

# DECONSTRUCTING DIFFERENTIATION: SELF REGULATION, INTERDEPENDENT RELATING, AND WELL-BEING IN ADULTHOOD

Elizabeth A. Skowron  
Sarah E. Holmes  
Ronald M. Sabatelli

**ABSTRACT:** This study examined underlying similarities between the Personal Authority in the Family System Questionnaire (PAFS; Bray, Williamson, & Malone, 1984a) and the Differentiation of Self Inventory (DSI; Skowron & Friedlander, 1998). Generalized least-squares factor analysis yielded two related factors, Self Regulation and Interdependent Relating, accounting for 60% of the variance in the solution. Greater Self Regulation—comprised of DSI scales characterized by less emotional reactivity and the ability to take an I position in relationships—and Interdependent Relating—marked by greater personal authority, intergenerational intimacy and less intergenerational fusion on the PAFS and less emotional cutoff on the DSI—predicted well-being among both women and men. Implications for family therapy and suggestions for future research are discussed.

**KEY WORDS:** Bowen theory; differentiation of self; well-being; factor analysis.

Multigenerational perspectives on individual and family development are based on the assumption that the dynamics within a family

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Elizabeth A. Skowron, PhD, is Assistant Professor in the Counseling Psychology program at Penn State University, 327 Cedar Building, University Park, PA 16802-3110 (eas14@psu.edu). Sarah E. Holmes, PhD, is Research Associate at the National Institute on Aging, Gerontology Research Center, 5600 Nathan Shock Dr., Baltimore, MD 21224. Ronald M. Sabatelli, Ph.D., is Professor in the School of Family Studies, University of Connecticut, U-117, 843 Bolton Rd., Storrs, CT 06268. Direct requests for reprints to the first author.

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of origin constitute a legacy that influences the trajectory of both individual and family development (Allison & Sabatelli, 1988; Bowen, 1978; Harvey & Bray, 1991). Since the development of Bowen family systems theory in the 1960s, multigenerational theorists and therapists have made extensive use of the concept of differentiation of self when referring to the manner in which family patterns affect the trajectory of individual health and development and influence the extent to which individuals are able to act with an age-appropriate degree of autonomy, take personal responsibility for age-appropriate tasks, and experience strong connections with important others (e.g., Bowen, 1978; Boszormenyi-Nagy & Ulrich, 1981; Napier, 1988; Schnarch, 1997; Wamboldt & Reiss, 1989; Wilcoxon & Hovestadt, 1985; Williamson, 1982). While the development of psychometrically sound measures of concepts central to Bowen theory has lagged behind theoretical work, the last decade has seen several systematic efforts to operationalize one of the central constructs in Bowen theory—differentiation of self. These measures may open the way for more empirical research investigating the role of differentiation in health and functioning of families and their members.

While the importance of good measurement is openly acknowledged by the research community, there is, at the same time, often a lack of systematic attention to the practice of good measurement in the field of family therapy (Carmines & Zeller, 1979; Sabatelli & Bartle, 1995). Halverson (1995) cautioned family researchers against developing different measures of concepts that appear to focus on common domains of content. At the same time, treating concepts as if they are similar when they are not and treating measures as if they assess identical concepts when they do not also promotes confusion and hinders the type of constructive dialogue and research necessary to foster greater clarity and understanding of key concepts in family systems theories. Therefore, we sought to determine whether alternate measures of differentiation of self assess similar or distinct elements of the differentiation construct. Indeed, the meaningfulness of future research on family systems theories rests in part on the development of clear operationalizations of the constructs under investigation. As such, the purpose of this study was to investigate the commonalities underlying two multidimensional measures of differentiation—the Personal Authority in the Family System Questionnaire (PAFS; Bray, Williamson, & Malone, 1984a), and the Differentiation of Self Inventory (DSI; Skowron & Friedlander, 1998), to evaluate relationships between differentiation, gender, and age, and to test which underlying dimensions of differentiation were most predictive of adult psychological well-being. These two

measures were selected for investigation because they are theoretically sound, multidimensional in nature, developed for use with adults, and similarly employ a self-report questionnaire format. In essence, our goal with this study was to help provide information for family practitioners and researchers in selecting instruments to assess and evaluate therapy outcomes.

