method

Sample and Procedure

The convenience sampling method was used to recruit participants, who filled out an online survey. The sample consisted of 105 female participants, aged 18-50 years ($M=30.61$, $SD=8.09$). Participants had different levels of education: 27.6% of them finished high school ($N=29$), 48.6% of them finished college ($N=51$) and 22.9%

of them finished master's studies ($N=24$). Lastly, 1% of participants did not finish primary school ($N=1$).

Instruments

The Differentiation of Self Inventory (DSI; Skowron & Friedlander, 1998) was used to measure different aspects of self-differentiation. This 6-point Likert type scale consists of 43 items organized into 4 subscales, representing the operationalization of self-differentiation that the authors suggested, which are: Emotional Reactivity – it reflects the degree to which a person responds to environmental stimuli with emotional flooding, emotional lability, or hypersensitivity and includes items like: *“When someone close to me disappoints me, I withdraw from him or her for a time”*; I Position – this subscale reflects a clearly defined sense of self and the ability to thoughtfully adhere to one's own convictions when pressured to do otherwise and includes items like: *“I tend to remain pretty calm even under stress”*; Emotional Cutoff – it reflects fears of engulfment and behavioral defenses like distancing, denial, or over-functioning and includes items like: *“Our relationship might be better if my spouse or partner would give me the space I need”* and Fusion with Others – this dimension reflects emotional over-involvement with others and includes items like: *“I worry about people close to me getting sick, hurt, or upset”*. Reliability indicators (Cronbach alpha coefficients) that the authors of the inventory reported were 0.88 for Emotional Reactivity, 0.85 for I Position, 0.79 for Emotional Cutoff and 0.70 for Fusion with Others, while in this research Cronbach alpha coefficients are 0.83 for Emotional Reactivity, 0.68 for I Position, 0.87 for Emotional Cutoff and 0.64 for Fusion with Others.

The Reflective Functioning Questionnaire (RFQ; Fonagy et al., 2016) was used to measure capacity for mentalization. It is a 46-item inventory, where participants answered on a 6-point Likert scale. Polar-scored items were prone to bias in assessing reflective functioning because they confound hypermentalizing and hypomentalizing, so the authors focused on the 26 central response items and recoded them to assess the two subscales: Certainty about Mental States where these 26 items are recoded to 2, 1, 0, 0, 0, 0, and Uncertainty about Mental States where the same 26 items are recoded to 0, 0, 0, 0, 1, 2. Certainty about Mental States focused on the extent to which participants disagree with statements like *“I don't always know why I do what I do”* while recoding these items so that low agreement reflected hypermentalizing and high agreement reflected more genuine mentalizing. Uncertainty about Mental States in extreme assessed hypomentalizing and very high scores on items like *“Sometimes I do things without really knowing why”* reflected an almost complete lack of knowledge about mental states, while lower scores reflected more genuine mentalizing. Reliability indicators (Cronbach alpha coefficients) that the authors of the inventory reported were 0.63 for Uncertainty about Mental States and 0.67 for Certainty about Mental States, while in this research Cronbach alpha coefficients

are 0.80 for Uncertainty about Mental States and 0.76 for Certainty about Mental States.

Results

The results of the descriptive statistics for certainty and uncertainty about mental states and all the aspects of self-differentiation are shown in Table 1.

Table 1
Descriptive statistics for mentalization and self-differentiation

Research variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Skewness</i>	<i>Kurtosis</i>
RFC	9.78	5.59	0.45	-0.78
RFU	5.33	5.08	1.05	0.38
Emotional reactivity	4.35	0.92	-0.20	-0.64
I position	4.13	0.71	-0.42	0.03
Emotional cutoff	2.98	1.11	0.49	-0.33
Fusion with others	4.23	0.75	-0.13	-0.51

Note. RFC = Certainty about mental states; RFU = Uncertainty about mental states.

Correlations between all the aspects of mentalization, self-differentiation, and age are presented in table 2.

Table 2
Correlation among variables

	FWO	EC	IP	ER	RFU	RFC	Age
Age	-.130	.141	.120	.047	.198*	.158	
RFC	.009	-.272**	.494**	-.229*	-.336**		
RFU	.310**	.452**	-.152	.554**			
ER	.506**	.548**	-.238*				
IP	.070	-.076					
EC	.202*						
FWO							

Note. FWO=Fusion with others, EC=Emotional cutoff, IP=I position, ER=Emotional reactivity, RFC=Certainty about mental states, RFU=Uncertainty about mental states.
* < 0.05, ** < 0.01.

