

Exploring Effects of Differentiation of Self on Self-Esteem among Adults

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Differentiation of self involves ability to distinguish between one's thinking and feelings. Several studies have shown how psychiatric disorders are positively correlated with low levels of differentiation of self in adult population. Studies have also found relationship between differentiation of self, jealousy and self esteem. When experiencing jealousy person may feel threat of losing their cherished relationship. Low self esteem often leads people to feel inferior about them and may cause anxiety. The aim of the study was to explore the effect of Differentiation of Self on self-esteem in adults. Brief differentiation of self inventory, multiple jealousy scale and Rosenberg self-esteem scale were administered on participants. Correlational research design was used to understand the relationship between differentiation of self (independent variable) and self esteem. Further regression analysis was used for data analysis. Results found a significant positive correlation between Differentiation of self and self esteem. A non significant negative correlation was found between Jealousy and self esteem. Lastly, Differentiation of self significantly predicted the variance in self esteem. Based up on present study interventions could be designed to enhance self esteem of a person to reduce the feeling of jealousy experienced by the person in their relationship.

Key words: Differentiation of Self, jealousy, self esteem, adults

Bowen's family systems theory emphasize how parents ability to balance their own needs of remaining emotionally connected with the family and at the same time assisting their child's need for individuality would impact how successful the child's transition would be into their adulthood. According to Bowen, Differentiation of self involves ability to distinguish between one's thinking and feelings. It also refers ability to maintain a sense of self (the 'I' position) in relationships (Peleg, 2002). People who are high on differentiation of self show greater autonomy and intimacy in their relationship and lower fear of abandonment. On the other hand, people low on differentiation of self tend to show increased emotional reactivity, high fusion with others and emotional cutoff

(MacKay, 2017). Their life tends to be dominated by feelings of those around them.

According to Dunn and Brown (1994) apart from maintaining the marital relationship one of the most important task of family system is to teach children social skills. This process largely includes making children learn rules of appropriate emotional behavior. Learning about causes and consequences of emotions not only allows children to succeed in outsideworld but also helps in smooth functioning of the society. When parents talk to their children about feelings it helps them in understanding emotions. However this may lead to emotional transmission, that is, emotions or behaviors of one family member predict emotions and behaviors of other family

members (Dunn and Brown, 1991). One such emotion that members of family may experience is Jealousy. Krystyna and Jamie (2011) found that people often experience threat to their relationship with certain family members. They found that people experience more jealousy when there is loss of time spent with family members. The family member's relationship with another person may also increase jealousy. In 1922, Freud gave definition of jealousy. It revolved around feelings of loss and enmity. According to him people experience pain when there is a threat of losing their loved ones. Feeling of enmity may also rise against the rival along with self criticism.

Low self esteem often leads people to feel inferior about them and may cause anxiety. It includes personal beliefs about one's skills, abilities and interpersonal relationships. James (1890) described self-esteem as a feeling which depends on the effectiveness of one's actions. Self esteem is the estimate of one's capabilities. It may be experienced by the person in form of feelings which may be experienced constantly. Thus the way in which evaluate themselves impact their emotions. People may often distort reality to always view themselves in positive light (Levin, 2013). According to Branden, self-esteem plays a crucial role in formation of intimate relationships. People who have sense of worth and efficacy and view them as loveable are more likely to appreciate and love others whereas people who lack respect and sense of worth, often tend to seek approval and disapproval of others. People with low self-esteem may show jealousy in their relationships as they may feel they are not capable to be with the person they are currently with. People with low self esteem may feel threatened in their relationship that they would lose their partner (Hand, 2015)

In a study review by Calatrava et al (2022) differentiation of self was found to be a

predictor of marital quality and psychological health. Higher differentiation of self was also found to predict better physical health and improved relationships between multiple generations. In recent research a meditational role of how a person defines themselves between Differentiation of Self and subjective well-being in emerging adults (age -18 and 25) was studied. Using structural equation model analyses a positive association was found between Differentiation of Self and subjective well-being (Hocaođlu & İpýk, 2022). Peleg (2002) found a negative correlation between differentiation of self and social anxiety in Israeli students. He also concluded that students with low differentiation of self might be at high risk for developing symptoms of social anxiety. Castellar et al (2022) also reported similar findings in their study. They found differentiation of self to play a meditational role between family functioning and trait anxiety in Spanish sample (age -18 to 56 years). Deng et al (2023) explore how insecure attachment style and jealousy were related to each other and how differentiation of self influenced this relationship. They found that attachment anxiety had a significant positive predictive effect on jealousy but differentiation of self partially mediated this relationship.

