The relationship between differentiation of self and aspects of identity

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Abstract

According to family systems theory differentiation of self is a highly important psychological construct that provides a framework for understanding how the quality of the parent-child relation plays an important role in family member's experiences of stress and anxiety. This study examined the relationship between differentiation of self and aspects of identity. For this purpose, two hundred (100 male, 100 female, 28 missing) students from University of Tehran were participated in this study. All Participants were completed the Differentiation of Self Inventory (DSI) and Aspect of Identity Questionnaire-IV (AIQ-IV). Correlation analyses showed that the aspects of differentiation of self (Emotional Reactivity, Emotional Cut-Off and Fusion with Others and I-Position) were negatively associated with aspects of identity (collective Identity (CI) Orientation, Personal Identity (PI) Orientation, Social Identity (SI) Orientation and Relational Identity (RI) Orientation). Regression analyses showed that fusion with others can predict relational identity and social identity. It can be concluded that aspects of differentiation of self will influence aspects of identity. Implications of these findings are discussed.

Keywords: family systems theory, differentiation of self, aspects of identity

1. Introduction

Bowen’s Family Systems Theory is arguably considered the most comprehensive theory of human functioning from a systems perspective. Grounded in natural systems theory, Bowen Family Systems Theory is a theory of multi generational emotional functioning. The concepts of "differentiation of self" and the "emotional system" are essential elements in Bowen theory (Skowron & Van Epps & Cipriano, in press). Differentiation of self is the internal, psychic condition of being able to distinguish feelings from thoughts. Differentiation is described on a continuum where at one end (high differentiation) an individual is able to maintain a strong sense of self in the midst of uncertain circumstances and intense emotional relationships. At the other end of the continuum (low differentiation), a person loses self in situations that produce anxiety, becoming emotionally dependent and enmeshed or fused psychologically with others (Beebe, 2009). Also differentiation is a transferrable characteristic of family and in the (multigenerational transmission process) problem and anxieties of family home transfer from generation to generation (Sawatzky, Hurst, & Paré, 1996). The concept of self- Differentiation has two dimensions;

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intra psychic and interpersonal. On an intra-psychic level, differentiation refers to the ability to distinguish emotional feelings from other intellectual processes. With the interpersonal level in mind, differentiation involves the capacity to develop a balance of autonomy while maintaining closeness with others. Intra-psychic dimensions of differentiation include Emotional Reactivity (ER) and difficulty in taking an “I” position (IP), while interpersonal dimensions include emotional cut-off (EC) and fusion with others (FO) (Yousefi, Etemadi, Bahrami, Fatehezade, Ahmadi, Beshlidgeh, 2009). Also studies have shown that Differentiation of self has been positively correlated with psychological well-being, ethnic belongingness, self-control, and marital adjustment and negatively correlated with chronic anxiety, psychiatric symptoms, fears of abandonment, and desire for merger (Skowron, & Friedlander, 1998; Tuason, & Friedlander, 2000; Cheek, 1989). Identity orientations refer to the relative importance that individuals place on various identity attributes or characteristics when constructing their self-deﬁnitions (Cheek, 1989). Self-identity comprises a number of “self-images” that lie on a continuum, with personalised self-schemata at one extreme and self-characteristics related to social categories at the other (Hagger, Anderson, Kyriakaki, Darkings, 2007). Cheek (1989) made somewhat similar distinctions between personal, social, and collective identity orientations and studied the importance of these identity orientations. He defined PI as private self-conceptions and subjective feelings, and SI as public image and social roles and relationships. Finally, he defined CI as membership in and identification with different groups and collectives, such as religious, national, or ethnic groups. Each of these conceptions of self, the personal or individual, the social, and the collective-theoretically coexists in a single individual. Within an individual, however, these different aspects would vary in their descriptiveness and importance (Carpenter, arakitapoglu-Aygün, 2005). Many studies have been conducted on the impact of aspects of identity on and their relationship with other variables in different social educational contexts, sometimes with controversial findings and results (Razmjo, 2010). Cheek and Busch (1982) found SI to be positively correlated with measures of public self-consciousness, sociability, and institutional and altruistic selves. PI was positively correlated with private self-consciousness, need for uniqueness and achievement-oriented self (Cheek, & Busch, 1982). Cheek et al. (1994) reported in their study that while there were no significant differences between Asian-Americans and European-Americans with respect to personal and social identities, Asian-Americans were signiﬁcantly higher in CI than European-Americans (Cheek, Tropp, and Chen, 1994). According to contents above the aim of this study is the relationship between aspects of differentiation of self in Bowen theory and aspects of identity in Iranian sample.

