

*Full Length Research Paper*

## Separation-individuation of late adolescents : A longitudinal study

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The aim of this study was to demonstrate the change in separation-individuation between late adolescents in the first, second, third and fourth year of higher education. The study sample used for this longitudinal study consisted of 148 students attending class studies, computer education and science education departments of Kırıkkale University. The Separation-Individuation Test of Adolescence (SITA) Scale was used. The study was performed using data collected annually over a period of four years, and the analysis of variance (ANOVA) test was used to compare the results. Based on the study results, significant differences were identified between the yearly mean scores of the late adolescents' attachment to a caregiver, attachment to teachers, and separation anxiety dimensions.

**Key words:** Separation-individuation, late adolescent, longitudinal study.

### INTRODUCTION

Separation-individuation is redefining the relationship between an individual and their caregivers such as mother and father by means of moving away from this dependency on parents on their way to independence and autonomy. It is expected that adolescents separate from their parents with the help of physical, mental, interpersonal and emotional developments during separation-individuation process. According to Blos (1989), the idea of the self is experienced in a subjective manner during separation-individuation period when an adolescent becomes aware of himself/herself by getting rid of the dependencies on their parents. During this process mental structuring is materialized again by the ego of an adolescent whose personality is in a process of

embodiment. Thus, the nature of an adolescent is changeable during this process. It is significant for adolescents to control the anxiety that they experience and manage self-esteem during the process of getting away from their infancy and childhood ties in separation-individuation period.

Bowlby argues that the relationship between child and mother-father, especially the relationship between child and mother is double-sided (Cited in Brandell and Ringel, 2007). Problems are observed in separation-individuation of all individuals who have human-human and human-object relationship based on unhealthy attachment style (Göka and Göka, 2009). The disturbances that arise in mirroring, internalization and separation processes might

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result in self pathologies during early childhood and adolescence (Çetin, 2001). According to Koepke and Denissen (2012), the separation-individuation process leads individuals to distinguish and identify the structures involved in this process. As a developmental process, separation is conceptualized as a change not only in personal dependences, but also in mental and internal cognitive representations. This process is accompanied by psycho-logical maturation, a sense of personal independence, and positive emotional attachment to parents.

On the other hand, according to Pionnie et al. (2001), the separation of parents and adolescents during separation-individuation is a difficult process. Adolescence is viewed as a period where adolescents are required to persue and continue certain cultural rituals, even though this becomes gradually more difficult for them over time. Families feel increasingly obliged to find and define themselves on their own, developing their own rituals in the process out of a compelling and narcissistic force. As parent and adolescent relations become more complex, adolescents discover the advantages of structures that enable separation-individuation in different areas. Koepke and Denissan (2012) demonstrated that parents influence the development of children through responses to their to the children's need for individuation and sense of belonging; this consequently provides them with sufficient means to influence and manage personality in children. Thus, parents and children conceptualize a system of identity based on the experimental use of notions such as separation, independence and difference.

When separation-individuation literature is reviewed; for example, in his study on late adolescents, Hoffman (1984) found that while conflictual independence is in harmony with personal adaptation it is not related with problems in romantic relationships. On the other hand, it was determined that, the increase in emotional independence is related with academic adaptation. In their study on separation-individuation in late adolescents, Quintana and Kerr (1993) found that participation in relationships bolsters separation, mirroring and symbiosis. It was found that for healthy separation of both genders there is a positive correlation between and the scales of self-centralizing and symbiosis. The symbiosis, separation anxiety, rejection expectancy, depression and anxiety scores of females were found to be higher than those of males. McClanahan and Holmbeck (1992) found in a study on adolescents that there is a consistent correlation between the separation anxiety, healthy separation, need denial and nurturance seeking subscales of Separation-Individuation Test and the tools measuring family functions and positive-negative psychological adaptation. In their first study, Ryan and Lynch (1989) conducted a study on 148 early adolescents. As a result of the first study, it was found that there is a negative correlation between emotional autonomy and qualitative attachment to parents and a positive correlation between emotional autonomy and qualitative attachment to friends.

Willemssen et al. (1987) revealed that independence from mother predicts secure attachment.

In their study, Kroger and Haslet (1988) determined the relationship between the attachment styles of university students and separation anxiety. Schultheiss and Blustein (1994) found that female university students have more attitudinal loyalty and attachment to their parents. It was found that male university students with disintegrated and moratorium identity status show attitudinal loyalty to parents. When separation-individuation literature is reviewed some studies can be found like (Perosa et al. 1996) which focused on individuation of female university students in Minuchin structural family model.

When separation-individuation literature is reviewed, Levpuscek (2006) found that girls achieve individuation from parents more successfully than boys. Boys, on the other hand, make a greater effort to become independent during individuation period. In their study on freshman college students, Holmbeck and Wandrei (1993) found that self-esteem predicts adjustment rather than separation-individuation, family relationships, cognitive indicators of personality variations and status of home leaving. When it comes to the findings regarding gender, it was found that girls who achieve less adjustment have higher separation anxiety and seek attachment whereas boys who achieve less adjustment separate more from important others (mother, father, siblings, etc.). In their study on university students, Beyers and Goossens (2003) found that there is a negative correlation between psychological separation and independence from parents and emotions of separation. In their study on kindergarten-age children, Stadelmann et al. (2010) observed that children's behavioral/emotional problems were associated with separation, family conflicts and negative representations of the family. In addition, children separated from their parents at the age of five had significantly more negative experiences regarding their parents than children still living with their parents at the age of five and six. Holmbeck and McClanahan (1994) previously evaluated the correlation, cluster analyses and item-level analyses of the SITA scale. In their study, performed on individuals between the ages of 17 and 70 taking courses at a university, Blazina et al. (2007) identified a positive correlation in males between ideology, solitude and separation-individuation. In their study on Belgian adults, Kins et al. (2012) observed nonfunctional dependence and nonfunctional independence – which are symptoms of problem separation-individuation – as a form of psychological control. A study by Arseth et al., (2009) on female Norwegian university students between the ages of 18 and 29 demonstrated a higher level of separation individuation difficulties among insincere and dependent women than among sincere women. Dependent women showed higher separation anxiety scores than sincere women, while insincere women had significantly higher scores expectation of rejection, denial of intimacy and

separation anxiety scores. In a study investigating African-Americans and European-Americans, Lindsey (2014) found that separation-individual has a significantly positive correlation with approval seeking schema and anxiety. However, among African-Americans, separation-individuation is not a significant predictor of anxiety. Kins et al. (2012) identified a relationship between depressive symptoms and pathological separation-individuation, and also demonstrated that separation-individuation is related to wellness, nonfunctional dependence, nonfunctional independence, and the four groups of personality associated with a combination of these.

In another study in the literature of separation-individuation, Delhaye et al. (2012)'s study on Belgium college students between the ages of 18 and 26 regarding their perceived parenthood, separation-individuation and emotional adaptation showed that a low perceived parenthood is a predictor of higher levels of independence and insufficient emotional adaptation. Eliezer et al. (2012) investigated the relationship between the internal father object, the separation-individuation process, anxiety levels and depression levels. The results of this study demonstrated that in separation-individuation processes, the development of a weak father object showed similarities as well as differences with the development of depression and anxiety. Coonerty's (1986) study showed that schizophrenics showed greater separation-individuation themes, while the border group exhibited even higher separation-individuation themes than schizophrenics. These results were considered to be a validation of Mahler's theory. Blazina et al. (2008) previously performed a study on the role of gender role conflicts and separation-individuation difficulties on solitude/loneliness among college males, where they determined that higher levels of solitude among parents rendered successful separation more difficult. In addition, they also determined that gender role conflict scores were associated with an increase in the frequency of solitude/loneliness.