The results indicate that there are some significant correlations between mentalization and self-differentiation. Certainty about mental states is significantly associated with all the aspects of self-differentiation, except for Fusion with others. It negatively correlates with Emotional cutoff and Emotional reactivity (respectively $r = -.272$; $r = -.229$) and it correlates positively with the I position ($r = .494$). On the other hand, uncertainty about mental states correlates significantly with all the aspects of self-differentiation, except for the I position. It correlates moderately and positively with all other subscales of the differentiation of self. Certainty and uncertainty about mental states are significantly negatively correlated ($r = -.336$), which is very similar to the results found in the paper of the development and validation of the reflective functioning questionnaire ($r = -.349$; Fonagy et al., 2016).

Certain self-differentiation aspects are also significantly correlated. Emotional reactivity is moderately positively correlated with Fusion with others and Emotional cutoff (respectively $r = .506$; $r = .548$) and negatively with the I position ($r = -.238$). Also, Emotional cutoff is positively correlated with Fusion with others ($r = .202$). When it comes to age, it only correlates significantly and positively with Uncertainty about mental states ($r = .198$).

Linear regression analysis was used to explore the association between mentalization and self-differentiation.

Table 3

A predictive model of certainty about mental states

Block	Predictors	β	p	Model Summary
1	Age	.147	.143	$R = .16$, $R^2 = .02$, $R^2_{adj} = .01$, $F(2,102) = 1.75$, $p = .229$
	Education	.062	.536	
2	Age	.137	.134	$R = .56$, $R^2 = .32$, $R^2_{adj} = .28$, $F(6,98) = 7.73$, $p = .000$, $F_{change}(4,98) = 10.57$, $p = .000$
	Education	.045	.642	
	Emotional reactivity	-.009	.943	
	I position	.459	.000	
	Emotional cutoff	-.245	.024	
	Fusion with others	.057	.576	

The first model ($F(2,102) = 1.75$, $p = .229$) is not statistically significant, but the model contribution and the second model are ($F(6,98) = 7.73$, $p = .000$). The second model explains 32.1% of the variance of the certainty about mental states, with the I position ($\beta = .459$, $p = .000$) and Emotional cutoff ($\beta = -.245$, $p = .024$) as significant predictors.

Table 4*A predictive model of uncertainty about mental states*

Block	Predictors	β	p	Model Summary
1	Age	.261	.006	$R=.40, R^2=.16, R^2_{adj}=.14,$ $F(2,102)=9.71, p=.000$
	Education	-.353	.000	
2	Age	.233	.007	$R=.63, R^2=.40, R^2_{adj}=.36,$ $F(6,98)=11.09, p=.000,$ $F_{change}(4,98)=10.05, p=.000$
	Education	-.208	.024	
	Emotional reactivity	.323	.005	
	I position	-.132	.131	
	Emotional cutoff	.128	.205	
	Fusion with others	.121	.209	

The first model ($F(2,102) = 9.71, p = .000$) that is tested for prediction of the uncertainty about mental states is statistically significant and explains 16% of the variance of the uncertainty about mental states, with Age ($\beta = .261, p = .006$) and Education ($\beta = -.353, p = .000$) as significant predictors. The model contribution is also statistically significant, and the second model explains 40.4% of the variance of the uncertainty about mental states ($F(6,98) = 11.086, p = .000$), with Age ($\beta = .233, p = .007$), Education ($\beta = -.208, p = .024$), and Emotional reactivity ($\beta = .323, p = .005$) as significant predictors.

Discussion

The concepts of mentalization and self-differentiation seem to be close and have a lot of common correlates, but previous research didn't study the connection between them directly. The aim of this research was to examine the connection between these early formed concepts, and to examine if this reflective functioning can be predicted with different aspects of self-differentiation, specifically in a female sample.