In a study Krystyna and Jamie (2011) examined jealousy in families. Through self report tool a recent experience involving jealousy was assessed. It was found that people often experience threat to their relationship with certain family members. It was also found that more jealousy is experienced when time spent with family members is reduced. Jealousy may also be increased if family members spend more time with another person (Aune & Comstock, 2011). Another study by Lans et al (2014) examined relationship between romantic jealousy and differentiation of the self. Study

also explored how males and females express and react to romantic jealousy. Results showed a negative correlation between differentiation of self and self reported jealousy. As compared to males, females were found to have more emotional arousal and were more likely to interpret multiple situations as jealousy arousing. Fernandez et al (2023) found positive correlation between attachment and jealousy and a non-significant and low correlation, between attachment and love as a measure of dependence. Hand (2015) explored relationship between self-esteem, happiness, age and jealousy in romantic relationships of people living in Dublin. A negative correlation was found between self esteem and romantic jealousy among males and females. A significant correlation was found between happiness and jealousy in men but not in women.

Need for the current study

Differentiation of self, jealousy and low self-esteem play a determining role in emotional transmission. Although the three can be considered for their detrimental effects but the studies have shown these factors being present together and hence interrelated. Low differentiation of self may lead people to focus more on feelings and thoughts of others than their own, believing in their opinions as their own and thus building low self esteem which may pave way for jealousy since they disregard themselves and the feeling of being inferior was then transmitted into their relationship. Previous researches have shown links between differentiation of self, self esteem and jealousy. Thus in present study the

researcher aimed to explore how differentiation of self, self esteem and jealousy are interrelated to each other in young adults in Indian population. The researcher also aims to explore the meditational role of jealousy between differentiation of self and self esteem. It was evident from the review of literature that research on the variables has been concise and limited in India.

Objectives

The objectives of the study were -

- To study the relationship between differentiation of self and self esteem
- To study the relationship between jealousy and self esteem
- To study how relationship between Differentiation of Self and self-esteem is mediated by jealousy

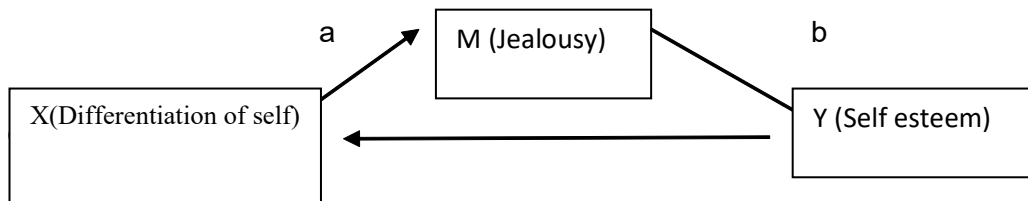
Hypotheses

- H₁ There would be significant relationship between differentiation of self and self-esteem.
- H₂ There would be significant relationship between jealousy and self-esteem.
- H₃ The relationship between Differentiation of Self and self-esteem would be mediated by jealousy.

Method

Research design

For the purpose of the study correlational research design was used to understand the relationship between independent variable (differentiation of self) and dependent



variable (self esteem). Further regression analysis and Sobel test were used to understand the moderating effect of jealousy in relationship between differentiation of self and self esteem.

Sample

In the present study, the sample consisted of 100 participants belonging to the region of Delhi and NCR between age range of 25 years to 40 years. The education level was graduate.

People with active psychopathology were excluded from the study.

Tools

Demographic information: A short survey was prepared to obtain demographic information such as name, age, gender, educational qualification and relationship status of the participant.

Brief differentiation of self inventory: Brief DSI is a 20-item scale derived from Differentiation of self-inventory by Skowron & Schmitt (2003) containing 46 items. The scale was developed by Sloan and Van Dierendonck in 2016 and assesses Emotional Reactivity, I position, Emotional cutoff and fusion with others. Questions are answered on 6-point rating scale. Authors found test re-test reliability of the scale to range from 0.75 to 0.85 in college sample population.

Multiple jealousy scale: Jealousy is a negative emotion related to a perceived threat of a social relationship. Buunk et al (1997) developed 15 item jealousy scale assessing three domains of jealousy namely cognitive jealousy, emotional jealousy and behavioral jealousy. Respondents mark their answer on a 5-point rating scale. Authors found high item total correlation for each subscale (more than 0.60). Pearson's correlation was also performed on all the three sub scales. All subscales were

moderately correlated with each other, thus showing internal consistency.

