

Abstract

Previous literature indicated that the level of differentiation of self (Bowen, 1978) was closely associated with marital satisfaction. However, the relationship between differentiation of self and romantic relationship outcomes among emerging adults has received little attention. The present study investigated how differentiation of self was related to relationship satisfaction and distress, and tested the mediating roles of two emotion regulation strategies, cognitive reappraisal, and expressive suppression. The study has examined 211 Hong Kong emerging adults who were in a dating relationship, using a cross sectional survey involving Chinese version of Differentiation of Self Inventory (C-DSI), Chinese version of Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (C-ERQ), Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS), and Relational Depression Subscale (RDS). Results revealed that differentiation of self was positively correlated with relationship satisfaction and negatively correlated with relationship distress. Neither cognitive reappraisal nor expressive suppression were found to mediate the relationship. However, emotional cutoff, one of the components in differentiation of self, was specifically found to be closely related to expressive suppression and relationship distress. Therefore, the approach of Bowen's family therapy which focuses on individual's differentiation of self may help promote relational and mental health among emerging adults.

Keywords: differentiation of self, emotion regulation, romantic relationship, relationship outcomes, emerging adults