### **DIFFERENTIATION OF SELF: BOWEN AND WILLIAMSON**

Differentiation is a multidimensional construct comprised of an intrapsychic capacity to distinguish thinking and feeling systems, and an interpersonal ability to maintain connections with others while achieving an autonomous self (Bowen, 1978; Kerr & Bowen, 1988). On an intrapsychic level, differentiated adults are thought to be more capable of reflecting on, experiencing, and modulating their emotions, and are less emotionally reactive than their less differentiated counterparts (Kerr & Bowen, 1988). According to theory, such persons are better able to take "I" positions in their important relationships, to preserve a solid sense of self, and thoughtfully adhere to their own opinions and beliefs. Likewise, more differentiated adults are thought to be more comfortable with strong emotions and better able to adapt to life stressors, cope with uncertainty and ambiguity, and remain relatively calm in intimate relationships (Bowen, 1978). Conversely, less differentiated persons tend to get overwhelmed by their emotions and have difficulty maintaining a solid sense of self in their relationships, leading to greater psychological distress (Skowron & Friedlander, 1998).

On an interpersonal level, differentiation of self entails comfort with both intimacy and autonomy in relationships. In response to anxiety in significant relationships, poorly differentiated persons are thought to gravitate toward fusion with others or conversely engage in emotional cutoff, distancing themselves emotionally and/or physically from others (Kerr & Bowen, 1988). According to theory, those who gravitate toward emotional cutoff tend to become anxious in response to emotional closeness with important others, while those who tend to fuse with others generally experience separation anxiety prompted by independent actions taken by significant others. In short, these individuals purportedly engage in interpersonal distance regulation to manage anxiety, and remain preoccupied with acceptance and rejection

in their most important relationships (Kerr, 1992). In contrast, more differentiated persons are comfortable with intimacy in close relationships and refrain from using fusion or emotional cutoff as relational mechanisms for regulating anxiety. According to Bowen theory (1976, 1978), differentiation of self is fundamental for healthy functioning of individuals and families. While Bowen (1978) suggested that gender differences were unlikely to have an impact on one's capacity for self differentiation, subsequent research (e.g., Kosek, 1998; Skowron & Friedlander, 1998) has indicated that men and women differ in the ways that differentiation difficulties are expressed, with men reporting more problems with emotional cutoff and women indicating difficulties with emotional reactivity.

Williamson (1981) theorized that differentiation of self is characterized as well by the presence of personal authority in relations between parents and adult children. Williamson's (1982) concept of personal authority in the family system refers to "the achievement of peer-like intimacy in interactions with all persons, including parents, while maintaining an individuated stance" (Harvey & Bray, 1991, p. 300). Individuals with greater personal authority in their relationships are thought to be more able to achieve individuation while experiencing emotional intimacy with others. Williamson (1981) argued that personal authority is achieved when adult children manage to renegotiate their relationships with parents on the basis of mutual respect, collaboration, and choice, rather than based on obligations, fusion, or the use of intimidation or fear (Harvey & Bray, 1991; Rabin, Bressler, & Prager, 1993). This renegotiation process is thought to occur in adulthood (i.e., fourth decade of life), and focuses on a shifting of the power structure in parent/adult child relationships, thus enabling a mutual, peer-like relationship to emerge (Williamson, 1981). Conversely in his theory, Bowen (1978) made no specific predictions about the role of age in the development of differentiation, except to suggest that levels of differentiation are rather immutable, with differentiation levels achieved in adulthood remaining essentially similar to those experienced in childhood within one's family of origin. On the question of gender, Williamson like Bowen posited no relationships between gender and the ability of adult children to achieve personal authority in their relationships with parents and partners. However, some research (e.g., Garbarino, Gaa, Swank, McPherson, & Gratch, 1995) suggests that, at least among young adults, women may have greater difficulty than men in developing personal authority in their families of origin.