Rosenberg self esteem scale: It was developed by Rosenberg. It is a 10-item scale that measures global self-worth by measuring both positive and negative feelings about the self. The scale is believed to be uni-dimensional. All items are answered using a 4-point Likert scale format ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Internal consistency for the scale was found to be 0.77. Test-retest reliability for the 2-week interval was calculated at 0.85, the 7-month interval was calculated at 0.63.

Procedure

For the purpose of the study participants were recruited via a convenience sampling methodology. Google form and printed questionnaires were distributed to family and friends to fill in and further distribute it at their workplace and college. Questionnaire was also distributed at Amity University, Haryana. Inclusion criteria were that participants must be residents of Delhi and/or NCR region, aged between 18-40 years and must be graduate. People with diagnosed psychopathology were excluded from the study.

The study included 100 participants in which 64% of the participants were females and 36% were males. While 82% of the participants belonged to the age range of 25-30 years, only 18% of the population belonged to the age range of 31-35 years. It was also found that 50 percent of the participants who took part in the study were single while 40 % were in a romantic relationship. Only 8% of the participants were married while 2% were separated from their spouses. Lastly while majority of the sample had completed their graduation (52%), 40% of the sample had completed their post graduation. Only 6% of the sample had done M. Phil or PhD.

Table 1. Frequency and percentage (valid and cumulative) of age, gender, relationship status and educational qualification in the sample

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Gender	Female	63	63.0	63.0
	Male	37	37.0	100.0
Age	25-30 years	82	82.0	82.0
	31-35 years	18	18.0	100.0
Relationship Status	In a romantic relationship	40	40.0	40.0
	Married	8	8.0	48.0
	Separated	2	2.0	50.0
	Single	50	50.0	100.0
Educational qualification	Graduation	52	52.0	52.0
	M.Phil	6	6.0	58.0
	PhD	2	2.0	60.0
	Post graduation	40	40.0	100.0

Results

Table 2 describes the frequency of scores obtained by the participants in the study on three variables. Highest mean and standard deviation was obtained in differentiation of self while lowest mean and standard deviation was obtained in self esteem scale.

Table 2. Mean and standard deviation of scores of differentiation of self, jealousy and self esteem

	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation
DOS	100	51.00	112.00	76.4300	12.62774
Jealousy	100	15.00	70.00	41.1300	10.28744
Self esteem	100	15.00	40.00	29.0900	4.68631
Valid N (list wise)	100				

Table 3. Correlation analysis between Differentiation of self, Jealousy and Self esteem

		DOS	Jealousy	Self esteem
DOS	Pearson Correlation	1	.329**	.519**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.001	.000
	N	100	100	100
Jealousy	Pearson Correlation	-.329**	1	-.152
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001		.130
	N	100	100	100
Self esteem	Pearson Correlation	.519**	-.152	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.130	
	N	100	100	100

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

Table 3 shows the relationship between Differentiation of self, jealousy and self esteem. A significant positive correlation was found between Differentiation of self and Self esteem ($p < 0.01$). A significant positive correlation was also found between differentiation of self and jealousy ($p < 0.01$) indicating that increase in one variable would lead to increase in another variable also. However, a non significant negative correlation was found between Jealousy and self esteem (-.152).

Table 4. Multiple Regression analysis between differentiation of self, jealousy and self esteem

Variable	B	β	SE	t value	p value
Constant	13.766		3.588	3.837	.000
Jealousy	.010	.021	.042	.229	.819
Differentiation of self	.195	.526	.034	5.730	.000
R ²	.270				

Table 4 shows how much variance in dependent variable is accounted by independent variable. Results indicate that differentiation of self significantly accounts for the variance on Self esteem (27%, $p < .000$) while jealousy accounts for non significant variance on self esteem ($p > 0.819$).

Discussion

The aim of the study was to explore the effect of Differentiation of Self on self-esteem in adults. Relationship between differentiation of self, self esteem and jealousy was explored. How relationship between differentiation of self and self esteem was mediated by jealousy was also explored. Brief differentiation of self inventory, multiple jealousy scale and Rosenberg self esteem scale were administered on participants. Participants were recruited via a convenience sampling methodology. Google form and printed questionnaires were distributed to family and friends to fill in and further distribute it at their workplace and college. Correlational research design was used to understand the relationship between differentiation of self and self esteem. Further regression analysis was used to understand how much variance in self esteem and jealousy was accounted by differentiation of self. The study included 100 participants in which 64% of the participants were females and 36% were males. While 82% of the participants belonged to the age range of 25-30 years, only 18% of the population belonged to the age range of 31-35 years. It was also found that 50 percent of the participants who took part in the study were single while 40 % were in a romantic relationship.

