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Background

Separation-individuation is a crucial developmental challenge that requires emerging adults to develop an autonomous self in the context of ongoing relational commitments. Failure to negotiate self-other boundaries in this process is linked to a range of dysfunction, including poor college adjustment and psychiatric symptoms. In clinical-developmental theory (Pine, 1985) dysfunctional individuation is indicated by poor self-other differentiation, relationship disturbances and splitting of self and others into “good” and “bad.” Christenson & Wilson (1985) developed a useful 39-item assessment that purports to measure *pathology* of individuation. Recently a brief 10-item Dysfunctional Individuation Scale (DIS) has been developed to serve as a potential diagnostic screen (Stey, Hill & Lapsley, *in press*).

Purpose

This project reports on a further attempt to establish the construct validity of the DIS. First, we examine the concurrent validity of the DIS by examining patterns of correlation with measures of college adjustment problems and psychiatric symptoms. Second, we examine the correlation between the DIS and theoretically related constructs such as *differentiation of self* and *ego splitting*. Finally, we examine the incremental validity of the DIS in predicting select outcomes.

Differentiation of self is the degree to which one is able to balance emotional and intellectual functioning and intimacy and autonomy (Skowron & Friedlander, 1998); and is measured by a scale that taps Emotional Reactivity, Emotional Cutoff, the I-Position and Fusion with Others. *Splitting* is derived from Kernberg’s account of defense mechanisms, and is tapped by the Splitting Index (of Self, Family and Other; Gould, Prentice, and Ainslie, 1996).

Method

Participants included 360 randomly selected undergraduate students (206 female, $M_{age} = 19.35$) from a private Midwestern university. Participants responded to the 10-item Dysfunctional Individuation Scale, the 3 subscales of the Splitting Index (Self, Family, Other), the Differentiation of Self Inventory which includes Emotional Reactivity, Emotional Cutoff, the I-Position and Fusion with others. The College Adjustment Scale (Anton and Reed, 1991) measured interpersonal, self-esteem and family problems; and the Brief Symptom Inventory (Derogatis, 1975) measured 8 psychiatric symptoms. Internal consistencies are reported in Table 1.

Tables

The following tables display (1) the correlation of DIS with several outcome variables, and (2) the summary of the hierarchical regressions predicting college adjustment.

Table 1. Correlation of DIS with indices of psychiatric symptoms, college adjustment, splitting and differentiation of self

Dysfunctional Individuation Scale (DIS)	
$(\alpha = .83)$	
BSI: Somatization ($\alpha = .87$)	.44**
BSI: Obsession Compulsion ($\alpha = .82$)	.57**
BSI: Interpersonal Sensitivity ($\alpha = .87$)	.54**
BSI: Depression ($\alpha = .88$)	.52**
BSI: Anxiety ($\alpha = .86$)	.50**
BSI: Hostility ($\alpha = .84$)	.50**
BSI: Paranoid Ideation ($\alpha = .78$)	.60**
BSI: Psychoticism ($\alpha = .78$)	.60**
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CAS: Anxiety ($\alpha = .88$)	.54**
CAS: Self Esteem Problems ($\alpha = .87$)	.49**
CAS: Interpersonal Problems ($\alpha = .85$)	.66**
CAS: Academic Problems ($\alpha = .88$)	.41**
CAS: Substance Abuse Problems ($\alpha = .90$)	.34**
CAS: Career Problems ($\alpha = .93$)	.33**
CAS: Family Problems ($\alpha = .84$)	.43**
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SI: Self-Images ($\alpha = .88$)	.54**
SI: Family Images ($\alpha = .85$)	.26**
SI: Other Images ($\alpha = .86$)	.47**
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DSI: Emotional Reactivity ($\alpha = .85$)	.36**
DSI: Emotional Cutoff ($\alpha = .80$)	.55**
DSI: I-Position ($\alpha = .70$)	-.27**
DSI: Fusion With Others ($\alpha = .70$)	.02

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Table 2.

Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis Predicting CAS Outcome Variable.

	CAS Outcome Variables					
	Interpersonal Problems		Self-Esteem Problems		Family Problems	
	ΔR^2	b	ΔR^2	b	ΔR^2	b
Step 1	.02*		.00		.00	
Age		-.04		-.01		-.03
Gender		-.13**		.06		-.01
Step 2	.46***		.49***		.44***	
Age		-.05		.00		-.04
Gender		-.15***		.04		-.01
SI: Splitting Of Self		.33***		.55***		.09†
SI: Splitting Of Family		.09*		.09*		.60***
SI: Splitting Of Others		.40***		.17***		.05
Step 3	.06***		.08***		.04***	
Age		-.06		-.02		-.05
Gender		-.16***		.01		-.03
SI: Splitting Of Self		.17***		.34***		-.05
SI: Splitting Of Family		.10*		.06		.60***
SI: Splitting Of Others		.31***		.13**		-.01
DSI: Emotional React.		.12*		.21***		.16**
DSI: I-Position		-.09†		-.23***		-.06
DSI: Emotional Cutoff		.24***		.04		.16***
DSI: Fusion With Others		.06		-.09†		-.01
Step 4	.06***		.01*		.03***	
Age		-.02		-.00		-.02
Gender		-.12***		.02		.00
SI: Splitting Of Self		-.07		.30***		-.12*
SI: Splitting Of Family		-.10*		.06		.60***
SI: Splitting Of Others		.26***		.11*		-.05
DSI: Emotional React.		.09†		.20***		.13*
DSI: I-Position		-.10*		-.23***		-.06
DSI: Emotional Cutoff		.12**		.00		.07
DSI: Fusion With Others		.05		-.10*		.00
Dysfunctional Individuation		.34***		.12*		.26***
Total R^2	.60***		.57***		.52***	
n	360		360		360	

† $p < .10$.
* $p < .05$.
** $p < .01$.
*** $p < .001$.

Results

The 10-item DIS was strongly positively correlated with all subscales of the BSI ($M_r = .54$) and the three college adjustment scales ($M_r = .53$). The DIS was also moderately correlated with the Splitting Index: Splitting of Self ($r = .54$), Splitting of Family ($r = .26$) and Splitting of Other ($r = .47$).

The DIS was also moderately correlated with three subscales of Differentiation of Self: Emotional Reactivity ($r = .36$), Emotional Cutoff ($r = .55$) and with the I-Position ($r = -.27$).

A hierarchical regression analysis, with block entry of subscale variables, showed that the DIS accounted for unique variance over and above the Splitting Index and Differentiation of Self scales in the prediction of the three college adjustment measures, although the effect was stronger for predicting interpersonal problems than for self-esteem or family problems.

Conclusions & Implications

Our results show that the DIS is strongly correlated with psychiatric symptoms and college adjustment problems. It also converges with theoretically related constructs such as poor differentiation of self and defensive use of splitting. Moreover, the DIS demonstrated incremental validity over these related constructs in predicting a range of college adjustment problems. Thus the DIS is a brief, internally consistent, construct valid measure that holds much promise as a diagnostic screen and is indicated for use in longitudinal research and clinical intervention work.

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This poster is available at our lab website:

www.nd.edu/~dlapsle1/Lab