In Turkey, Göral (2002) carried out some research into the second separation-individuation of Turkish university students. Göral found that the perception of parents' over-protective, over-disciplined and democratic attitudes have a slight effect on the separation-individuation and experiences in romantic relationships of young adults. In his study, Yaman (2005) found that high school students with a low level of psychological adaptation experience more problems in many dimensions of separation-individuation process. Furthermore, it was observed that females experience more problems when compared with males in terms of both separation-individuation process and psychological adaptation. In their study, Aslan and Güven (2010) found that there is a mediation of separation-individuation in the relationship between secure attachment to parents and personal adaptation in late adolescents.

While adolescents experience the separation-individuation process, they also begin to assume

responsibility for themselves as individuals and for their own behavior. During the separation-individuation process, individuals reduce their dependency – especially their dependency on their parents – and begin to form their own personality through individuation; they therefore take steps towards becoming independent individuals. It is important to determine whether the process of separating from parents to become an individual, and to develop an identity as adult, is managed effectively. In this context, this study aims to investigate in Turkish late adolescents the separation-individuation process – a process that plays an important role in the shaping of personality in adolescents – by using a longitudinal study model.

## METHODS

The single screening model is used not only to assess certain situations and cases, but also to evaluate temporal changes and developments. Studies using screening models to determine temporal changes and developments are referred to as development studies. In contrast to "instant" screening methods, which evaluate static characteristics, the screening of temporal changes and developments evaluate dynamism and motion. Temporal screening can be performed using one of two basic approaches that are the monitoring and the cross-sectional approaches (Dalen, 1962; as cited by Karasar, 2003: 79, 80). In the monitoring approach, there are generally a limited number of variables (of the same element or unit) whose temporal change or development is being evaluated, which are followed continuously or in certain time intervals, starting at a certain point in time. In this study, we have used the monitoring approach – or in other words the longitudinal study design – to determine the change experienced over time by late adolescents during the separation-individuation process.

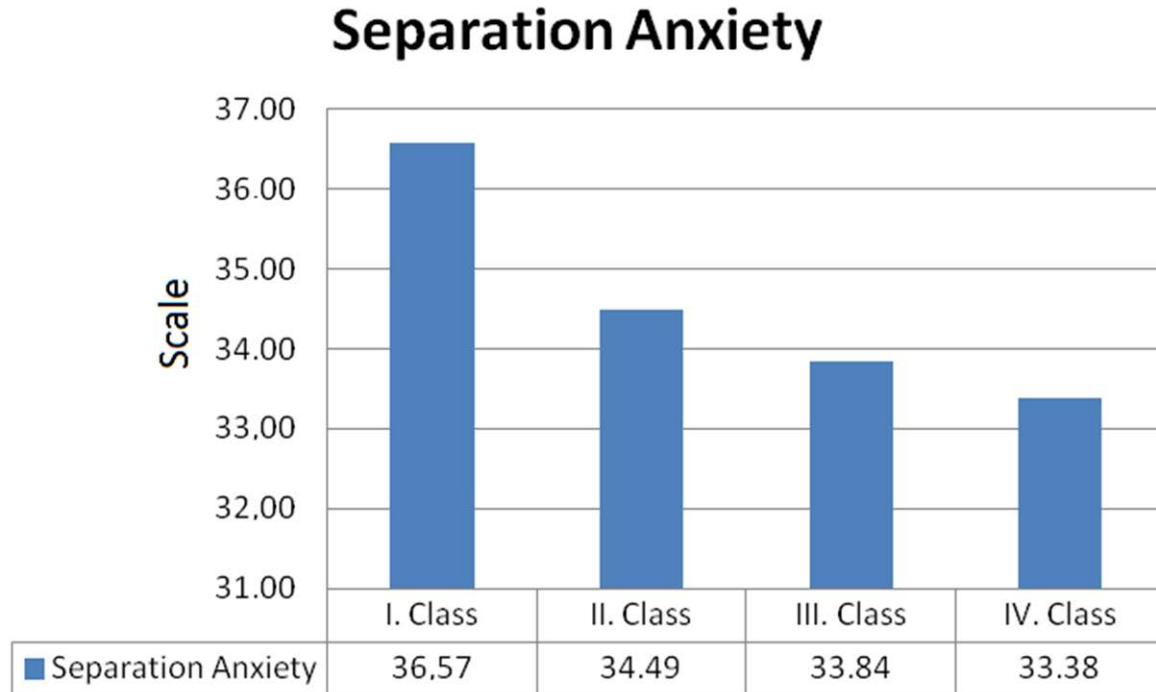
## Participants

The study group consisted of 148 fourth-years students attending the class studies, science education and computer education departments of Kırıkkale University. The study was conducted from the spring semester of the 2010-2011 academic year to the spring semester of the 2013-2014 academic year. The age range of the students within the study group was between 17 and 28, while 105 (70.9%) of these students were females (mean age =20.30, SD=1.25) and 43 (29.1%) were males (mean age=20.95, SD=1.76).

## Instruments

The Scale of Adolescent Separation-Individuation (SITA), developed by Levine et al. (1986) and adapted by Aslan and Güven (2008) for Turkish university students SITA, is a five-point Likert-type scale consisting of 9 subscales and 103 items. The SITA subscales are as follows (Levine and Saintonge, 1993):

1. Separation Anxiety: Significant others experienced as abandoning.
2. Engulfment Anxiety: Intimacy experienced as envelopment.
3. Nurturance Seeking: Strong caretaker attachment.
4. Peer Enmeshment: Strivings for intense peer intimacy.
5. Teacher Enmeshment: Strivings for intense, intimate attachments to teachers.
6. Practising-Mirroring: Narcissistic strivings.



**Figure 1.** Mean scores obtained with repeated measurements of separation anxiety subscale.

7. Need Denial: Attachment needs denied.
8. Rejection Expectancy: Significant others experienced as callous and hostile.
9. Healthy Separation: Flexible balance of dependence and independence strivings.

Regarding the scale, a study done in Turkey (Aslan and Güven, 2008) revealed that the factor loadings for the subscales of SITA are .36 - .71 for separation anxiety, .48-.84 for engulfment anxiety, .46-.70 for rejection expectancy, .29-.80 for practising mirroring, .20-.58 for peer enmeshment, .22-.63 for need denial, .28-.59 for teacher enmeshment, .40-.68 for nurturance seeking and .30-.66 for healthy separation, respectively. Cronbach's alpha coefficients were .79 for engulfment anxiety, .75 for separation anxiety, .82 for rejection expectancy, .91 for practising mirroring, .71 for peer enmeshment, .72 for need denial, .63 for teacher enmeshment, .65 for nurturance seeking and .39 for healthy separation, respectively.

### Procedure

Before administration of the scales, appointments were arranged with the class instructors at the Faculty of Education at Kırıkkale University. The purpose of the study was explained to them, and their permission was sought to apply the instruments during their classes. After obtaining their approval, the researchers applied the instruments on the participants who had volunteered. Before administration, informed consent and permission to report the findings were obtained from the volunteer participants. During the administration, the participants were also informed about the purpose and completion of the study, and were assured about the anonymity and confidentiality of their responses. The duration of implementation was approximately 40 min. All of the participants completed the scales. The points which were obtained from the three scales were analyzed through SPSS 11.5 and the total points of scales were found in data analyses.

### Data analysis

In this study, data collected annually during the four-year study period were used to evaluate the change in separation-individuation experienced by the students over the course of four years. In this context, we have used means and the analysis of variance (ANOVA) to analyze these changes.