## MEASURING DIFFERENTIATION OF SELF

Despite general agreement among theorists that differentiation of self has far-reaching implications for understanding psychological health and well-being (Guisinger & Blatt, 1994; Kerr & Bowen, 1988; Nichols & Schwartz, 2000), psychometrically sound measures of this construct have only been developed in the last decade. Grounded in multigenerational family systems theory (Boszormenyi-Nagy & Ulrich, 1981; Bowen, 1978; Framo, 1992, Williamson, 1981), the PAFS (Bray, Williamson, & Malone, 1986) is a 132-item self-report measure most commonly used to assess an individual's ability to function autonomously in the family system while maintaining age-appropriate connections with parents and significant others (Anderson & Sabatelli, 1990). The PAFS distinguishes between intergenerational and spousal/peer relations, and includes a focus on the concept of personal authority in its assessment of the interpersonal dimensions of differentiation. Separate versions of the measure exist for use with adults and late adolescents. Factor analysis of the PAFS items has shown support for a factor structure corresponding to its subscales, except for considerable overlap observed between Fusion and Intimacy scales (Lopez & Gover, 1993). Finally, the PAFS neglects to assess the phenomenon of emotional cutoff in relationships.

The DSI is a relatively newer 43-item, self-report instrument derived from Bowen Theory (1978; Kerr & Bowen, 1988), designed to assess emotional functioning, intimacy, and autonomy in interpersonal relationships. Its subscales assess interpersonal (i.e., fusion and emotional cutoff) and intrapsychic dimensions of differentiation problems (i.e., emotional reactivity and difficulty taking an I-position). Factor analyses of the DSI supported the four-factor structure, and a single, higher-order latent factor (Skowron & Friedlander, 1998). The DSI neglects to distinguish between differentiation of self expressed in relationships with parents versus romantic partners, and has not been used extensively in research to date.

Research conducted using the PAFS and DSI provides compelling support for the basic tenets of the multigenerational perspectives (Bowen, 1978; Kerr & Bowen, 1988) linking differentiation of self with a range of socio-emotional and physical indices of health and adjustment. For example, higher levels of differentiation measured by the DSI have been associated with less chronic anxiety and fewer psychological symptoms (Skowron & Friedlander, 1998), better coping and prob-

lem solving skills (Murdock, Gore, & Horosz, 1998), and greater marital satisfaction (Kosek, 1998) in adults. Greater complementarity among married couples along the dimensions of emotional reactivity and emotional cutoff predicted greater marital discord (Skowron, 2000a). Moreover, some evidence exists regarding its cross-cultural validity, in that no ethnic differences have emerged in the differentiation scores of young adult African-, Latino-, and Asian-Americans and Caucasians similar in terms of age, gender, and educational levels (Skowron, in press).

Likewise, higher levels of differentiation as measured by the PAFS have been associated with less psychological distress and fewer health problems (Harvey, Curry, & Bray, 1991), greater marital satisfaction (Schweitzer, 1999), and better psychosocial development (Cebik, 1988). Among college students, PAFS individuation scores were directly associated with levels of identity and intimacy resolution (Garbarino et al., 1995). In terms of the relationship between family environment and differentiation skills, greater fusion and triangulation with one's parents has been associated with greater psychological stress and poor problem-solving skills among young adults (Fraser & Tucker, 1997).

Since we could locate no studies that directly examined these alternate measures of differentiation, in the present study we sought to evaluate whether the PAFS and DSI assessed a similar construct. Given some of the subtle differences in content across these two measures, researchers and practitioners who wish to test questions about Bowen theory and/or evaluate outcomes of family therapy may obtain divergent results depending on the choice of measure used. Therefore, the central purpose of this study was two-fold: to determine whether these two measures assessed similar dimensions of differentiation of self; and to test relationships between the underlying dimensions of differentiation that emerged on the one hand, and age, gender, and emotional well-being on the other. It was expected that the results of this study would help to (a) clarify the conceptual similarities between the DSI and PAFS scales; (b) identify the elements of differentiation that best account for variation in psychological well-being among men and women; and thus (c) enable researchers to test more precise hypotheses regarding the relationship between differentiation and adjustment in adults. That is, we viewed this research as an important first step towards consolidating our understanding of instruments derived from multigenerational family theory and the ways in which family patterns are associated with individual well-being.

