

Studying the Relationship Between Self-Differentiation Components and Avoidance/ Diffuse Identity Style and Informational Identity Styles in Adolescents

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ABSTRACT

In order to investigate the relationship between self-differentiation and avoidance/ diffuse identity style and informational identity styles in adolescents, 50 adolescents were chosen in Tabriz and Berzonsky identity style questionnaire and Skowron and Friedlander self-differentiation questionnaire were responded. Data obtained were analyzed using Pearson correlation coefficient and stepwise multiple regression. Analysis of the results showed there is direct relationship between self-differentiation components (emotional reactivity, My status, emotional cut off and mingling with others), and informational identity style and there is reverse relationship between self-differentiation components and avoidance/ diffuse identity style. According to the results, there is the possibility of practical utilization of research findings in the field of counseling interventions.

Keywords: Self-Differentiation Components, Informational Identity Style, Avoidance/ Diffuse Identity Style, Adolescents.

Introduction

Murray Bowen (creator of family systems theory) assumes family as an emotional unit and network of intertwined relationships and if we analyze it from multi generation or history frame we can understand it better. He stressed on role of family emotional system that includes multi-generation and introduced it as person malfeasance cause. In his opinion, families' intertwined relationships are under the command of the balance force that are in all natural systems (Kerr and Bowen, 1988). Bowen current theory on family is in the form of emotional communication system, consisting of eight interconnected concept including 1. Self-

differentiation 2. Triangulate 3. Family emotional system 4. Family projection process 5. Emotional cutoff 6. Multigenerational transmission process 7. Sibling position 8. Social repression and theoretical underlying of these concepts is that it is supposed there is some kind of chronic anxiety in life. (Freidman, 1991). The core concept of the theory that other concepts are described relative to it, is Self- differentiation. Self- differentiation refers to the separation of itself from Multi-generational family system, a system that is characterized by different levels of anxiety projection and emotional attachment. (Bowen, 1978; Papro, 1990).

The extent of differentiation indicates the extent to which one can distinguish between the intellectual and emotional processes that experience that is the extent to which the person can avoid from behaviors that are auto-generated from excitement. The extent of emotional separation of one from the parents has a key role in this process, because it requires people to have a differentiated self, without experiencing emotional cutoff with family members. Those who achieve successful self-differentiation are able to free themselves from emotional attachment to their families, without having to cut ties with family members. (Goldenberg and Goldenberg, 2003; Johnson & Buboltz, 2000). Self-differentiation includes four key components: 1) emotional reactivity 2) My status 3) Emotional cut off 4) mingling with others (Skowron & Friedlander, 1998). Self-differentiation is necessary for communication and psychological adjustment. As researchers showed in their research (Johnson & Boylans, 2000; Crain, 1986 and Green, 1986 quoted from Peleg & Papko, 2004) that there is a relationship between individuals' self-differentiation and psychological reactions. Also researches confirmed (Skowron, 2004; Papko, 2004; Gavazy, 1994 and 1993, quoted from Sehat, 2007 and Anderson & Sabatelly, 1993 and Bartel Haraing, 1997; Pleg, 2004 quoted from Maarefvand, 2002) the relationship between self-differentiation, stress, anxiety and health.

One of the psychological adjustment aspects that is related to self-differentiation is identity. Identity is mix of beliefs, values, roles, and various cognitive, practical and moral skills that is converted to a cohesive whole and cause a coherence in relation to their past and illustrate their future orientation. In this regard the

process-oriented approach to identity is a try that Berzonsky (1990, 1994) has done. Berzonsky (1990) studied the role of personal epistemology in the process of identity formation and concluded that people use the cognitive- social processes to solve personal problems, decision making and processing information related to themselves and finally forming their identity. He believes that people lay their identity based on three different cognitive processing orientation that are called identity processing styles (including informational style, normative style and avoidance/ diffuse style). People who have informational identity style explore information actively and have passed commitment. These people are skeptical about their views and tend to judge on themselves after process and evaluating information. This identity style correlates with thinking on themselves, compromising efforts focused on the problem, high demand to recognition, deliberately decision-making and cognitive complexity. In other words, people having active informational identity style are going to collect, process and evaluate identity, so they accept information from environment and facing inconsistent information with their identity try to reconsider their identity features. Avoidance/ diffuse identity style describes people who usually hesitate to show their decision making and try to delay them as much as possible. They are reluctant to deal with personal problems and issues related to their identity and solving it (Berzonsky, 1994).