Hypothesis 1 stated that significant relationship exists between differentiation of self and self esteem. A significant positive relationship was found between the variables. Hypothesis has been accepted on the basis of the results obtained. Results

obtained show that increase in a person's differentiation of self is likely to increase their self esteem (Table 2). Similar results were found by Kim and Jeon (2020) who explored relationship between self-differentiation, self-esteem and mental health among university students in Busan and Gyeongnam area. In the study it was found that differentiation of self and self esteem was positively correlated in university students. Similarly, Behjati (2020) found that training in differentiation of self has a significant effect on secure and anxious attachment styles and self esteem of the person. Self differentiation training allowed women to be more mindful of the triangulation that they might create in their relationship. Branden was also of the view that the self esteem plays a crucial role in formation of intimate relationships. People who have sense of worth and efficacy and view them as loveable are more likely to appreciate and love others whereas people who lack respect and sense of worth, often tend to seek approval and disapproval of others. Thus, people with low self esteem may be more fused with others as compared to ones with high self esteem. They may constantly think that something was wrong with them, which might be painful for them to experience and may try to do and say the ways others tell them.

Hypothesis 2 was rejected on the basis of the results obtained. A non significant negative correlation was found between jealousy and self esteem. The obtained results indicated that increase in Jealousy may decrease self esteem of a person. Several studies have found a significant negative correlation between jealousy and self esteem. Hand (2015) explored relationship between self-esteem, happiness, age and jealousy in romantic relationships of people living in Dublin. A negative correlation was found between self esteem and romantic jealousy among males and females. Adams (2012) examined relationship

between jealousy, ego defense mechanisms and self esteem in people aged between 20 to 81 years and found negative correlation between jealousy and self esteem in women. No differences were found among different age groups (Adams, 2012). While like previous studies the variables were negatively correlated, results were found to be non significant. Obtained results could be contributed to the socio-demographic variables present in the current sample. Research has found that kind of relationship held by people may impact the jealousy experienced by them. As reported by Sanchez (2009) people with obsessive love are more likely to experience jealousy than those whose relationship falls in category of desperate love. Gender skewness observed in sample could also contribute to the obtained results. While 63% of the participants were female only 37% of the participants were male. Michael (2010) found gender differences in experiencing jealousy in college students (Tagler, 2010). Danielle and Susan (2015) also found gender to be a better predictor of jealousy (Zandbergen & Brown, 2015). Therefore, further research is required to understand the role of other variables on results obtained.

Hypothesis 3 has been rejected on the basis of results obtained. While differentiation of self significantly predicted 27% of variance in self esteem ($p < .000$), jealousy was not found to significantly predicted the variance in self esteem ($p > .000$). Since significant results were found for only one dependent variable, pre-requisites were not met for mediational analysis and further analysis was not conducted. Obtained results were found to be inconsistent with previous researches who have found self esteem to direct affect jealousy (Bayram et al., 2019)(Farooq et al., 2020). The way in which person perceive their capabilities may not only be impacted the perceived threat to their

relationship but other factors also. Socio demographic variables may also play a crucial role (Tagler, 2010). Differentiation of self in parents could have a significant impact on differentiation of self of children. Fateme et al (2018) found that father's differentiation of self could predict their son's differentiation of self. Whereas mother's ability to take I position could predict their son's differentiation of self. While in females, father's fusion with others and mother's emotional reactivity predicts their differentiation of self. Thus gender and differentiation of self of parents have a huge role to play in an individual's ability to differentiate from others. However further analysis is required to understand the role of other variables which may have impacted the results obtained.

Conclusion

Thus, it was found in the present study that increase in a person's differentiation of self was likely to increase their self esteem. Further, increase in Jealousy may decrease self esteem of a person. While differentiation of self significantly predicted 27% of variance in self esteem, jealousy was not found to significantly predict the variance in self esteem. Thus present study yielded insights into relationship between differentiation of self, jealousy and self esteem in Indian population among adults. Based upon the findings of present study, suitable interventions could be designed to enhance self esteem of a person to reduce the feeling of jealousy experienced by the person in their relationship. Thus quality of relationship could be improved by improving the self esteem of the partners.

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