

A Cohort-Sequential Study of Dysfunctional Individuation in Emerging Adulthood

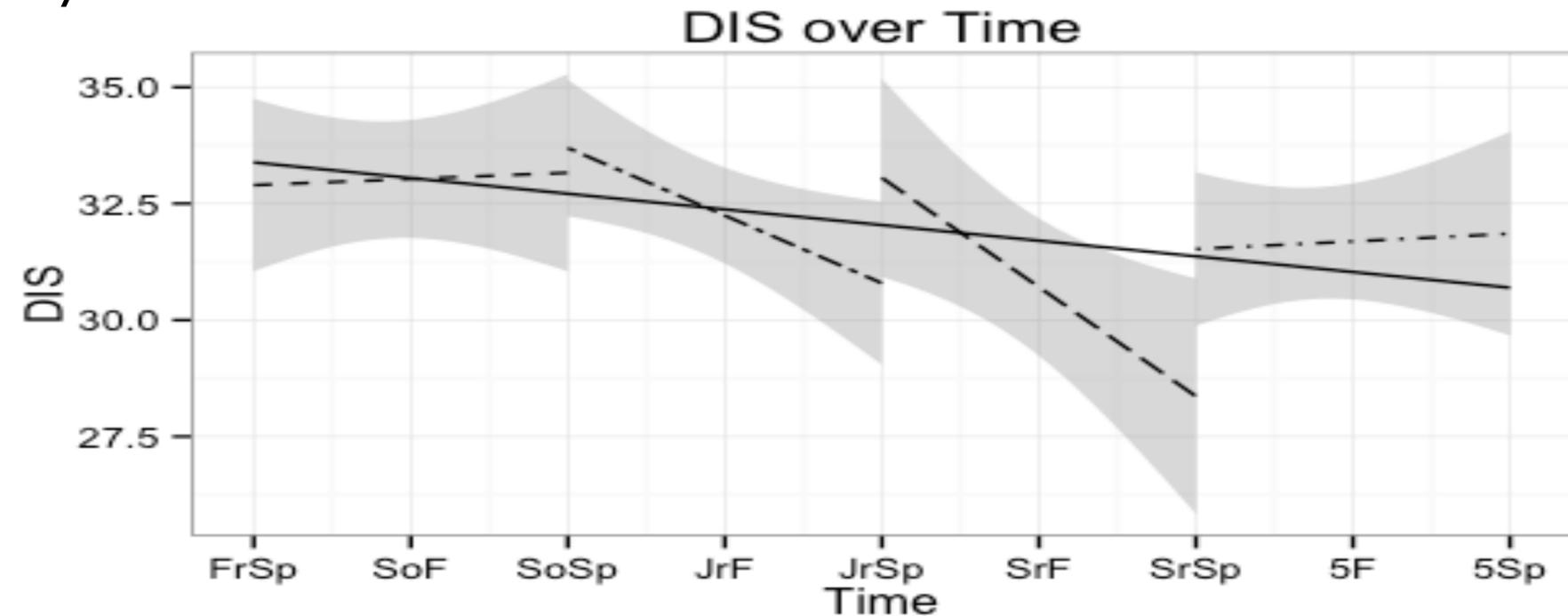
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Introduction:

Separation-individuation is a crucial developmental challenge that requires adolescents and emerging adults to construct and revise self-other boundaries in a way that encourages relational autonomy. Disturbances in individuation are assumed to adversely affect psychosocial functioning (Mattanah, Brand, & Hancock, 2004). The present project is the first to examine dysfunctional individuation using an accelerated longitudinal design and a promising new measure, the Dysfunctional Individuation Scale (DIS), which has shown a strong evidence of construct validity (Stey, Hill, & Lapsley, 2013). We examined the covariation of longitudinal change in DIS scores with indicators of adaptation using multi-group latent growth curve modeling.



Method:

Participants: 464 undergraduates participated in three waves of data collection over one year.

- Time 1:
 - 248 females, Mage = 20.1, SDage = 1.29
 - Freshman n = 118
 - Sophomore n = 150
 - Junior n = 75
 - Senior n = 121

Measures:

- Dysfunctional Individuation Scale (Stey et al., 2013)
- Depression Anxiety Stress Scale, short-form (Henry & Crawford, 2005)
- College Adjustment Sub-Scales: Family Problems, Interpersonal Problems (Anton & Reed, 1991)

Analyses:

- Cohort-sequential design (Bell, 1953)
- Multi-group Latent Growth Curve Models

Table: Multi-Group Latent Growth Curve Model Coefficients

	$I_{DV} \sim I_{DIS}$	$S_{DV} \sim I_{DIS}$	$S_{DV} \sim S_{DIS}$
Depression	.277**	-.002	.271**
Stress	.202**	.028	.243**
Family Problems	.289**	.247**	3.826*
Interpersonal Problems	.503**	-.018	.455**

Note. I = Intercept; S = Slope; ~ "regressed on"; DV = Dependent Variable; DIS = Dysfunctional Individuation Scale. $I_{out} \sim S_{DIS} = 0$ in all models. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$.

Results:

- Dysfunctional individuation decreases across college.
- Students with more dysfunctional individuation as freshman were more likely to have higher rates of adjustment problems.
- Changes in dysfunctional individuation predicted changes in interpersonal problems, family problems, and stress. In all cases, as dysfunctional individuation decreased, so did these indicators of poor adaptation.

Discussion:

The downward trajectory of dysfunctional individuation and the positive association between individuation and college maladjustment suggest that the process of separation-individuation does play an essential role in psychosocial development during the college years. Future work can use the new measure (DIS) as a marker of psychopathology, include younger samples to include antecedents of dysfunctional individuation, and expand the range psychosocial outcomes (e.g., identity formation; Koepke & Denissen, 2012).

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