2. Method

2.1. Participant

Two hundred students from university of Tehran (100 males, 100 females, 28 missing) were chosen randomly. The mean age of the sample was 24.12 years (SD = 2.88); the mean age of male students was 24.29 years (SD = 1.81), and for female students it was 23.96 years (SD = 3.67). Age ranged between 18 and 44 years.

2.2. Measures

**Differentiation of Self Inventory (DSI)** Theis inventory is a 43-item self-report measure that focuses on adults, their significant relationships, and their current relations with family of origin. Participants respond to items on a six-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (not at all true for me) to 6 (very true for me). The DSI contains four subscales: emotional reactivity (ER; 12 items), I position (IP; 10 items), emotional cut-off (EC; 13 items) and fusion with others (FO; 9 items). The DSI full-scale score was calculated by reversing raw scores on all items on the ER, EC, and FO sub-scales and one item (35) on the IP sub-scale and totalling them, so that higher scores reﬂected greater differentiation (less emotional reactivity, less difﬁculty in maintaining I-positions, less emotional cut-off and less fusion). The original study reported internal consistent reliabilities (Cranach’s alpha) as follows: DSI full-scale = 0.73, ER = 0.66, IP = 0.65, EC = 0.73 and FO = 0.60 (Skowron, Friedlander, 1998). Internal consistent reliabilities for the Persian version of the scale are reported as good: DSI full scale = 0.94, ER = 0.78, EC = 0.86, IP = 0.83 and FO = 0.88.

**Aspects of Identity Questionnaire - IV (AIQ – IV)** Development of the aspects of identity questionnaire began with the selection of items from Sampson's (1978) list of identity characteristics that were judged to represent the domains of personal and social identity (Cheek & Briggs, 1981, 1982). Subsequently, some items were reworded, others eliminated, and new items were developed to improve the reliability and content validity of the measures
(Cheek, 1982/83; Cheek & Hogan, 1981; Hogan & Cheek, 1983). Because the psychometric analyses indicated that certain items originally scored in the social identity category (e.g., “Being a part of the many generations of my family”) were tending to cluster on a third factor representing communal or collective identity, a third scale for this domain was developed (Cheek, Underwood, & Cutler, 1985 and Cheek, Tropp, Chen, & Underwood, 1994). Neither the social nor collective scales focus on intimate relationships with close friends or romantic partners, so a fourth scale for relational identity orientation (“Being a good friend to those I really care about”) was added to the AIQ-IV (Cheek, Smith, & Tropp, 2002). Therefore, in the present study, the fourth version of Cheek, Smith and Tropp’s (2002) scale was used. To avoid any confusion and enhance validity, the Persian version of the questionnaire was utilized and the back translation by two experts in the field confirmed the original concepts of the translated questionnaire. The numbers of items in the form of a Likert Scale in each category are as follows:

a. personal identity: 10 items
b. Social identity: 7 items
c. Collective identity: 8 items
d. Relational identity: 10 items
e. Special: 10 items

Cheek, Tropp and Chen (1994) ran a factor analysis of questionnaire items and the results indicated that personal, social, and collective aspects of identity constitute three relatively distinct categories of identity attributes with adequate psychometric characteristics. Furthermore, the alpha coefficients of reliability for each scale were: personal (.84), social (.86), and collective (.68). Moreover, Cheek, Smith and Tropp’s (2002) psychometric analyses in a sample of 1999 college women yielded 10 items for the new relational scale. As such, the final version of the questionnaire comprises four categories. Furthermore, the researcher ran a confirmatory factor analysis of questionnaire items and the results indicated that personal, relational, social, and collective aspects of identity constitute four relatively distinct categories of identity attributes with adequate psychometric characteristics. The validity of the third scale was checked by Jowkar and Latifian (2006) utilizing factor analysis on 404 Iranian girls and boys and the factor analysis of the questionnaire yielded three main factors and all the items delineated acceptable go-togetherness. As for the reliability, Jowkar and Latifian (2006) ran the Cronbach’s alpha coefficients of reliability and the indices for personal, social and collective identities were 0.63, 0.67 and 0.55, respectively. Moreover, the researcher calculated the reliability index for the 5 variables of the questionnaire using Cronbach’s Alpha and the results were 0.55 (personal identity), 0.69 (social identity), 0.69 (collective identity), 0.79 (relational identity), 0.66 (special items) and for all the items of the questionnaire the reliability index was 0.88. Therefore, Cronbach's Alpha depicts the fact that each of the factors by itself and the combination of all factors had acceptable reliability indices (Razmjo, 2010)

2.3. Procedure

At the beginning of a lecture, students were invited to participate in the study. It was emphasized that Participation was not obliged. The students who agreed to participate filled out an informed consent. Then the Questionnaires were administered in a random order to avoid order effects in the data.