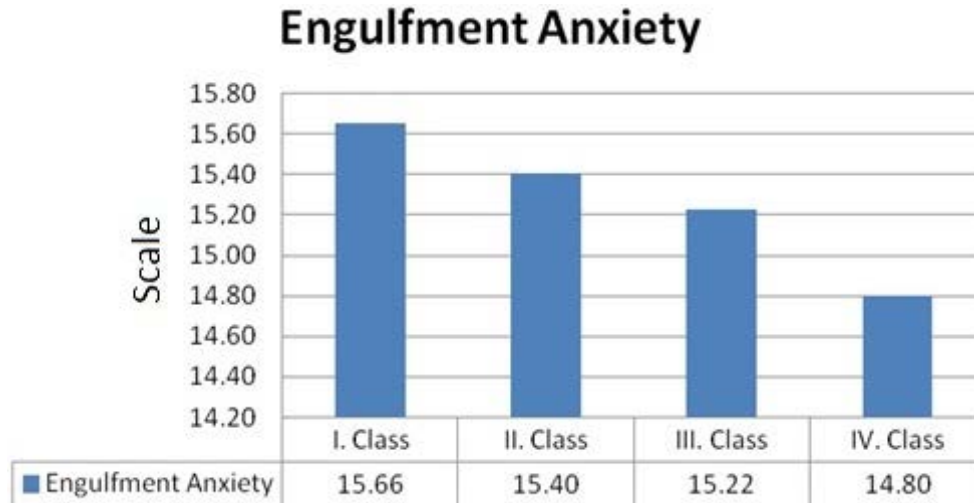
### FINDINGS

The study results were evaluated based on mean values for the study variables and ANOVA. In the sections below, the study results are first provided as descriptive statistics of the four year means for the SITA's subscales, according to the different student classes/years. The results are then provided as descriptive statistics of the four-year means of the SITA's subscales, according to gender.

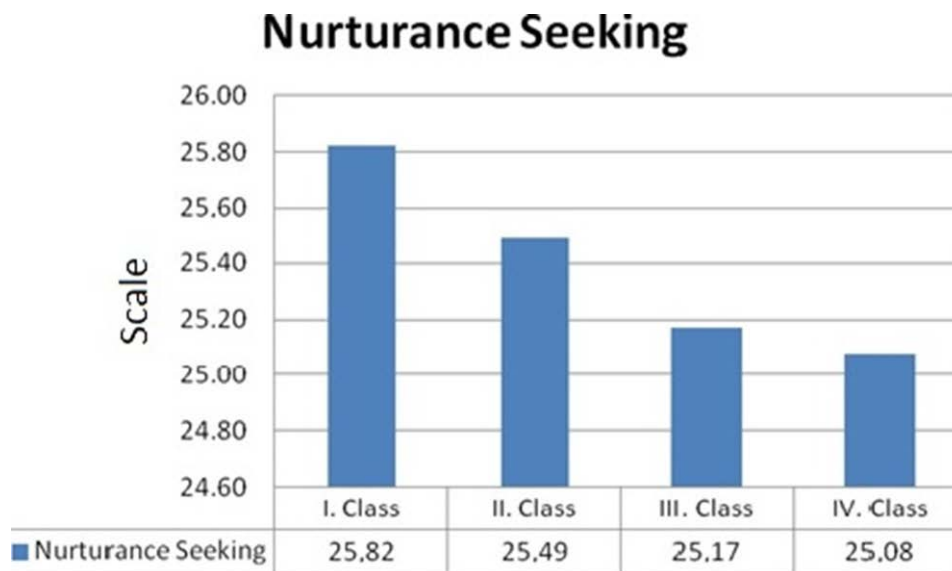
#### **The four-year means of adolescent separation-individuation scale's subscales according to students' class/years**

As shown in Figure 1, the mean score for SITA's separation anxiety subscale was 36.57 for first-year students, 34.49 for second-year students, 33.84 for third-year students, and 33.38 for fourth-year students. In this subscale, first-year students had the highest mean score, while fourth-year students had the lowest mean score.

As shown in Figure 2, the mean score for SITA's engulfment anxiety subscale was 15.66 for first-year



**Figure 2.** Mean scores obtained with repeated measurements of engulfment anxiety subscale.



**Figure 3.** Mean scores obtained with repeated measurements of nurturance seeking subscale.

students, 15.40 for second-year students, 15.22 for third-year students, and 14.80 for fourth-year students. In this subscale, first-year students had the highest mean score, while fourth-year students had the lowest mean score.

As shown in Figure 3, the mean score for SITA's nurturance seeking subscale was 25.82 for first-year students, 25.49 for second-year students, 25.17 for third-year students, and 25.08 for fourth-year students. In this subscale, first-year students had the highest mean score, while fourth-year students had the lowest mean score.

As shown in Figure 4, the mean score for SITA's peer enmeshment subscale was 39.18 for first-year students, 39.93 for second-year students, 39.92 for third-year

students, and 38.54 for fourth-year students. In this subscale, first-year students had the highest mean score, while fourth-year students had the lowest mean score.

As shown in Figure 5, the mean score for SITA's teacher enmeshment subscale was 11.11 for first-year students, 11.13 for second-year students, 10.53 for third-year students, and 11.33 for fourth-year students. In this subscale, fourth-year students had the highest mean score, while first-year students had the lowest mean score.

As shown in Figure 6, the mean score for SITA's practising mirroring subscale was 44.66 for first-year students, 48.10 for second-year students, 47.71 for third-

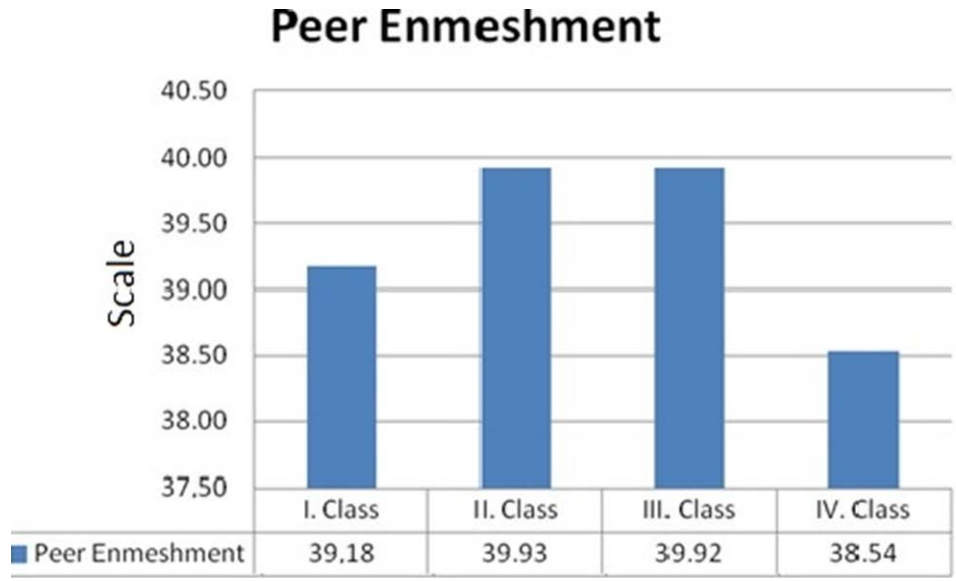


Figure 4. Mean scores obtained with repeated measurements of peer enmeshment subscale.