Identity happens in socio- cultural context. It is obvious that family is an effective and determining sub context in the process of identity formation. Families' efficiency has been emphasized in the process of identity formation by researchers and theorists. BARBER (2002) pointed out that high

involvement and parental psychological control has negative impacts on adolescent autonomy and their dealing with identity tasks. Luyckx and colleagues (2007) in a longitudinal study found that perceived parental control has negative effect on commitment aspects and children's deep discovery. Jenkins et al., (2005) also concluded that self-differentiation from major family correlates with the quality of solving mental-social growth crisis of Erikson's theory. Minuchin (2004) also considers the family as identity origin and argues that if boundaries of family sub systems are unknown and the inability of independent exploration, identity will encounter difficulty. Self-differentiation is important factor as a function of the quality of family members' emotional attachment to each other, that its relationship with identity styles empirically is not tested yet. This study investigated the relationship between Self-differentiation extent and informational identity style among adolescents. The study question is this: What relationship is there between the components of self-differentiation (emotional reactivity, my status, emotional cut off and mingling with others) with the informational identity style?

Method

Community and statistical sample

The statistical community of this study includes all Tabriz 12 to 16 years' old adolescents that using available sampling method 50 adolescents were selected and studied as sample.

Measurement tools

Bowen self-differentiation questionnaire (DSI-R)

The questionnaire was developed in 1988 by Skowron and Friedlander and was

revised by Skowron and Smith 2003 and ultimate test built on the basis of Bowen theory by Jackson in 46 articles and Yunesi standardized it in Iran (2006). This questionnaire is a self-assessment and self-report tool and is used to evaluate persons' differentiation and its main focus is on adults, important relationships and current relationships with family. The items of this questionnaire are scored in a Likert scale from 1 to 6. This scale consists of four subscales of emotional responses, my status, emotional cut off and mingling with others. Yunesi (2006) calculated reliability coefficients of this questionnaire by Cronbach's alpha method 0.85, and researchers' calculated reliability was 0.79 through statistical data.

Berzonsky's Identity Styles Questionnaire (ISD)

Identity Styles Questionnaire was designed by Berzonsky for the first time (1989) to measure cognitive-social processes that adolescents use in dealing with issues of identity. The questionnaire consisted of 40 questions, 11 questions were devoted to informational identity style, 9 questions to normative identity style and 10 questions to avoidance/diffuse identity style, and 10 items to commitment scale. The first scale was used to measure the informational identity style. Subjects respond to questions based on a five degree scale. Berzonsky (1997) reported the Cronbach's alpha coefficients for each subscales 0.70, 0.64, 0.76, 0.71 in final revised version of the questionnaire.

Findings

Statistical characteristics (explanatory) of studying variables and relationships between variables (correlation matrix) are presented in Tables 1 and 2 as follows:

Table 1. Descriptive characteristics of Self- differentiation components and informational identity style

Variable		Mean	Standard deviation	N
Self-differentiation	Emotional reactivity	22/68	6/34	50
	My status	26/13	5/75	50
	Self- differentiation	30/71	5/54	50
	mingling with others	16/76	4/89	50
Identity style	Informational identity style	23/71	3/76	50
	Avoidance/ diffuse Identity style	18/35	3/54	50

Table 2. Correlation matrix of studied variables

		Emotional reactivity	My status	Emotional cut off	mingling with others	Informational style	Avoidance / diffuse Identity style
Pearson correlation coefficient	Emotional reactivity	1	0/26	0/22	0/26	0/25	-0/25
	My status		1	0/20	0/37	0/39	-0/18
	Emotional cut off			1	0/16	0/21	-0/23
	Mingling with others				1	0/39	-0/19
	Informational style					1	-0/21
	Avoidance/ diffuse Identity style						1
Significance level	Emotional reactivity		0/01	0/01	0/01	0/01	0/01
	My status			0/01	0/01	0/01	0/01
	Emotional cut off				0/01	0/01	0/01
	mingling with others					0/01	0/01
N	Emotional reactivity		50	50	50	50	50
	My status			50	50	50	50
	Self-differentiation				50	50	50
	mingling with others					50	50

In order to describe studied variables and identifying the role of each of them in

predicting changes of informational identity style and avoidance/ diffuse

identity style we calculated the correlation between variables listed in Table 2.

