



A bridge from will to authenticity: The role of meaning

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Abstract

Examining the mediating role of meaning in the effect of will on authenticity in adults is the purpose of this study. The sample is a total number of 289 adults. The correlation between will, authenticity and meaning was examined in SPSS 22. A positive relationship was found between will and personal meaning, between will and pure authenticity, between personal meaning and pure authenticity. The model was tested using AMOS to examine role of meaning in the effect of will on authenticity. It has been seen that the meaning in the effect of the will on authenticity has a mediating role.

Keywords Will · Free will · Volition · Authenticity · Personal meaning

Introduction

The general purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between will and authenticity in adults. In this context, it is thought that there are some relations between will, meaning and authentic life. In addition, it is assumed that meaning has a mediating role in the effect of will on authentic life. The literature on will, meaning, and authenticity supports the aims of the research. Accordingly, first of all, will, authenticity and meaning were examined one by

one. Then, the relationship between will, authenticity and meaning was mentioned.

Will

The will is defined as the ability to choose the individual's own actions freely and the ability to freely express its own choices and decisions (Budak, 2009). Will is the will that includes freedom and is the power and ability to implement an action to be performed under various conditions without external coercion (Bolay, 2013). Free will does not include the freedom to make an absolute decision. Essentially, the will is the ability to decide without any external influence even under pressure (Allais, 2012).

Self-control, rational choice, and planned action are vital forms of free will. Intelligent decision-making and self-control behaviors use the body's basic energy resources. When this energy is exhausted, self-control fails (Baumeister et al., 2008). While Baumeister and Brewer (2012) found that people who do not believe in free will have the high behaviors of being in the guidance of others and thinking only of themselves, they also found that belief for free will is linked to self-efficacy, self-control, internal control, life satisfaction and low stress.

In the adaptation study of the Free Will and Determinism Scale, Alper and Sümer (2017) found the belief in free will was associated with seeing the self as an autonomous person, independent of the influence of others, high control desire and internal control. Özen (2017) developed the Free

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Will Scale and examined the students' levels of free will. It was seen that students who have older parents, who have a higher number of siblings and who have lower academic education have higher perceptions of free will and have successfully completed their developmental tasks.

Authenticity

Especially, the authenticity which is one of the basic concepts of humanist (Rogers, 1980) and existentialist (Yalom, 1980) approach is defined as choices and actions that reflect our real feelings and needs (Budak, 2009). Authenticity is also of point of interest in psychoanalytic and positive psychology (Deci & Ryan, 2009; Fromm, 1965). According to positive psychologists, authenticity is both an individual having feelings, beliefs and internal convictions, and the same individual behaving in a way that demonstrates her true self. In other words, it means to say and feel and act accordingly (Tabak et al., 2012).

Many psychology theories approach authenticity in various aspects. According to Wood et al., (2008) authenticity is described by three components: authentic life, acceptance of external influence and self-alienation. Authentic life is the fact that people behave as themselves in the almost all the environments and act in accordance with their beliefs and values. The acceptance of external influence and self-alienation are the opposite of authentic life.

When the studies about authenticity are examined, different results are observed. Yöntem and İlhan (2013), in their study with adults, found that individualistic self-construct and authentic life predicted altruism significantly. On the other hand, Ekşi et al. (2016) did not find a significant relationship between altruism and authenticity levels of university students.

Meaning

According to the thought system of Frankl, who is one of the first names coming to mind when considering 'meaning', the basic motive of human is the search for meaning. The search for meaning is a phenomenon that includes the qualities of curiosity, productivity and intelligence that reveal the knowledge of who the individual is. Giving a meaning to life and future is the most important source of motivation which connects the individual to life. The search for meaning is a distinctive feature of being human. The three components of the search for meaning are meaning volition, meaning of life and freedom of will. Meaning volition is about being willing to find meaning. The meaning of life can be found in any situation, even in difficult conditions. As for freedom of will is the freedom of the individual to determine an attitude

about the living conditions (Altıntaş & Gültekin, 2005; Ekşi et al., 2018; Okan & Ekşi, 2017; Wong, 1997).