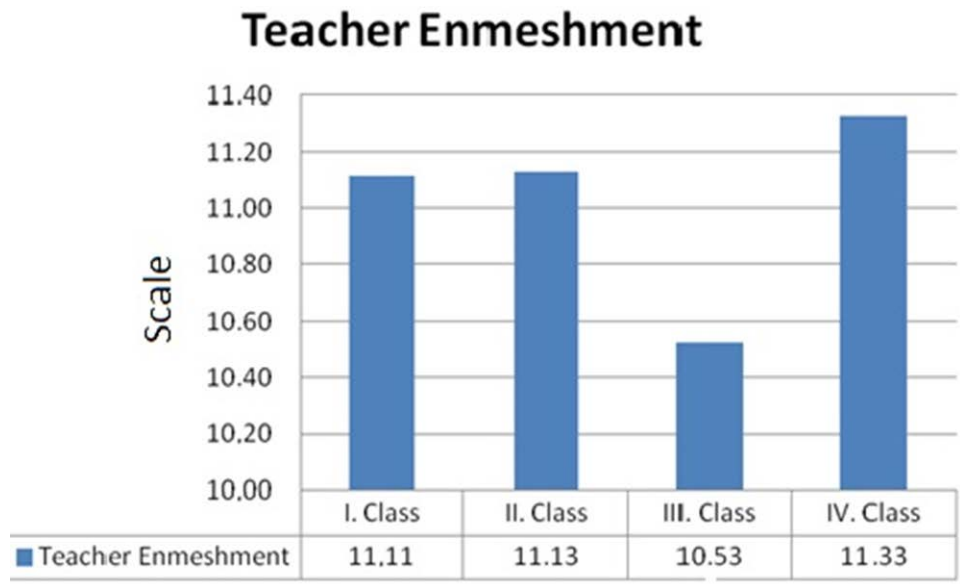


Figure 5. Mean scores obtained with repeated measurements of teacher enmeshment subscale.

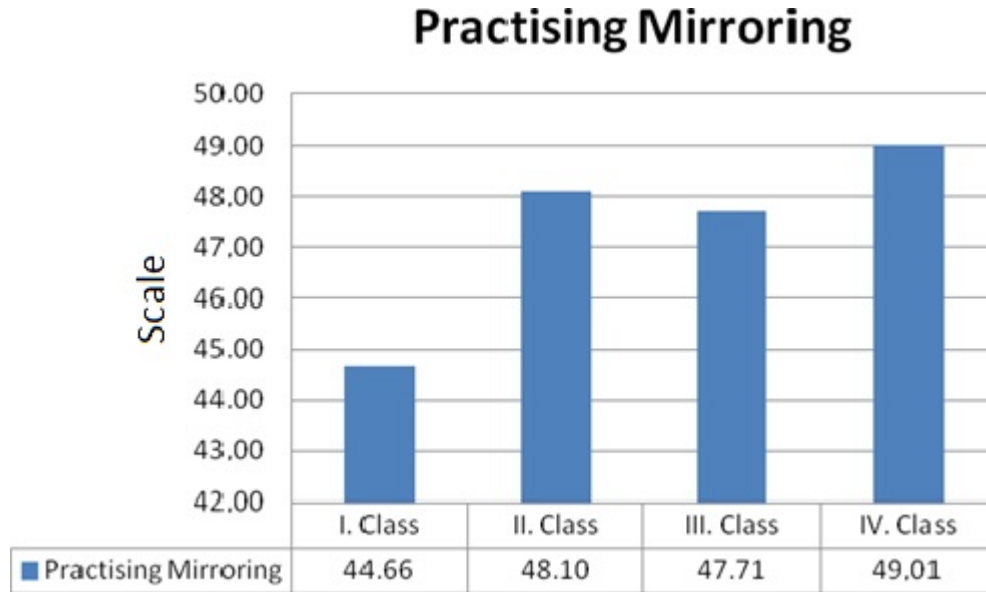
year students, and 49.01 for fourth-year students. In this subscale, fourth-year students had the highest mean score, while first-year students had the lowest mean score.

As shown in Figure 7, the mean score for SITA's need denial subscale was 26.89 for first-year students, 26.20 for second-year students, 25.81 for third-year students, and 27.35 for fourth-year students. In this subscale, fourth-year students had the highest mean score, while third-year students had the lowest mean score.

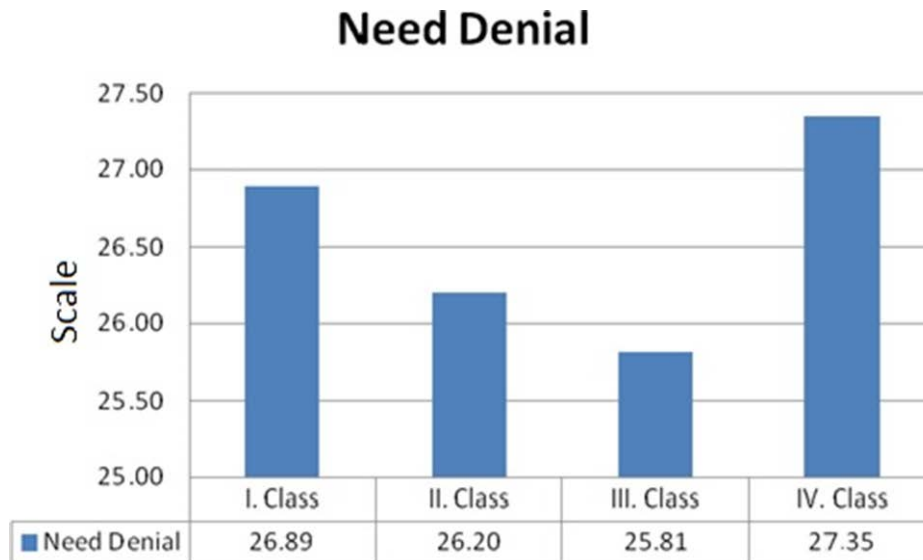
As shown in Figure 8, the mean score for SITA's

rejection expectancy subscale was 23.41 for first-year students, 24.67 for second-year students, 25.00 for third-year students, and 25.08 for fourth-year students. In this subscale, fourth-year students had the highest mean score, while second-year students had the lowest mean score.

As shown in Figure 9, the mean score for SITA's healthy separation subscale was 8.75 for first-year students, 9.37 for second-year students, 8.88 for third-year students, and 9.04 for fourth-year students. In this subscale, second-year students had the highest mean



**Figure 6.** Mean scores obtained with repeated measurements of practising mirroring subscale



**Figure 7.** Mean scores obtained with repeated measurements of need denial subscale.

score, while first-year students had the lowest mean score.

#### ***Four-Year Mean Scores of Adolescent Separation-Individuation Scale's Subscales According to Gender***

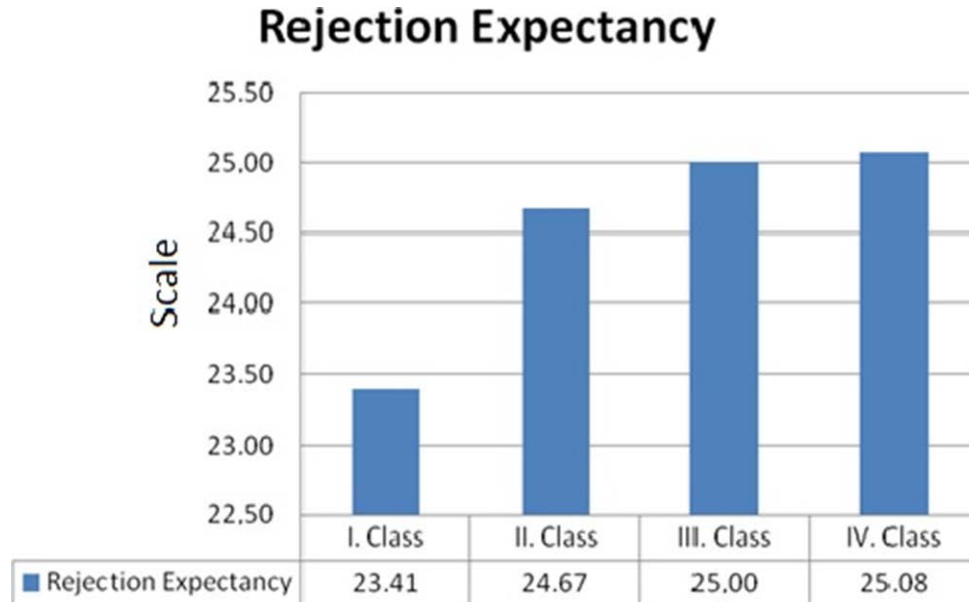
As shown in Figure 10, the four-year mean score for SITA's separation anxiety subscale varied significantly according to gender for third-year students. In this subscale, third-year female students had a significantly higher mean score than third-year male students.