## METHOD

### *Participants and Procedure*

This national sample was comprised of 221 adults, 87 men (39%) and 134 women (61%), with an average age of 51.46 years ( $SD = 8.04$ ). Approximately 60% of the adults were married, 11% were single, 10% were divorced, and the other 20% were separated, divorced, remarried, cohabitating, or widowed. Most participants (81%) reported having attained at least a college degree. The predominant ethnicity of participants was Caucasian (93%), followed by African American/Black (6%), and Hispanic (1%).

Prospective participants were randomly selected individuals between the ages of 35 and 65 on the waiting list for the Baltimore Longitudinal Study of Aging, a longitudinal study of over 1,500 men and women, funded by the National Institute on Aging. A total of 352 adults volunteered to complete a mailed questionnaire packet, and of those, 245 returned questionnaire packets, for a 70% return rate. Of the completed questionnaire packets received, 221 contained complete data.

### *Instruments*

*Personal Authority in the Family System (PAFS)*. The PAFS consists of 132 items rated on a 5-point Likert-type scale. For the current study, the following subscales (Personal Authority, Intergenerational Fusion/Individuation, Intergenerational Intimacy, and Intergenerational Intimidation) on the adult version were used to assess differentiation. Several items were reworded to ask separately about one's relationship with father and mother. Thus, the question, "How necessary is it to meet your parents' expectations concerning your marriage" was broken down into separate questions about mother and father (i.e., "How necessary is it to meet your mother's expectations . . ." and "How necessary is it to meet your father's expectations . . ."). These items were combined and averaged for the purposes of this study to parallel Bray and associates' (1984a) original item content. The *Personal Authority* scale measures capacity for intimate or personal interchanges with a parent, while maintaining an individuated stance (Bray et al., 1984b). The Intergenerational Intimacy scale assesses the degree of satisfaction and intimacy with parents. The Intergenerational Fusion/

Individuation scale assesses the degree to which a person operates in a fused or individuated manner with one's parents. The Intergenerational Intimidation scale measures the degree of personal intimidation experienced by one's parents. Internal consistency reliabilities for the PAFS scales ranged from .83 to .94 (Bray et al., 1984a). Evidence for the PAFS' construct-related validity has been shown with documented relations between greater differentiation, marital adjustment, family functioning (Bray et al., 1984b), and better psychosocial adjustment and health (Anderson & Fleming, 1986; Harvey & Bray, 1991).

*Differentiation of Self Inventory.* The Differentiation of Self Inventory (DSI; Skowron & Friedlander, 1998) is a 43-item self-report measure that focuses on adults, their significant relationships, and current relations with family of origin. Participants respond to items using a 6-point Likert type scale, ranging from (1) not at all true of me to (6) very true of me. The DSI contains four subscales: Emotional Reactivity, I-Position, Emotional Cutoff, and Fusion with Others. The Emotional Reactivity scale assesses the tendency to respond to environmental stimuli on the basis of autonomic emotional responses, emotional flooding, or lability. The "I" Position scale contains items that reflect a clearly defined sense of self and the ability to thoughtfully adhere to one's convictions even when pressured to do otherwise. The Emotional Cutoff scale consists of items reflecting fears of intimacy or engulfment in relationships, and the accompanying behavioral defenses against those fears. The Fusion with Others scale reflects emotional over-involvement with significant others and over-identification with one's parents—taking in parental values, beliefs and expectations without question.

Subscale scores are calculated by reversing raw scores on all items on the ER, EC, and FO subscales and one item on the IP subscale, summing across a subscale, then divided by the number of items on the subscale, such that scores on each subscale also range from 1 to 6. Higher scores reflect greater differentiation of self. Internal consistency reliabilities of the DSI and its subscales calculated using Cronbach's alpha ranged from .74 to .88 (Skowron & Friedlander, 1998). Theoretically-based relationships between DSI scores and less chronic anxiety, less symptomatology (Skowron & Friedlander, 1998), and problem-focused coping styles (Murdock et al., 1998), provide evidence for the DSI's construct validity.