According to Frankl (2016), in order to make life meaningful, it is necessary to establish a love-based relationship with people, to have spiritual feelings, to be intertwined with nature and art, to set goals for the future, to have a sense of humor and to leave a mark.

According to Steger et al. (2008), the meaning of life is the efforts of people to shape or strengthen the goals of their lives. When trying to find out what life means, it should make it a natural part of life. The search for meaning will open the door to new opportunities for human beings.

Research also supports the search for meaning theory. Steger et al. (2008) found a significant relationship between the meaning of life and the determination for achievement. In addition, Riichiro and Masahiko (2006) found a negative relationship between the meaning of life and depression and anxiety symptoms. Akın and Taş (2015) found a positive relationship between the meaning of life and originality in the adaptation study of Life Meaning Scale.

Ho et al. (2010) examined the meaning of life and the role of optimism in supporting well-being in their research with adolescents. Both the meaning of life and optimism were related to the structure of multidimensional psychosocial problems and multidimensional life satisfaction among adolescents. In addition, optimism plays a partial mediator role in the relationship between meaning of life and well-being.

The Relationship of Will, Authenticity and Meaning

When the definitions and components of the concepts of will, authenticity and meaning are examined in the literature, it is thought that these three concepts are related with each other.

Regarding the common the personality traits of authentic individuals, an authentic individual also has a high free will. To be able to make decisions even in difficult and impasse situations and to have the power to resist external pressure and barriers can only be done by individuals who can use their will (Allais, 2012; Altıntaş & Gültekin, 2005). The individual with a free will does all these things because she/he really wants them, not necessarily. It is not compulsory for the authentic individual to be honest with herself/himself either. On the contrary, authenticity enables the individual to express her/his true feelings, desires and tendencies freely (Klenke, 2007).

Considering that one of the three components of the search for meaning is freedom of will, it is seen that the concepts of will and meaning are also closely related (Altıntaş & Gültekin, 2005; Ekşi et al., 2018; Okan & Ekşi, 2017; Wong, 1997).

In the literature, no mediator role study has been found in which will, authenticity and meaning are studied together. It is thought that this study will contribute to the psychology literature, especially spiritual counseling. Spiritual counseling researchers can expand their research by starting from the relationships of these variables. Spiritual counselors can also organize the basic concepts they use in therapy according to the results of this research. Consequently, the general purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between will and authenticity in adults. In accordance with this purpose, the following hypotheses will be tested:

Hypothesis 1. In adults, there is a relationship between will and authentic life.

Hypothesis 2. In adults, there is a relationship between meaning and authentic life.

Hypothesis 3. In adults, meaning has a mediating role in the effect of will on authenticity.

Method

Research Design

In this study, the relationship of will to authenticity in adults was examined with the structural equation model. Relationships between variables can be examined in the context of causality in the model, which is constructed by means of path analysis, one of the structural equation models. Thus, direct and indirect effects between variables can be seen (Çokluk et al., 2016). The model used in this study is similar to Model 4 proposed by Hayes (2013). In the model in the research, it was assumed that the will has a direct effect on authenticity. The second assumption of the model is that meaning has a mediating role in the effect of will on authenticity. The default model has been tested with path analysis. In addition, before data collection, confirmatory factor analysis was performed to see whether the Adolescent Will Scale could be used in adults.

Sample

The convenience sampling method was used in the data collection phase of the research. The adults who made up the sample were reached through google forms. Since each question in these forms is marked as mandatory, there is no missing data. In addition, informed consent was obtained from the participants. Therefore, only volunteers participated to the study. The form was applied to different participants until the required sample size was reached. Within the scope of the research, data were collected in two samples. Since the adolescent will scale is a scale developed on adolescents, it was applied to a sample group of 219 people to perform

confirmatory factor analysis on the adult sample. As a result of the analyzes, it was seen that the adolescent will scale was confirmed in adults. Then, a data group of 289 (160 female, 129 male) people was collected for other analyzes within the scope of the research. In addition, 136 of the participants were married, 147 were single and 6 were divorced. One of the participants received education at the primary school level, 12 at the secondary school level, 203 at the undergraduate level, and 73 at the graduate level.