As shown in Figure 11, the four-year mean score for SITA's engulfment anxiety subscale did not vary significantly according to gender for any of the classes/years.

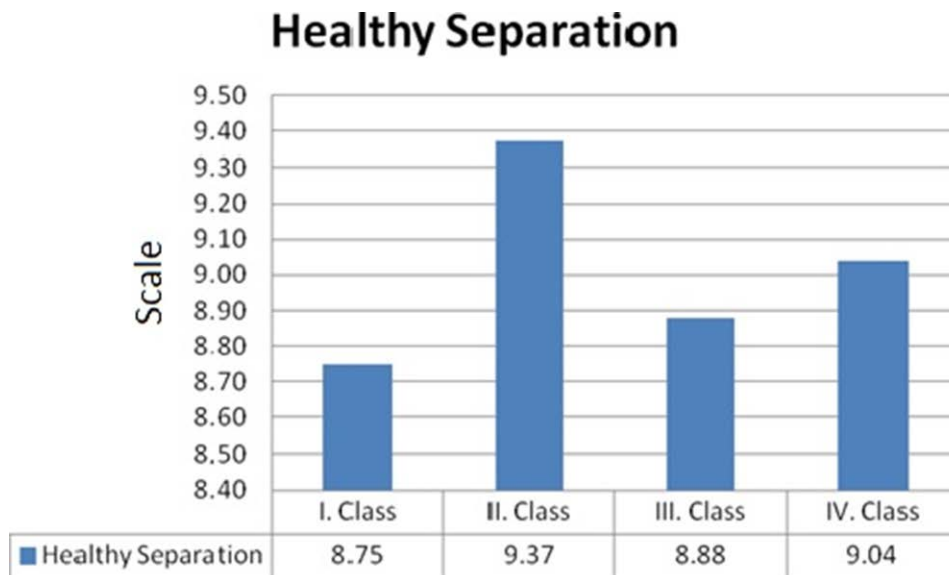
As shown in Figure 12, the four-year mean score for SITA's nurturance seeking subscale varied significantly according to gender for first-year, second-year, third-year and fourth-year students. In this subscale, first-year, second-year, third-year and fourth-year female students had significantly higher mean scores than male students of the same class/year.

As shown in Figure 13, the four-year mean score for





**Figure 8.** Mean scores obtained with repeated measurements of rejection expectancy subscale.



**Figure 9.** Mean scores obtained with repeated measurements of healthy separation subscale.

SITA's peer enmeshment subscale did not vary significantly according to gender for any of the classes/years.

As shown in Figure 14, the four-year mean score for SITA's teacher enmeshment subscale varied significantly according to gender for first-year, second-year, third-year and fourth-year students. In this subscale, first-year, second-year, third-year and fourth-year male students had significantly higher mean scores than female students of the same corresponding class/year.

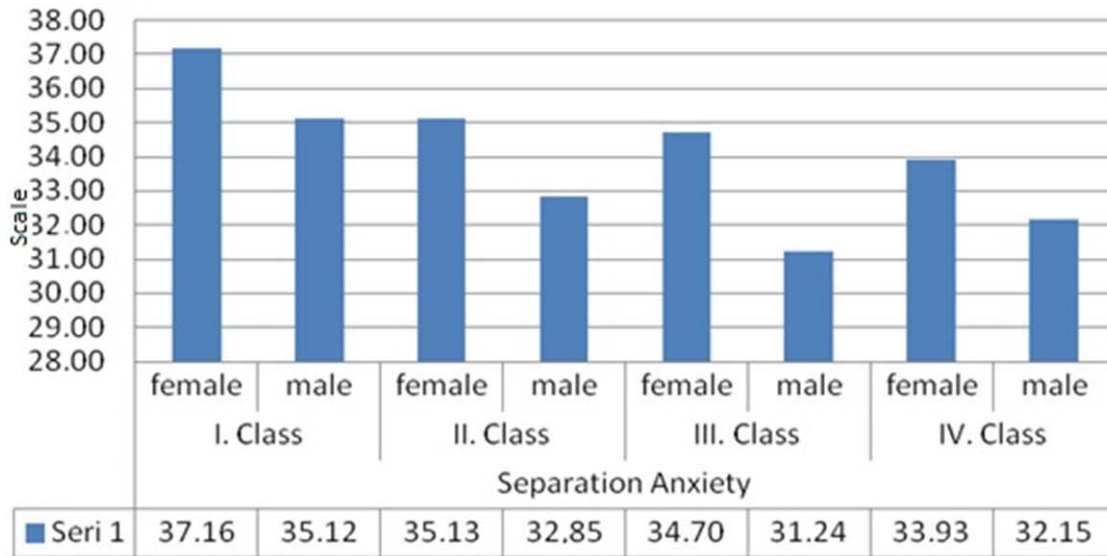
As shown in Figure 15, the four-year mean score for SITA's practising mirroring subscale did not vary significantly according to gender for any of the classes/years.

As shown in Figure 16, the four-year mean score for SITA's need denial subscale did not vary significantly according to gender for any of the classes/years.

As shown in Figure 17, the four-year mean score for SITA's rejection expectancy subscale did not vary significantly according to gender for any of the

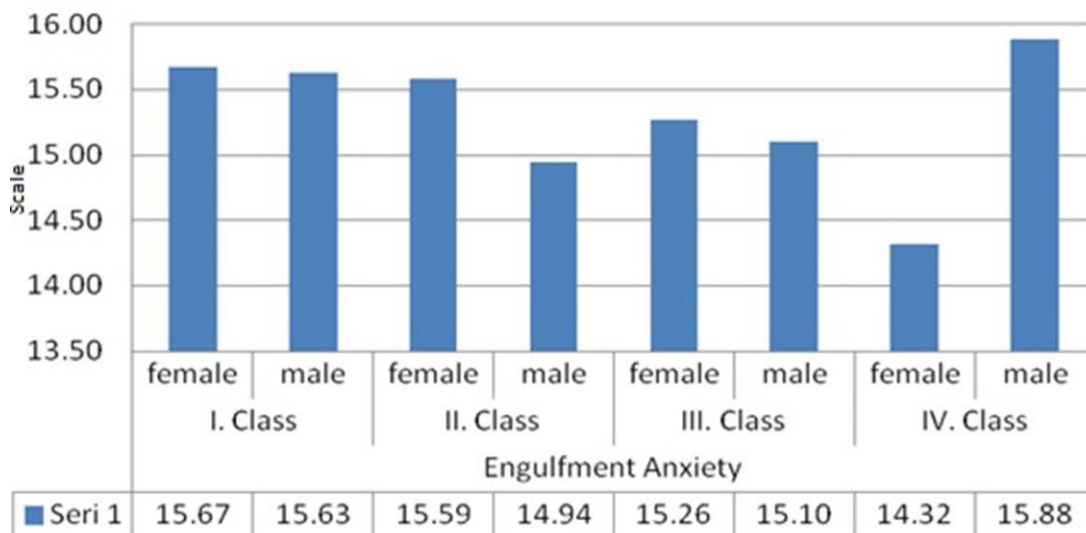


## Separation Anxiety



**Figure 10.** t Test results obtained according to gender with repeated measurements of separation anxiety subscale.  $t(\text{first-year})=1.455$ ;  $t(\text{second-year})= 1.310$ ;  $t(\text{third-year})=1.994^*$ ;  $t(\text{fourth-year})=1.148$ . \* $P(t)<0.05$  (0.05 level of difference according to gender);