*Psychological well-being.* Psychological well-being was assessed using the Life Satisfaction Index (LSI; McCrae & Costa, 1991). This

scale asks participants to rate their satisfaction in 14 distinct areas in life, including health, money, neighborhood, and work (McCrae & Costa, 1991). Participants rated items using a 5-point Likert-type scale from (1) very dissatisfied to (5) very satisfied. Correlations between well being scores and Positive and Negative Affect scales (Bradburn, 1969) were .39 and  $-.35$ , respectively (McCrae & Costa, 1991) providing evidence for the LSI's construct validity. Cronbach's alpha was .80 for this sample.

## RESULTS

### *Gender, Age, and Differentiation of Self*

Table 1 presents the means, standard deviations, range, and possible range of scores for each of the scales. Since previous studies have demonstrated evidence of both gender and age differences on the PAFS and DSI scales (e.g., Garbarino et al., 1995; Lawson, Gaushell, & Karst,

**TABLE 1**  
*Means, Standard Deviations, Range, and Possible Range on Differentiation Scales*

<i>Scale</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Standard Deviation</i>	<i>Range</i>	<i>Possible Range</i>
<b>PAFS</b>				
Personal Authority	46.95	6.99	22–61	18–62
Intergenerational Intimacy	112.42	14.73	59–125	25–125
Intergenerational Fusion/Individuation	30.61	5.47	16–40	8–40
Intergenerational Intimidation	86.74	27.60	38–141.50	29–145
<b>DSI</b>				
Emotional Reactivity	3.81	.82	1.55–5.80	1–6
“I” Position	4.55	.68	2.36–6.00	1–6
Emotional Cutoff	4.35	.61	2.75–5.57	1–6
Fusion with Others	3.00	.73	1.33–4.89	1–6

1993; Skowron, 2000; Skowron & Friedlander, 1998), we tested for such differences in the current sample. A MANOVA yielded significant gender differences on all multivariate fit statistics (e.g., Wilks' Lambda = .91),  $F_{(8, 220)} = 2.67$ ,  $p = .01$ . Specifically, gender differences were observed on Intergenerational Fusion:  $F_{(1, 220)} = 5.31$ ,  $p = .02$ , with men reporting less intergenerational fusion ( $M = 31.66$ ,  $SD = 4.87$ ) than did women ( $M = 29.94$ ,  $SD = 5.74$ ).

Next, a multiple regression analysis conducted on age and the DSI and PAFS scales yielded significant relations:  $F_{(8, 217)} = 4.15$ ,  $p < .0001$ , with less Emotional Reactivity:  $t_{(217)} = -3.33$ ,  $p = .001$ ; and greater Intergenerational Intimidation:  $t_{(217)} = -2.62$ ,  $p = .009$ , observed in older participants. Thus, gender and age were included in subsequent regression analyses of differentiation and psychological well-being.

### *Factor Analysis of PAFS and DSI Subscales*

Factor analysis was used to determine whether any of the PAFS and DSI scales shared similar underlying dimensions (Table 2). Following Tabachnick and Fidell's (1989) guidelines, the DSI Fusion and PAFS Intimidation scales were omitted from remaining analyses, due to their low average squared multiple correlations (SMCs) with the other scales. Factor analysis was conducted using a generalized least squares extraction and oblique rotation, with parallel analysis used as the criterion to determine the number of factors to retain (Lautenschlager, 1989; Zwick & Velicer, 1986). Using parallel analysis, 2 factors were extracted, accounting for 42.21% and 18.56% of the variance respectively, or a total of 60.77% variance explained. Factor loadings of the scales and their communalities are shown in Table 3. Factor loadings greater than .40 were interpreted (Tabachnick & Fidell, 1989).

Two subscales from the DSI—the Emotional Reactivity and “I” Position scales—loaded positively on the first factor (eigenvalue = 2.53). The items on these scales reflected a focus on the intrapsychic aspects of differentiation, namely extent of comfort with emotions, capacity to reflect on or think about them, and a capacity to maintain a strong sense of self. Hence the first factor was labeled, Self Regulation, to reflect its focus on the dimensions of differentiation involving emotional experiencing and selfhood. The Personal Authority and Intimacy scales on the PAFS and the DSI Emotional Cutoff subscale loaded on the second factor (eigenvalue = 1.11). Interpretation of the second factor loadings and the interpersonal nature of the item content on these scales resulted in a factor label of Interdependent Relating. The correla-