Data Collection Tools

Demographic Information Form

Adults were given a personal information form which was created by the researchers to collect demographic information such as age, gender, marital status.

Personal Meaning Profile Scale Short Form

The scale developed by McDonald et al. (2012) and adapted to Turkish by Ekşi et al. (2018) is aimed at adults. The 7-point Likert type scale has a total of 21 items and 7 sub-dimensions. These sub-dimensions are self-transcendence, intimacy, religion, achievement, relationship, perceived justice, and self-acceptance. The scale aims to find out what constitutes the meaning of individuals in their lives. There is no inverse item. As the score obtained from the scale increases, personal meaning increases. The CFA results for construct validity are $\chi^2 / df = 1.816$, $p < .001$, RMSEA = 0.049, SRMR = 0.087, NNFI = 0.958, CFI = 0.957, GFI = 0.932, NFI = 0.91, IFI = 0.958). The Cronbach alpha internal consistency coefficient is .83 for the whole scale (Akın, 2015; Ekşi et al., 2018; McDonald et al., 2012).

Authenticity Scale

The scale developed by Wood et al. (2008) and adapted to Turkish by İlhan and Özdemir (2013), is aimed at adults. The 7 point Likert type scale has a total of 12 items. The scale has three sub-dimensions: self-alienation, authentic life and acceptance of external influence. There is no inverse item. While each dimension can be evaluated separately, a pure authenticity score can be obtained by subtracting the scores from the other two dimensions from the authentic life dimension. It shows that a person is authentic when her/his authentic life score is high and the scores of other dimensions are low. The CFA results for construct validity are $G2 / df = [74.39 / 50] 1.49$ RMSEA = .055, CFI = .95, IFI = .95, GFI = .92. The Cronbach Alpha internal consistency coefficients are .79 for alienation, .67 for external

effects acceptance and .62 for authentic life (Akin, 2015; İlhan & Özdemir, 2013; Wood et al., 2008).

Adolescent Will Scale

The scale developed by Okan (2016) is 5-point Likert type and consists of 40 items. The scale has two sub-dimensions: cognitive will and experiential will. There is no inverse item in the scale. Higher scores on the scale indicate that the individual's will is strong. The two factors which are the result of the Exploratory Factor Analysis explain 57% of the total variance. As a result of Confirmatory Factor Analysis, item loads and scale compliance values are sufficient. As a result of the reliability study, Cronbach alts alpha values are $\alpha = .95$ for the cognitive will subscale and $\alpha = .96$ for the experiential will sub dimension. The total Alpha value of the scale was calculated as .97.

Adolescent Will Scale Confirmatory Factor Analysis Results

Adolescent will scale is a scale developed on adolescents. In this study, it was applied to a group of 219 participants to test its usability in adults. Confirmatory factor analysis was performed with the help of AMOS program. Factor loads obtained as a result of the analysis are given in Fig. 1.

The adaptation indices obtained from the analysis showed that the adolescent will scale can be used in adults. ($X^2 / df = 2.167$, $p < .001$, $RMSEA = 0.07$, $S-RMR = 0.00$, $AGFI = 0.86$, $IFI = 0.92$). These results indicate that adolescent will scale can be used in adults. Based on these results, adolescent will scale was applied to adults in our study.

Results

The reliability coefficients, mean values, standard deviation values, and Pearson correlation coefficients of the variables within the scope of the study are shown in the Table. According to the results of the correlation analysis, there is a positive correlation between pure authenticity and personal meaning ($r = .47$, $p < .001$), pure authenticity, and willpower ($r = .58$, $p < .001$). There is a positive correlation between will and personal meaning ($r = .59$, $p < .01$) (Table 1).

The relationship between Will and Pure Authenticity is high level as seen in the model ($r = .58$; $p < .000$) (Fig. 2). According to this model, the will significantly predicts pure authenticity. This constitutes a suitable basis for continuing the mediating role of 'personal meaning' which is the main purpose of the study, between the two variables.