## Engulfment Anxiety



**Figure 11.** t Test results obtained according to gender with repeated measurements of engulfment anxiety subscale.  $t(\text{first-year})= 0.055$ ;  $t(\text{second-year})= 0.739$ ;  $t(\text{third-year})= .162$ ;  $t(\text{fourth-year})= -1.912$ ;  $P(t)<0.05$  (no significant differences according to gender in any of the classes/years)

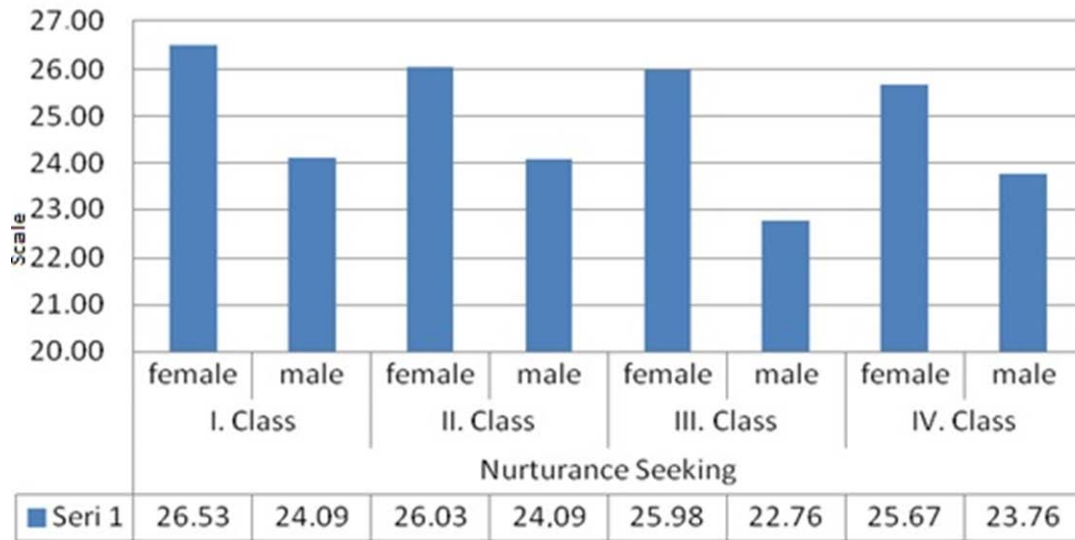
classes/years.

As shown in Figure 18, the four-year mean score for SITA's healthy separation subscale did not vary significantly according to gender for any of the classes/years.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

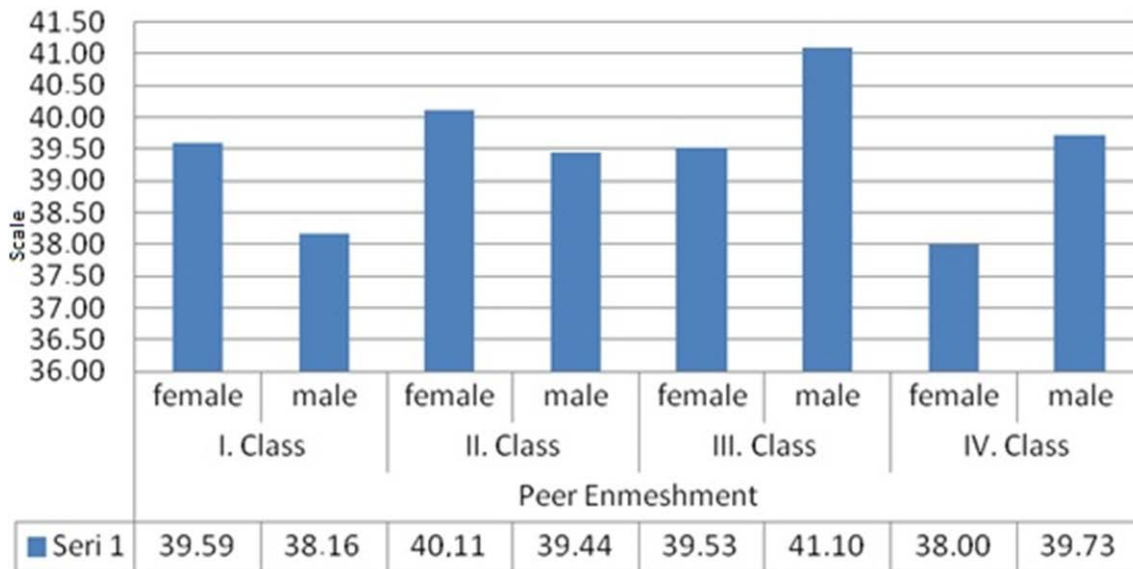
In this study, we observed that among the late adolescents, first-year university students had the highest

### Nurturance Seeking



**Figure 12.** t Test results obtained according to gender with repeated measurements of nurturance seeking subscale.  $t(\text{first-year})= 3.076^{**}$ ;  $t(\text{second-year})=2.419^{*}$ ;  $t(\text{third-year})=3.565^{**}$ ;  $t(\text{fourth-year})= 2.304^{*}$ .  $P(t)<0.05$  (0.05 level of difference according to gender).  $^{**}P(t)<0.01$  (0.01 level of difference according to gender).

### Peer Enmeshment

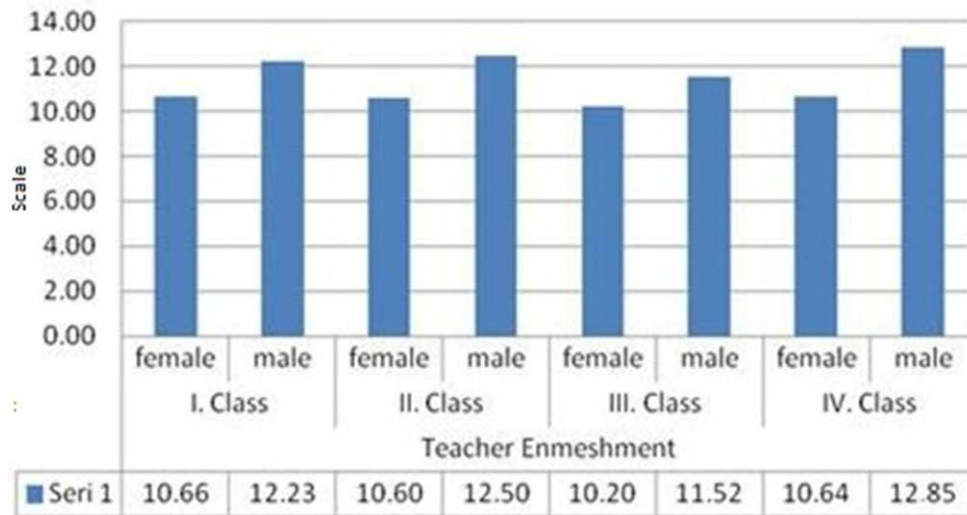


**Figure 13.** t Test results obtained according to gender with repeated measurements of peer enmeshment subscale.  $t(\text{first-year})= -1.293$ ;  $t(\text{second-year})= 0.634$ ;  $t(\text{third-year})= -1.469$ ;  $t(\text{fourth-year})= -1.512$ .  $P(t)<0.05$  (no significant differences according to gender in any of the classes/years).