Some previous research noted that females demonstrate fewer difficulties in the separation-individuation process, and score higher not only on the mentalizing tasks with fewer hypermentalizing errors than males but also score higher in emotional intelligence, empathy, and theory of mind (Dimitrijević et al., 2017; Lapsley et al., 2001; Poznyak et al., 2019; Proverbio, 2016). The only aspect of mentalization where females scored less or the same as males is a self-related aspect of mentalization (Jańczak, 2021), which consists of items such as: "When I get upset, I am not sure whether I am sad, afraid, or angry" and "I am often confused about my exact feelings", which represents general confusion, not understanding and not focusing on one's own emotions and thoughts. On the other hand, self-differentiation includes the capacity to distinguish thoughts from feelings, to maintain awareness of one's own emotions, and to experience and regulate strong ones, so self-related mentalization and self-differentiation seem focused on similar subjects. It is hypothesized that

women develop a belief in the importance of empathy and being empathetic in their interactions with others rather than focusing on themselves (Jańczak, 2021), so this research is focused on female differentiation of self as a predictor of capacity for mentalization.

When predicting certainty about mental states, the model that contains self-differentiation measures explains 32.1% of the variance. The I position, which represents a clearly defined sense of self (Skowron & Friedlander, 1998) and the ability to express emotions and thoughts responsibly and to encourage other individuals to do the same (Yusuf et al., 2018), is positively connected to certainty about mental states. This supports the assumption that the capacity for mentalization is closely related to the organization of self (Fonagy, 2006).

Emotional cutoff, which reflects experiencing intimacy as a threat and vulnerability in relations with others, and it manifests as distancing, denial of the importance of close relationships, and staying away from others, is negatively correlated with certainty about mental states (Bowen, 1976). Certainty about mental states and self-differentiation have shown to have certain mutual correlates. Certainty about mental states has been negatively correlated with borderline personality disorder (BDP) features (Fonagy et al., 2016), the same as self-differentiation, specifically negatively correlated with defense mechanisms and fear of intimacy (Bagheri & Khodai, 2021). This dimension of mentalization is also negatively correlated with alexithymia and symptoms of autistic spectrum disorder (Morandotti et al., 2018). Alexithymia impairs the ability to perceive, organize, and use emotions, causes emotional malfunctioning (Ammerman et al., 2015) and impairs understanding of social and interpersonal situations and lowers the emotional capacity (Shahgholian et al., 2007, as cited in Bagheri & Khodai, 2021). This can undermine the base of our relationship with self and others, whilst making it harder to understand our and others' behavior (Fonagy, 2006), therefore creating greater vulnerability in relationships and perception of intimacy as threatening. The preference to stay away from others and to deny the importance of closeness, along with fears of engulfment and denial, could explain the difficulties in distinguishing outer and inner reality and internal from interpersonal events (Fonagy, 2006). This is in accordance with theoretical assumptions and the results of having the negative connection between emotional cutoff and certainty about mental states. These results show that a clearly defined sense of self, less perceiving of intimacy as threatening and relations with others as something that makes us vulnerable, less distancing from others, and less denial of the importance of closeness are necessary for greater certainty about mental states and capacity for mentalization.

When it comes to predicting uncertainty about mental states, the model explains 40.4% of the variance and contains one intrapsychic dimension (emotional reactivity) and two sociodemographic variables (age and education) as significant predictors. Age, but also emotional reactivity, is positively correlated with the criterion, which means that with *age* women express the tendency to score higher on uncertainty about mental states, which indicates lower mentalization. Education is negatively correlated with uncertainty about mental states, which suggests that uncertainty

decreases with a higher educational level, suggesting better mentalization skills. This result is consistent with previous research, which reported significantly higher mentalization, empathy, and emotional intelligence by participants with higher education (Dimitrijević et al., 2017).