When the structural equation model (SEM) analysis for the model is examined, it is understood that personal meaning has an intermediary role. As understood from the first model, the relationship between will and

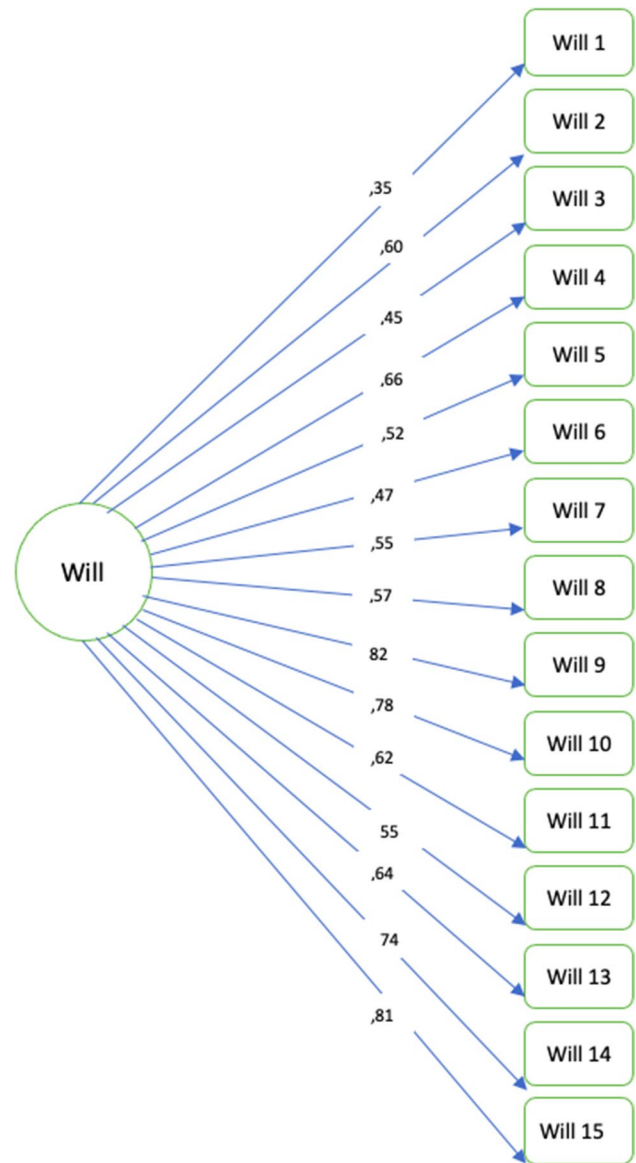


Fig. 1 Will scale path diagram and factor loads

authenticity ($r = .58$), while the second model ($r = .39$) with the effect of personal meaning regressed ($X^2 / df = 2.33$; $RMSEA = .07$; $SRMR = .00$; $NFI = .94$; $CFI = .96$; $GFI = .96$; $RFI = .89$; $TLI = .963$). This shows that personal meaning serves as a partial mediator between will and pure authenticity (Fig. 3).

When Table 2 is examined, it is understood that all direct path coefficients are meaningful after the bootstrapping process. Similarly, the indirect path coefficient is also significant (bootstrap coefficient = .19, 95% G.A. = .231, .44). When all these results are considered, it can be said that the personal meaning of adults plays a partial mediator role between their will and pure authenticity.

Table 1 Reliability coefficients, Mean, standard deviation and correlation values

Variables	Cronbach's Alpha	\bar{x}	SD	1	2	3
1. Personal Meaning	.85	109.89	14.27	1		
2. Will	.87	60.84	6.98	.59**	1	
3. Pure Authenticity	.74	-2.93	9.52	.47**	.58**	1