3. Results

Table 1 describes the descriptive statistics. Correlation coefficients were used to examine the association of the aspects of differentiation of self with the aspects of identity. Table 2 describes correlations between the variables of the study. Correlation analyses showed that the aspects of differentiation of self were negatively associated with aspects of identity. Also PI, IP, CI showed the lowest correlation (r=-0.02) and PI, RI the most correlation (r=0.62) with ER

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspect of Differentiation of Self</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Emotional reactivity</td>
<td>172</td>
<td>37.26</td>
<td>5.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;I&quot; position</td>
<td>172</td>
<td>35.78</td>
<td>5.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional cut-off</td>
<td>172</td>
<td>44.51</td>
<td>7.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fusion with others</td>
<td>172</td>
<td>36.64</td>
<td>6.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal identity</td>
<td>172</td>
<td>37.76</td>
<td>4.81</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The regression resulted in a significant overall model predicting approximately 48% of the variance in PI ($R^2 = 0.48$, $p < 0.05$), 10% of the variance in RI ($R^2 = 0.10$, $P < 0.05$), 24% of the variance in SI ($R^2 = 0.24$, $P < 0.05$) and 0.04% of the variance in CI ($R^2 = 0.04$, $P < 0.05$). The regression analyses showed that FO ($\beta = -0.30$, $t = -3.20$, $P < 0.05$) and ($\beta = -0.36$, $t = -4.20$, $P < 0.05$), emerged as independent predictors of RI and SI respectively.

## 4. Discussion

The aim of this study was to examine the relationship between aspects of differentiation of self in murry bowen theory and aspects of identity. According to gained resulted FO predicted dimensions of social identity and relational identity between other dimensions of identity. This result is consistent with gained result by cutler et al (1984)in that study have shown that SI was instead significantly correlated with concern for social appropriateness and altruistic orientation (Cutler, Lennox, & Wolfe, 1984) In connection with these results can be said the persons who are mixed in relation with others show stronger social and relational identity than others. Also can be said there are factors or others efficient factors that cause persons to concentrate and emphasis more on social and relational identities and also it increases intimacy or fear of rejection motivations in them to the others persons. Also in another study by Lutwak, Ferrari & Cheek (1998), to investigate The role of identity orientation and processing style in moral affects, in a sample of 306 from university students were conducted the resulted showed that guilt (TOSCA) was related to PI and the Informational Identity Style whereas shame was related to SI and the Normative Identity Style. The CI did not correlate significantly with either guilt or shame, but it did have moderate positive correlations with both the Informational and the Normative Identity Styles (Lutwak, Ferrari, & Cheek, 1998). Also Skowron, Stanley, & Shapiro, (2009) in a study Over-time relationship between differentiation of self and psychological and relational well-being in a sample of young adult college students. Investigated Results demonstrated that greater differentiation of self-that is, lower emotional reactivity and an ability to take “I” positions in one’s relationships, along with less emotional cut-off or fusion with others in relationships assessed early in the semester, predicted fewer psychological Symptoms and interpersonal problems at the semester’s end. Thus, individuals who reported that they were more emotionally reactive and less able to regulate their emotions, who had difficulty maintaining a clear sense of self in relationships, and who tended to engage either in emotional cut-off or fusion with others, experienced the greatest interpersonal distress and psychosocial problems 3 months later, even after statistically controlling for early semester problem levels. In contrast, those who were better able to emotionally regulate, think clearly under stress, and stay in good emotional contact with others while also maintaining a clear sense of self in those relationships, reported the highest levels of psychosocial and interpersonal well-being 3 months later (Skowron, Stanley, & Shapiro, 2009; Büyükóztürk, Atalay, Sozgun, & Kebapci, 2011). Finally, according to gained result and research limitations such as this study relied on self-report of schemas and self-report aspects of identity and doing research to the correlation method, Fallowing suggestions are offered for the future studies: using implicit instrument to the preventing of Common popular responses of participant in research and research works carried out with experimental designs.
References