*TABLE 2*  
*Intercorrelations Among the DSI and PAFS Scales*

<i>Measure</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>8</i>
1. DSI Emotional Reactivity	—							
2. DSI I Position	.49*	—						
3. DSI Emotional Cutoff	.28*	.29*	—					
4. DSI Fusion with Others	.24*	.02	-.18	—				
5. PAFS Personal Authority	.16	.32*	.38*	-.12	—			
6. PAFS Intergenerational Fusion	.42*	.26*	.32*	-.08	.32*	—		
7. PAFS Intergenerational Intimacy	.14*	.13	.30*	-.25*	.45*	.30*	—	
8. PAFS Intergenerational Intimidation	.02	.09	.05	.07	-.07	.12	-.66*	—

*Note:* Higher scores on the DSI measures indicate greater differentiation, specifically, less Emotional Reactivity, greater ability to take an I-position, less Emotional Cutoff, and less Fusion with Others. Higher PAFS scores represent greater Personal Authority, less Intergenerational Fusion, greater Intergenerational Intimacy, and less Intergenerational Intimidation, respectively.

\* $p < .05$ .

tion between the two factors was .43, indicating only 18% overlap in variance.

The results of the factor analysis suggested that the DSI and PAFS scales together captured two related dimensions of differentiation in adulthood. The first dimension appeared to represent the extent to which adults are comfortable with feelings, able to access emotional experiences, take ownership of personal thoughts and feelings, and maintain an inward directedness. The DSI Emotional Reactivity scale loaded most heavily on this first factor, followed by the "I" Position scale. The second dimension reflected the extent to which one negotiates the interpersonal dialectic between autonomy and intimacy, that is, relating to one's parents as peers, and demonstrating comfort with both togetherness and independence in relationships with parents and

**TABLE 3**  
*Pattern Matrix and Communalities for Principal Factors Extraction and Oblique Rotation for DSI and PAFS Scales*

<i>Measures</i>	<i>Final Communality Estimates</i>	<i>Factor 1: Emotion Regulation</i>	<i>Factor 2: Interdependent Relating</i>
DSI Emotional			
Reactivity	.96	<b>1.03</b>	-.14
DSI I Position	.36	<b>.43</b>	.23
DSI Emotional Cutoff	.30	.14	<b>.47</b>
PAFS Personal Authority	.63	-.04	<b>.83</b>
PAFS Intergenerational			
Fusion	.33	.31	.35
PAFS Intergenerational			
Intimacy	.36	-.04	<b>.59</b>
Percent of Variance		42.21%	18.56%

*N* = 221. Interpreted factor loadings are shown in bold.

significant others, and avoiding the use of emotional cutoff or interpersonal fusion in relationships. The Personal Authority scale contributed most to this second factor, followed by the Intergenerational Intimacy and Emotional Cutoff scales.

### *Differentiation of Self and Psychological Well-Being*

Next, two hierarchical regression analyses were conducted to determine if the differentiation factors would predict the criterion variable, psychological well-being, after controlling for age. Due to the significant gender differences observed above, we ran the regressions separately for men and women. Each hierarchical regression analysis was conducted using the two factor scores as predictor variables (i.e., Self Regulation and Interdependent Relating) and the criterion variable, psychological well-being, after controlling for age differences. Results of the hierarchical regression analysis for men ( $n = 87$ ) were significant at entry of age:  $F_{(1, 85)} = 3.97$ ,  $p = .05$ ,  $R = .23$ ,  $R^2 = .05$ , indicating that older men reported greater well-being scores. Entry of the two differentiation factors next yielded a significant increment in the prediction of well-being scores:  $\Delta F_{(2, 85)} = 8.69$ ,  $p < .0001$ ,  $\Delta R^2 = .17$ . The results shown

in Table 4 indicated that both Self Regulation and Interdependent Relating were unique predictors of men's psychological well-being scores, after taking into account age differences. Specifically, greater self regulation and interdependent relating predicted greater well being among men, over and above the influence of age on well-being.