four-year mean scores in the highest separation anxiety, engulfment anxiety, and the caregiver anxiety subscales of separation-individuation. The separation anxiety sub-dimension of separation-individuation represents the late

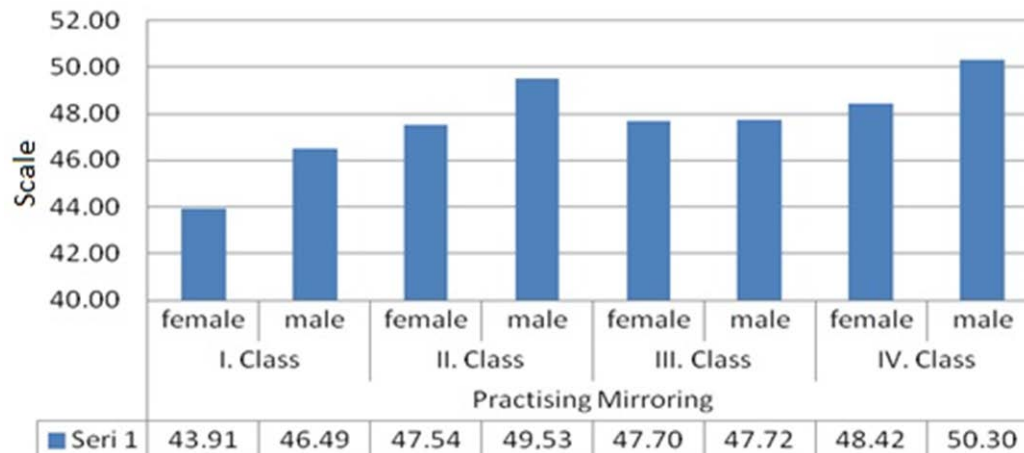
adolescents concern about separation from mother, father, siblings, etc. before individuation. Engulfment anxiety represents the control and restriction of the child's life by the parents during separation-individuation process.

## Teacher Enmeshment



**Figure 14.** t Test results obtained according to gender with repeated measurements of teacher enmeshment subscale.  $t(\text{first-year}) = -2.366^*$   $t(\text{second-year}) = -3.064^{**}$   $t(\text{third-year}) = 2.004^*$ ;  $t(\text{fourth-year}) = -3.611^{**}$ .  $P(t) < 0.05$  (0.05 level of difference according to gender).  $^{**}P(t) < 0.01$  (0.01 level of difference according to gender).

## Practising Mirroring

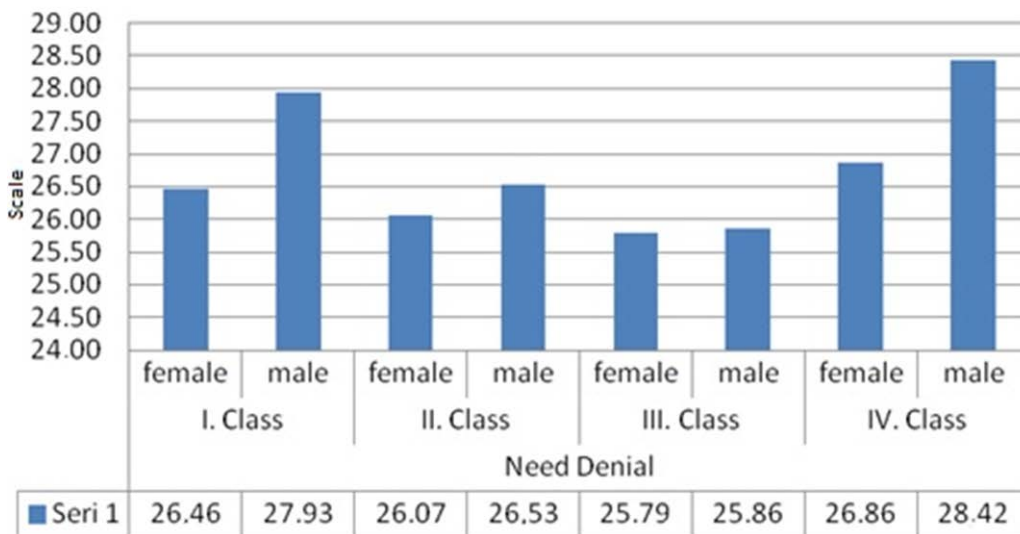


**Figure 15.** t Test results obtained according to gender with repeated measurements of practising mirroring subscale.  $t(\text{first-year}) = -1.338$   $t(\text{second-year}) = -1.048$ ;  $t(\text{third-year}) = -0.011$ ;  $t(\text{fourth-year}) = -0.997$ .  $P(t) < 0.05$  (no significant differences according to gender in any of the classes/years).

In this respect, it is possible to say that the high separation anxiety and engulfment anxiety observed among late adolescents who separate from their parents to receive high education, who have to adapt to a new environment, and who are therefore away from their parent's control for the first time, is compatible with the existing literature. Nurturance seeking refers to the

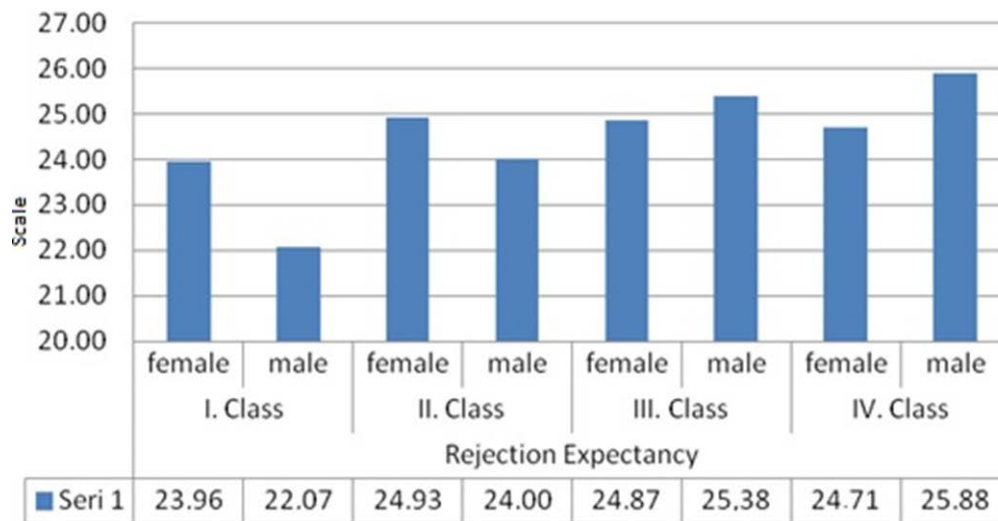
late adolescent's attachment to a caregiver such as their mother, father, grandmother, grandfather, or any other rearing person. On the other hand, since late adolescents have only recently separated from their caregiver (such as their mother or other rearing person) at the time they are first-year students, it is likely that their attachment still persists. This explains why nurturance seeking continued

### Need Denial



**Figure 16.** t Test results obtained according to gender with repeated measurements of need denial subscale.  $t(\text{first-year}) = -1.213$ ;  $t(\text{second-year}) = -0.385$ ;  $t(\text{third-year}) = -0.057$ ;  $t(\text{fourth-year}) = -1.207$ ;  $P(t) < 0.05$  (no significant differences according to gender in any of the classes/years).