**Significant at $p < .001$

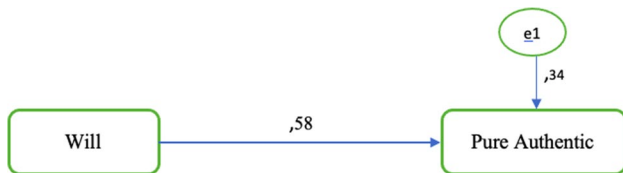


Fig. 2 The relationship model between will and pure authenticity

Table 2 Model's bootstrapping process

Model Paths		%95 BCa Confidence Interval	
Model 1	Coefficient	Low	High
Direct			
Will → Pure Authentic	.39	.56	.76
Will → Personal Meaning	.67	.32	.64
Personal M. → Pure A.	.28	.15	.44
Indirect			
Will → Personal M → Pure Authentic	.19	.13	.44

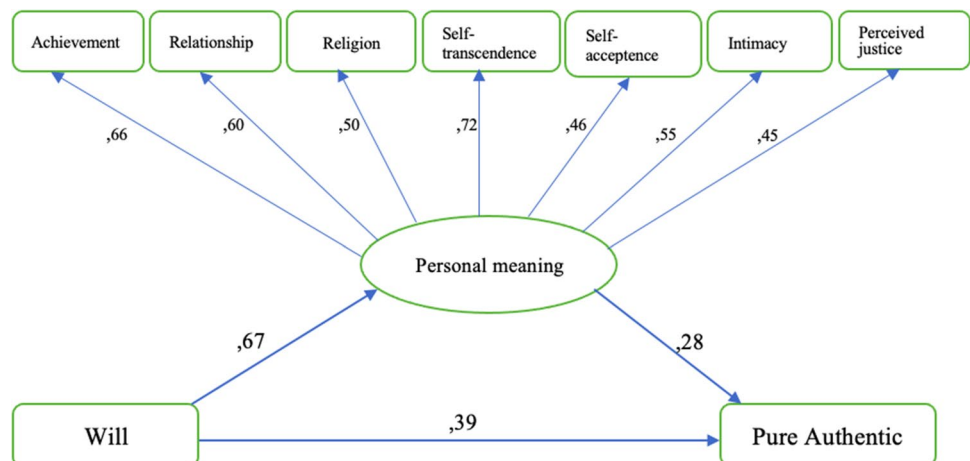
Discussion

In this study, the mediator role of meaning in the effect of the will on authenticity in adults was examined. According to the research findings, a positive relationship was found between the will and the authentic life between the will and personal meaning and between the personal meaning and authentic life. According to this, as the level of will of adults increases, the levels of authentic life and personal meaning increase. Also the level of authenticity increases as the level of personal meaning increases. It is concluded that personal meaning has a mediating role in the effect of will on authenticity in adults.

Discussion about Will

Frankl's (2016) view that one of the components of meaning in life is the free will, supports the positive relationship between the meaning and the will which is one of the results of this research. In other words, based on the findings of the research, it can be said that the level of will's being free may be increased by the means of increase in personal meaning. When the literature was examined, it was found that there was more research conducted between the will (Allais, 2012) which means deciding without any external influence even under pressure and the self-control (Hoch & Loewenstein, 1991; Mischel et al., 1996; Job et al., 2010; Gailliot et al.,

Fig. 3 The mediator role of personal meaning between the will and pure authenticity



2007; Mischel et al., 2011; Vohs et al., 2012). However Baumeister and DeWall (2009) investigated the effects of not believing in free will. They concluded that people who do not believe in free will have a lower level than those who believe in their prosocial behavior, such as helping others. Frankl (2016), in the process of discovering the meaning of life, emphasizes the need to create a piece or work in a job, to experience something or to interact with a person. It can be said that belief in the free will and the prosocial behaviors that Baumeister and DeWall (2009) suggest in their work match up with the process of discovery of the life's meaning stated by Frankl. It can be stated that the positive relationship between personal meaning and will which is the finding of this research coincide with the literature.