As set forth in Table 2, a positive correlation among informational identity style and emotional reactivity, my status, emotional cut off and mingling with others is significant in $P < 0.01$.

This means that higher scores on the components of self-differentiation is associated with increased informational

identity style scores. The negative correlation of avoidance/ diffuse identity style with emotional reactivity, my status, emotional cut off and mingling with others is significant in $P < 0.01$ level. This means that the higher scores on the components of self-differentiation is associated with decreased avoidance/ diffuse identity style.

Table 3. Regression analysis to predict the informational identity style score from self-differentiation components scores

Indicators Sources of change	Sum of squares	Degrees of freedom	Mean square	F	Significance level (P)
Regression toward mingling with others	840/38	1	840/38	/311 47	0/00
Residual	868/17	48	9/97		
Total	1708/55	49			
Regression toward mingling with others, My status	1005/99	2	503	/59 34	0/00
Residual	702/56	47	8/16		
Total	1708/55	49			

Table 4. Regression analysis to predict Avoidance/ diffuse Identity style from self-differentiation components scores

Indicators Sources of change	Sum of squares	Degrees of freedom	Mean square	F	Significance level (P)
Regression toward emotional cut off	611/15	1	9/88	9/88	0/00
Residual	3021/21	48	34/72		
Total	3632/02	49			
Regression toward emotional cut off, Emotional reactivity	746/04	2	373/02	6/24	0/00
Residual	2886/32	47	33/56		
Total	3632/36	49			

Table 3 indicates that to predict informational identity style scores firstly mingling with others component and my status component are entered in regression equation and the predicted

square sum (MS) has increased from 840.38 to 1005.99. Table 4 indicates that to identity avoidance/ diffuse identity style scores firstly emotional cut off component and then the components of

emotional reactivity are entered in regression equation and predicted sum of

squares (MS) has increased from 611.15 to 746.04.

Table 5. Regression and determination coefficients

Avoidance/ diffuse		informational		Indicator Variable
2	1	2	1	
0/11				Emotional reactivity
		0/23		My status
-0/18	-0/23			Emotional cut off
		0/24	0/39	Mingling with others
0/11	0/09	0/05	0/27	R2
0/10	0/08	0/32	0/27	Adjusted R2

In table 5 regression coefficients and entered explanatory variables coefficients in equation and changes in above coefficients due to each variable are shown.

Discussion and conclusions

Studying and analyzing the results showed that components of self- differentiation are associated with informational identity style. This means that less emotional reactivity, defining a clear role for "I", the lack of strong replication with parents and the whole detachment from family's emotional bulk are more likely lead to informational identity style. Accordingly, self- differentiation anticipates style that includes data collection, processing and actively evaluation of data, because people having informational style always act on the deliberate causes and when encounter a problem they consider several solutions (a PourAlifard, 2004).

This finding is consistent with conceptualization of Bowen (1978), Barber (2002), research of Buboltz and Johansson (2000) and also conducted researches on the relationship between informational identity style in other areas such as problem solving, decision-making and information processing. According to the fact that rational processes and

identity obligations result in obtaining identity with mediation of informational identity style (Berzonsky, 2008) strong the association between self-differentiation with this style of identity reveals the role of self-differentiation in identity.

The other finding of this analysis is negative and significant prediction of all self-differentiation components with avoidance/ diffuse identity style. This finding suggests that high levels of self-differentiation is alongside with a low level of avoidance/ diffuse identity style. It should be said that avoidance/ diffuse identity style states problems in context of identity. Adolescents having this identity style avoid facing with identity conflicts and personal decision making and if face with such conditions try to act according to the situation not on the basis of personal belief or normative standards (Schwartz et al, 2000). Process projection concept in self- differentiation suggest this idea that parents with high proximity and mingling with low level children transfer them their differentiation and immaturity and in fact they produce a copy of themselves (Bowen, 1978). Therefore, optimal identity depends on individual freedom from mingling and emotional mass and level of self- differentiation as an indication of individual freedom from this

emotional mass is considered as an anticipant factor for informational identity styles and avoidance/ diffuse identity style.

It is worth noting that at the end according to the fact that the process of identity formation and identity processing styles are launched in the teenage years, parental notification of emotional involvement with the original family nature, the problem of non-self- differentiation and this issues' impact on adolescent identity formation using the techniques of family therapy in Bowen's theory (1978) can be useful.

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