### Rejection Expectancy

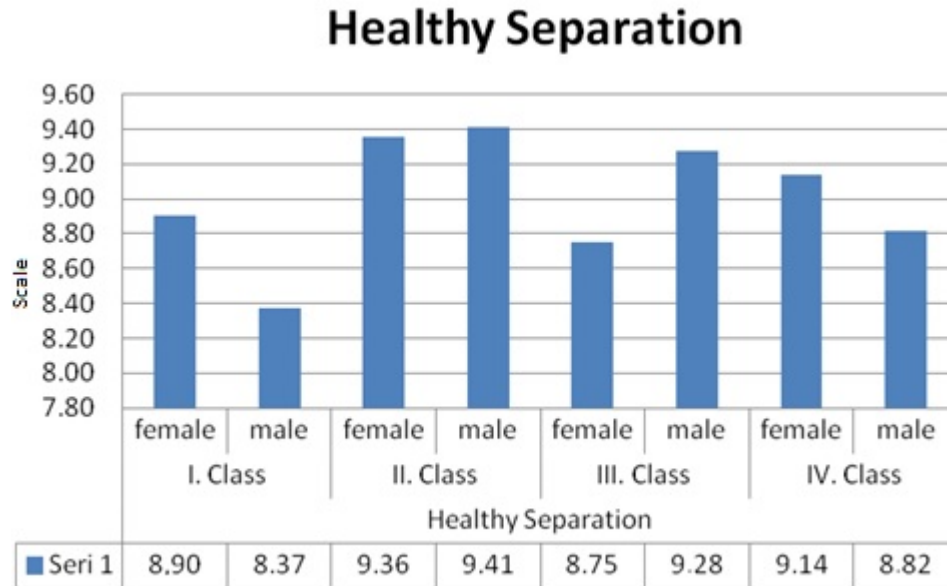


**Figure 17.** t Test results obtained according to gender with repeated measurements of rejection expectancy subscale.  $t(\text{first-year}) = 1.456$ ;  $t(\text{second-year}) = 0.623$ ;  $t(\text{third-year}) = -0.300$ ;  $t(\text{fourth-year}) = -0.795$ .  $P(t) < 0.05$  (no significant differences according to gender in any of the classes/years).

to be high among first-year university students.

Mean scores for the peer enmeshment and healthy separation subscales were found to be highest among second-year students. According to Horrocks (1962), relations with peers and finding a place among them become more important for adolescents than their

relations with parents. At the same time, while the Turkish culture harbors both individualist and communitarian characteristics, the tendency for integration associated with communitarian culture is stronger than the tendency for separation associated with individualist culture (İmamoğlu, 1998). For this reason, it is possible to say



**Figure 18.** t Test results obtained according to gender with repeated measurements of healthy separation subscale.  $t(\text{first-year}) = -1.239$ ;  $t(\text{second-year}) = -0.121$ ;  $t(\text{third-year}) = -1.005$ ;  $t(\text{fourth-year}) = 0.623$ .  $P(t) < 0.05$  (no significant differences according to gender in any of the classes/years).

The Turkish culture places more importance on the demands of the group or society than on the demands of the individual. For this reason, we can say that after coping with the adaptation stage in the first-year of higher education, late adolescents begin to find a place among their peers, and their peers' demands become more important than their own. However, during this period, late adolescents are also expected to balance their parental dependence with their parental independence, and to thereby experience a healthy separation. Therefore, as late adolescents gradually find a place among their peers, with whom relations become more important than parental relations, this might have assisted them in striking a balance between parental dependence and parental independence. This might account for the higher peer enmeshment and healthy separation scores observed among second-year students.

In this study, the highest scores in the teacher enmeshment, practising practising practising mirroring, need denial and rejection expectancy dimensions were observed among fourth-year students. The rejection expectancy refers to the feeling of being rejected/unwanted by parents and siblings. Need denial, on the other hand, is the rejection of need for attachment with parents, siblings and friends. According to Levine and Saintonge (1993), the rejection expectancy and need denial, reflect negative expectations. These two dimensions render late adolescents' adaptation to the separation-individuation process more difficult. In other words, while finding a place between peers, the late adolescents' continued separation from their parents due to higher education has an increasingly negative effect on

their expectations associated with separation-individuation. This can be interpreted as peers acquiring a more important place than parents for late adolescents during the separation-individuation process in Turkish culture. While the negative expectations of late adolescents continue to increase by the time they are in their fourth-year of university education, they also continue to exhibit higher practising practising practising mirroring, which is a reflection of their growing sense of being liked, respected, valuable or admired, and also of their sense of being liked and positively evaluated in their personal relations (Quintana and Kerr, 1993). According to Koepke and Denissen (2012), separation-individuation can, as a developmental process, be conceptualized in terms of changes in interpersonal dependencies and mental cognitive representations.

In this respect, it is possible to state that, during their separation-individuation process, late adolescents have a more positive perception of themselves towards the end of their higher education. Another result observed regarding fourth-year students was their high level of attachment to teachers. Rigid, passive and simple cultures tend to have more communitarian culture characteristics (Triandis, 1996). In communitarian cultures, the demands of the group – such as the school – come before the demands of the individual. For this reason, the higher level of teacher enmeshment observed among fourth-year students is somewhat expected in Turkish culture, since it bears communitarian characteristics. Another observation in this study was that teacher enmeshment was higher among male students than female students in all of the classes/years, from first-year students to fourth-

year students. Since teachers are also perceived as authority figures in Turkish culture, teachers and students also tend to display a relationship based on authority. It appears that during their separation-individuation process, male students have a greater preference/tendency for this authority-based relationship with an authority figure, than female students.

Mean scores for the separation anxiety dimension were found to be higher among third-year female students than third-year male students. In addition, female students of all classes/year, from first-year to fourth-year, had higher scores for nurturance seeking dimension (which is a reflection of stronger attachment to a caregiver figure) than male students. Separation anxiety refers to the anxiety late adolescents experience as they separate from parents and siblings and undergo individuation. Separation from parents and siblings and individuation follows different patterns depending on culture. As previously stated, Turkish culture possesses communitarian characteristics. In communitarian cultures, independence from parents is not viewed as a desirable situation, nor is it supported (Takano and Osaka, 1999). In China, another communitarian culture, mothers tend to place greater value on their sons, which ultimately causes males to be more dependent than females; however, since mothers and daughters usually share the same fate and conditions, they are also close and share an emphatic understanding. In other words, in China, a communitarian culture, females are less dependent than males, while also being closer to their mothers. In Indian society – another culture displaying communitarian characteristics – the separation of the male child from the mother (and therefore the id from the ego) takes place less pronouncedly and at a chronologically later stage than is the case in Western culture (Kakar, 2001; as cited in: Kumar, 2005). Adolescents experience caregiver relations primarily with their mothers, and the separation of male children takes place to a lesser extent than the separation of female children. Thus, in communitarian cultures, independence is not viewed as a desirable situation or trait; female children tend to be more independent, while also being closer to their mothers; and males experience separation to a lesser extent than females. These general observations might explain the higher separation anxiety observed among third-year female students, as well as the higher nurturance seeking seen in female students in all classes/years, from first-year to fourth-year.

Engulfment anxiety, expectation of rejection, peer enmeshment, practising practising practising mirroring, need denial and healthy separation dimensions did not differ significantly according to gender among first, second, third and fourth-year students. This study can be repeated with another group to test and validate the results of the present study.

Further studies conducted, based on the current study's results, can investigate separation-individuation through longitudinal studies encompassing the childhood, adolescence and late adolescence periods. The effect of

cultural factors on separation-individuation can be investigated as well by performing longitudinal studies on these cultures. In addition, it might also be possible to develop an assessment tool including variables associated with the identity, dependence, separation and independence of late adolescents.

### Conflict of Interests

The authors have not declared any conflicts of interest.

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