Discussion about Authenticity

Harter (2002) suggested that different theories have different perspectives on the concept of authenticity. According to Kernis (2003), authenticity is the free manifestation of the true self in daily relationships. According to Harter (2002), authenticity is that actions and expressions are consistent with values, desires and emotions. Wood et al. (2008) evaluate authenticity as a character trait, while Kernis (2003) and Harter (2002) treat it as a changeable attitude. In their study, Fleeson and Wilt (2010) asked participants to report 12 sensations of authenticity while engaged in different social activities. As a result, they reached the conclusion that the level of authenticity of the person is affected by the social environment and social relations in which they are more than personality traits. It is thought that the level of authenticity of the individual is influenced by the social environment and social relations in which they are involved rather than personality traits (Fleeson & Wilt, 2010). In this study, a positive relationship was found between personal meaning and authentic life (Wood et al., 2008), which means that people become themselves in most environments and act in harmony with their own beliefs and values. In other words, in this study, it is stated that authenticity is character trait. This finding shows similarity with the literature. Akın and Taş (2015) found a positive relationship between the meaning of life and authenticity in their scale study. Goldman and Kernis (2002) reported that authenticity was positively associated with self-esteem and life satisfaction, and that in the light of the findings, authenticity was not only associated with positive emotions but also with feelings of self-worth. In the study conducted by Koşucu (2016), the mediating role of ontological well-being in the relationship between authenticity and mental health and life satisfaction was examined. According to the results of this study, the relationship between authenticity and psychological well-being was determined.

Discussion about Meaning

Based on the research findings, the importance of meaning in human life emerges when it is evaluated in terms of the positive relationship of personal meaning with will and authenticity. According to Frankl (2016), the founder of Logotherapy, who survived four concentration camps during World War II, the main source of motivation to connect one to life is to have a meaning in a person's life. Frankl (2016) emphasizes that people who have survived in concentration camps have life goals. In other words, it can be interpreted that in the process of making life meaningful, the situation that the people are in does not affect them negatively. Research by Yüksel (2012) may support this idea. Yüksel (2012) examined the meaning of life of young adults in the 17-27 age group according to the variables of gender, perceived socioeconomic level, perceived parental attitude, parental union or divorce and birth order. It was concluded that the meaning of life did not differ significantly according to gender, perceived socioeconomic level and parental coexistence or separation. In addition, the meaning of life in young adults varies significantly according to perceived parental attitude and position at birth. Young adults who have an authoritarian parent cannot find meaning in their current lives and seek meaning for future life. The first children were found to have more meaning of current life than the single child and the last child. In Yüksel's (2012) research, the difference between the perception of the first child, single child and the last child in the meaning of life and Adler's (2010) opinion on the meaning of life are similar. According to Adler (2010), the more people there are, the more meaning is given to life. There are other studies on the meaning of life with university students. For example, in the research conducted by Yıkılmaz and Demir-Güdül (2015) it was concluded that as the level of finding meaningful in life and mindfulness increases, the level of satisfaction from life increases. Demirbaş-Çelik (2016) found a positive relationship between the meaning and the purpose of life and stated that the purpose of life increased as the meaning of life increased. There are also studies on the meaning in life with elderly individuals. Some research has been conducted on the prediction of late depression symptoms in the elderly (eg. Fry, 2000; Prager, 1996; Reker, 1997; Wong, 1997). For example, Fry (2000) in the study of existential predictors of psychological well-being in the elderly revealed that existential factors such as personal meaning, religiosity and spirituality were more determinative than physical health and social resources. In summary, as it can be seen from the results of the research, it can be said that individuals who have a high meaning of life regardless of their life period are advantageous in areas such as protection from depression, providing more satisfaction

from life, psychological well-being. In this study, it was concluded that individuals with high personal meaning levels were more authentic. This result is in line with the literature.