Next, a hierarchical regression analysis was conducted for the subsample of women ( $n = 134$ ), with age entered first, followed by the 2 differentiation factors. No significant relationship emerged between age and well-being for women. A significant increment was observed with the addition of the two differentiation factors:  $\Delta F_{(2, 129)} = 15.83$ ,  $p < .0001$ ,  $\Delta R^2 = .20$ . As shown in Table 4, similar to the men's sample, both Self Regulation and Interdependent Relating factor scores uniquely predicted women's psychological well-being scores,  $t_{(129)} = 2.09$ ,  $p < .04$ ,  $\beta = .19$ ,  $r_{\text{semipartial}} = .17$  and  $t_{(129)} = 3.69$ ,  $p < .0001$ ,  $\beta = .33$ ,  $r_{\text{semipartial}} = .29$ , respectively. Greater self regulation and interdependent relating scores were each associated with greater well-being among women.

**TABLE 4**  
*Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analyses:  
Age and Differentiation Factors Predicting  
Men's and Women's Psychological Well-Being*

<i>Variable</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	$\beta$	$r_{\text{semipartial}}$
<i>Men (n = 87)<sup>a</sup></i>				
Step 1				
Age	.21	.11	.21*	.21
Step 2				
Self Regulation	1.88	.91	.24	.20*
Interdependent Relating	2.28	1.03	.26	.22*
<i>Women (n = 134)<sup>b</sup></i>				
Step 1				
Age	-.03	.09	-.03	-.01
Step 2				
Self Regulation	1.51	.72	.19	.17*
Interdependent Relating	3.07	.83	.33	.29**

*Note.* <sup>a</sup> $R^2 = .05$ ,  $p = .05$  for Step 1;  $\Delta R^2 = .17$ ,  $p < .0001$ , for Step 2.

<sup>b</sup> $R^2 = .001$ ,  $p = .73$  for Step 1;  $\Delta R^2 = .20$ ,  $p < .0001$ , for Step 2.

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .0001$ .

## DISCUSSION

This study examined the underlying structure of two common measures of differentiation of self, the PAFS and DSI. Two distinct dimensions emerged: (a) Self Regulation, characterized by an ability to modulate emotional reactivity and maintain an I-position; and (b) Interdependent Relating, involving the ability to freely relate to parents as peers and comfort with both independence and togetherness in close relationships. Moreover, higher levels of differentiation as measured by the DSI and PAFS were associated with reports of greater well-being in men and women.

The results appear to shed some light on several dimensions of Bowen theory. First, these factor analytic data are consistent with Bowen's proposition that differentiation of self occurs on two levels of experience. The Self Regulation factor bears some resemblance to Bowen's (1978) notion of intrapsychic differentiation, described as a dialectic between thinking and feeling processes, embodied by the capacity to manage one's autonomic emotional responses to situations, and enabling greater clarity of thought. Bowen (1978) also posited that differentiation occurs in the interpersonal realm and requires an ability to balance the forces of togetherness and autonomy, represented in the Interdependent Relating factor's emphasis on achieving deep connection with others without losing one's sense of self.

These two dimensions were moderately related to one another ( $r = .43$ ), and consistent with our expectations, both the Self Regulation and Interdependent Relating factors showed significant relationships with psychological well-being among women and men. These findings suggest that lower emotionally reactivity and a capacity to develop a clear sense of self are as central to men's self-reported adjustment problems as are the relational elements of differentiation, that is, the ability to achieve both intimacy and autonomy in important relationships. Further, older men in our sample reported greater emotional health than did their younger counterparts. Likewise for women, both self regulation and greater interdependent relating also accounted for reports of greater psychological well-being, though no age differences emerged among the women in our sample. Consistent with existing research (e.g., Cross & Madson, 1997), our findings suggest that the role of interdependent relatedness and self management skills are equally significant for the experience of well-being in women. These findings support feminist theory (Gilligan, 1982) and research on women documenting the centrality of both healthy connectedness (Belenky,

Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1997) and self regulation (Kiecolt-Glaser & Newton, 2001) to women's experiences of psychological and physical health. Given the current sample consisted of primarily White, highly educated adults, cross validation of these results across a wider range of age groups, ethnic and cultural backgrounds, and socio-economic strata is necessary to determine the extent to which they may generalize across diverse populations.