Some other previous research has been conducted on the adolescent sample and the results suggested that mentalization improved with age, but since this wasn't a longitudinal study and the adolescent sample wasn't tracked throughout the time, it is not certain that these findings are accurate (Poznyak et al., 2019). When it comes to some related constructs, such as emotional intelligence or empathy, previous results are conflicted. Some studies found that older individuals score better on all dimensions of the Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test (Extremera et al., 2006; Mayer et al., 1999), some failed to find any significant correlations (Farrelly & Austin, 2007), while some found negative correlations that suggest that emotional intelligence decrease with age (Day & Carroll, 2004; Palmer et al., 2005) which is in accordance to meta-analysis reporting that older individuals have problems with recognizing emotions (Ruffman et al., 2008). When it comes to empathy, women expressed the tendency to score higher in the youngest age groups (Eisenberg & Lennon, 1983), but the gap becomes successively smaller in older age groups (Schieman & Gundy, 2000). There are certain gender differences in emotionality (Umberson et al., 1996) and age may influence these differences (Helson et al., 1997), which is confirming the convergence hypothesis that, later in life, men and women have tendency to relax the emotional roles learned in the earlier years (Helson et al., 1997) and become more alike in emotionality (Neugarten, 1996, as cited in Schieman & Gundy, 2000). These results could explain the noted increase in uncertainty about mental states or decrease in overall mentalization in this sample. Women could express the tendency to relax the emotional roles and roles regarding others with age, which could be also connected with general problems in older individuals when it comes to recognizing emotions.

Emotional reactivity has also shown to be a positive significant predictor for uncertainty about mental states. Emotional reactivity reflects the degree of emotional lability, and hypersensitivity (Skowron & Friedlander, 1998), and represents emotionally-driven reactions to some real or perceived environmental threat that can lead to inappropriate responses (Fehrer, 2002). Uncertainty about mental states correlates positively with impulsivity and negatively with perspective-taking (Fonagy et al., 2016) and includes poor imaginative and social skills. These findings are in accordance with the results of this research, connecting the hypersensitivity and inappropriate emotionally-driven reactions of emotional reactivity and impulsivity and poor social skills of uncertainty about mental states.

The main limitation of this study is the small sample, so for any certain conclusions, the sample should be expanded and more participants from different categories should be included (e.g., profession, gender). It could be interesting to examine the differences between men and women when it comes to capacity for mentalization, while including the knowledge of age as a mediator to certain phenomena close to mentalization, but also some other sociodemographic variables that could be connected. Regarding the implications of this research, this data could

be used in the area of education and counseling. These concepts are formed in early childhood and it could be useful to educate future parents about certain elements in children raising, but also to educate adults and help them become aware of specific parts of their upbringing and how they could upgrade their everyday functioning.

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SELF DIFERENCIJACIJA KAO PREDIKTOR KAPACITETA ZA MENTALIZACIJU³

Apstrakt

Cilj ovog istraživanja bio je da se ispita potencijalna uloga self-diferencijacije u predikciji mentalizacije na ženskom uzorku. Podaci su prikupljeni korišćenjem Upitnika za procenu reflektivne funkcije (RFQ) i Upitnika za procenu self-diferencijacije (DSI) na uzorku od 105 ženskih ispitanika, uzrasta 18–50 godina ($M = 30,61$, $SD = 8,09$). Oba modela koja sadrže self-diferencijaciju kao prediktore su statistički značajna. Prvi model koji predviđa sigurnost u pogledu mentalnih stanja objašnjava 32,1% varijanse ($R^2 = 0,32$, $F(6,98) = 7,732$, $p = 0,000$), gde su se Ja pozicija ($\beta = 0,459$, $p = 0,000$) i emocionalni cutoff ($\beta = -0,245$, $p = 0,024$) izdvojili kao statistički značajni prediktori. Drugi model koji predviđa nesigurnost u pogledu mentalnih stanja objašnjava 40,4% varijanse ($R^2 = 0,40$, $F(6,98) = 11,086$, $p = 0,000$), a značajni prediktori u ovom modelu su uzrast ($\beta = 0,233$, $p = 0,007$), stepen obrazovanja ($\beta = -0,208$, $p = 0,024$) i emocionalna reaktivnost ($\beta = 0,323$, $p = 0,005$). Prikupljeni rezultati ukazuju na to da različiti aspekti self-diferencijacije mogu da predvide sigurnost i nesigurnost u pogledu mentalnih stanja na ženskom uzorku, ali i na to da kada se radi o konceptima kao što je kapacitet za mentalizaciju, određene sociodemografske karakteristike (npr. uzrast, stepen obrazovanja) mogu igrati značajniju ulogu nego što se to prvenstveno pretpostavljalo. Preporučuju se dalja istraživanja, koja bi uključila veći i različitiji uzorak.

Ključne reči: mentalizacija, self-diferencijacija, emocionalna reaktivnost, emocionalni cutoff

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