Discussion about Relationship among Will, Authenticity and Meaning

When the concept of will is evaluated from the point of view of existentialism, human being is accepted as the only being that makes its own existence on earth and all other beings are created before existence. The tree cannot make its own woodiness, but human beings make humanity itself and exist just as they do. In doing so, he creates his own values and chooses his own path. There is life after a person begins to live and it is a living person who gives meaning to life. There is nothing in nature to guide man. Human is free, can choose his life in whatever form, however, human is as free as he can bear his own responsibility (Geçtan, 1998, p.14). From this point of view, it can be said that will can have an effect on authenticity when the components of will such as decision making, responsibility and choice are taken into consideration. The positive correlation between the will and authenticity of this study supports this view. The positive relationship between the will and authenticity which is one of the research findings coincides with some studies in the literature. It has been seen that the variables such as self-esteem which can particularly be one of the components and building blocks of will and authenticity, considering the internal references in decision-making, self-knowledge and not being arrogant were examined in the literature. In this context, it can be said that there is a decrease in the level of authenticity when the effect of external interventions is effective in decision making, in other words when the level of will is decreased. Taşçıoğlu and Tosun's (2018) study examined how individuals present themselves on Facebook, different self-representations, psychological well-being variables (self-esteem and life satisfaction), and their relationship to different dimensions of authenticity (self-alienation, acceptance of external influence and authentic life). A total of 180 people, 94 university students and 86 adults, participated in the study. False-deceptive self-presentation of students is positively related to the dimensions of self-alienation and acceptance of external influence. In other words, it has been found that as the false-deceptive self-presentations of the students on social media increases, there is an increase in the dimensions of self-alienation and acceptance of external influence which are sub-dimensions of authenticity. False-deceptive self-presentation is negatively related to authentic life for adults. Also, Tracy et al. (2009), who investigated the effect of authentic and arrogance on self-esteem and narcissistic characteristics, found that people with high self-esteem along with authenticity had successful social relationships

and positive mental health, while those with high narcissistic levels along with arrogance, exhibited aggression and other anti-social behaviors. Another striking research in the literature by Grijak (2017) is the investigation of the relationship between authenticity and mental health consisting of many components. In this research, the authenticity scale developed by Wood et al. (2008) was used. In this scale, there are authentic living, accepting external influence and self alienation sub-dimensions. Mental health scale consists of psychological distress (anxiety, depression, loss of behavioral / emotional control) and psychological well-being (overall positive affect, emotional ties and satisfaction with life and overall mental health index) sub-dimensions. As a result of the study, a negative relationship was found between authentic life and acceptance and alienation of external effects. A positive relationship was found between authentic life and psychological well-being and a negative relationship was found with psychological distress (high psychological well-being and low psychological distress characterize a mentally healthy person). In other words, authenticity was found to be closely related to mental health.

As a result, considering the literature and research findings, for some people to study on meaning of their lives may be essential to use their internal resources in decision-making processes in their life, to develop an attitude against irresistible pain, to value their own. The role of personal meaning in the effect of the will on authenticity which can be seen in this research is a result that supports this idea.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In this study, the mediator role of meaning in the effect of the will on authenticity in adults was examined. According to the research findings, a positive relationship was found between the will and the authentic life between the will and personal meaning and between the personal meaning and authentic life. It is concluded that personal meaning has a mediating role in the effect of will on authenticity in adults. These obtained results were discussed by comparing with the researches in the literature. The following suggestions can be presented in the context of these results. In this study, adults were taken as the sample group. In addition, the results of this study are limited to the responses of the participants to likert-type scales. Considering such limitations, it is important to carry out similar studies with different age and sample groups. Moreover, conducting research about this subject in different methods, such as qualitative and experimental research, will play an important role in supporting the results of this study. Based on the fact that the will is relevant to both authentic life and personal meaning, the strengthening of the will, which is an important concept for the life of

individuals, can be implemented as programs in schools. This training both develops the skills of individuals to make and decide their own free choices, and contributes to the development of personal meaning and authenticity. Since these three concepts are interrelated, it can also contribute to the development of will through guidance programs to increase authenticity and personal meaning.

Data Availability Upon request we are able to send relevant documentation or data in order to verify the validity of the results presented. This could be in the form of raw data, samples, etc.

Declarations

All processes of this article have been prepared in accordance with ethical principles.

Conflict of Interest As disclosure of potential conflicts of interest, the authors do not have any financial or other relationship with other organizations and people which may inappropriately affect the research. The authors declare that they do not have any conflict of interest with this paper.

Ethical Approval All procedures performed in the study involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and/or national research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards.

Informed Consent The informed consent form was read by the researchers to all participants and approval was obtained.

Research Involving Human and Animal Rights The study involved human participants that are all adult and informed consents were obtained from all of the participants

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