### *Implications and Directions for Future Research*

These factor analytic results also underscore the importance of using subscale or factor scores in conjunction with total scale scores to advance systematic knowledge of how differentiation of self functions in adult development. Careful use of distinct DSI and PAFS subscales and/or factor scores will lead to greater clarification of the interrelations among conceptually distinct dimensions of differentiation. For example, in a test of Bowen's similarity hypothesis, Skowron (2000) found no differences among the total differentiation of self scores of distressed married couples, while observing significant complementarity between spouses on their emotional reactivity and cutoff subscale scores. While use of total scores alone would merely collapse important sources of variability across distinct dimensions of this multidimensional construct (e.g., Lopez & Gover, 1993), when combined with subscale and/or factor score data, information from these three levels of abstraction may help to test key theoretical propositions about the purported health correlates of differentiation. Future research may determine whether individuals with similar levels of overall differentiation demonstrate relative strengths and weaknesses along specific components of differentiation. For example, it would be helpful to know whether adult partners complaining about intimate relationship problems are struggling with interpersonal fusion or emotional cutoff, or whether persons with work difficulties (e.g., career incongruence or conflict with supervisors) are more emotionally reactive or have not achieved sufficient personal authority in their own relationships with parents.

Our findings suggest that one strength of the PAFS is its multifaceted representation of interpersonal elements of differentiation (e.g., personal authority and intimacy), which is consistent with the authors' intended focus of the measure (Bray et al., 1984a). Alternately, the DSI scales appeared to best tap the Self Regulation dimension of differentiation and only a single element of Interdependent Relating, namely emotional cutoff. In contrast, the other interpersonal oriented DSI sub-

scale—Fusion with Others—failed to correlate with remaining differentiation dimensions, most notably with the PAFS Intergenerational Fusion scale. These findings are consistent with the lack of construct-related validity evidenced by the Fusion with Others scale (e.g., Skowron & Friedlander, 1998; Murdock et al., 1998). As such, we do not recommend its use until improvements to the subscale are complete (viz. Skowron & Schmitt, in press). Until then, clinicians and researchers interested in evaluating fusion in relationships are advised to use an alternate measure, such as the PAFS Fusion scales.

### *Implications for Family Therapy*

In sum, these findings have implications for assessment and evaluation in family therapy. First, the DSI and PAFS provide means for identifying individual differences between two related dimensions of differentiation: self regulation skills and capacity for interdependent relatedness. Second, given the link observed between self regulation and well-being among men and women, multigenerational family therapists who help focus on strengthening client self-differentiation may use select subscales of the DSI or PAFS to assess intake levels of functioning and evaluate the impact of their interventions.

Likewise, clinical researchers have begun to evaluate whether family therapy is effective for raising levels of differentiation in adults. For example, Bray and his colleagues found that a short-term, intergenerational therapy is capable of increasing personal authority and decreasing intergenerational triangulation among young adults (Bray et al., 1986). However, future research using the DSI and/or PAFS could clarify the types of therapies capable of strengthening adult differentiation. Specifically, the PAFS or DSI scales may be used individually or in tandem to assess clients at intake and termination to learn whether a particular family treatment is effective. Likewise, research could test whether different types of family therapy produce similar shifts in overall differentiation scores. If so, such findings would lend support to the systemic notion of treatment equifinality (Nichols & Schwartz, 2000), in which the effects of alternate systemic treatment modalities converge to achieve similar treatment outcomes.

In addition, more research on the process of family therapy is needed to determine whether changes in client levels of differentiation proceed, co-occur, or follow symptom remission or interpersonal change in psychotherapy. While the DSI and PAFS represent advances in the development of psychometrically sound instruments for measuring a

key construct in Bowen family systems theory, new observational measures of differentiation are needed to help uncover important dimensions of family transactions that signify successful balance of individuality, togetherness, and personal authority in key relationships, and conversely, to understand maladaptive transactions that underlie reactive distancing and fusion processes in families. Further, it would be interesting to learn more about how shifts in differentiation occur over time in the process of effective family systems therapy. The search for identifiable markers of differentiation may reveal the emergence in session of well-articulated personal life principles, and/or interpersonal transactions characterized by less neglect and emotional cutoff, coercion and submission, and more affirming and disclosing behaviors as key components of important change events in Bowen family therapy.

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