

Marta Kochan-Wójcik¹

Department of Psychology, University of Wrocław

Spousal Similarities in Self-differentiation and Corporal Self

Abstract:

The research aim is to verify the similarity that selected spouses demonstrate regarding their levels of self-differentiation and the strengths of their physical selves. Murray Bowen's Family Systems Theory and Sakson-Obada's model of corporal self constitute the theoretical basis for the examination. It is assumed that the level of spousal self-differentiation can be correlated; however, the spouses differ in this variable's certain dimensions. Furthermore, it is hypothesized that partners are similar in the physical self's strength with the exception of the attitude toward their own bodies. Research was conducted on 56 young couples married for five years or less. The hypotheses were confirmed to a large extent. The discussion focused on an analysis of dissimilar mechanisms used by wives and husbands in dealing with their marital tensions. In this context, possibly preventing marital dissatisfaction *via* supporting spouses in developing self-differentiation and deepening an awareness of their corporeity is also discussed.

Keywords: differentiation of self, corporal self disorders, Bowen family systems theory, marital satisfaction.

Introduction

The aim of this dissertation is to verify the theses referring to spousal similarity in self-differentiation and the corporal self. The empirical part is preceded by a

¹ Marta Kochan-Wójcik, Department of Psychology, Faculty of Pedagogical and Historical Sciences, University of Wrocław, Dawida 1, 50-527 Wrocław; m.kochan-wojcik@psychologia.uni.wroc.pl

theoretical discussion about the concepts of self-differentiation and corporal self, as well as a review of the research on the relations between these constructs in a spousal group and, more broadly, in a group of men and women. Finally, the possible prevention of marital dissatisfaction is discussed by supporting spouses in developing their self-differentiation as well as by broadening a consciousness of their corporal self.

Differentiation of self

The concept of differentiation of self originates from Murray Bowen's Family Systems Theory. At the intrapsychic level, self-differentiation of is defined as the ability to balance one's own emotional and intellectual functions, whereas at the interpsychic level it indicates the ability to balance intimacy and autonomy in relations with other people (Bowen, 2004). High level of self-differentiation characterizes people who are able to keep their autonomy in a partner relationship without fear of being rejected, as well as characterizing people who are able to retain emotional intimacy in the same relationship without fear of feeling smothered. On the other hand, low level of self-differentiation denotes weaker emotional maturity, and is connected with experiencing greater fear and tension in a relation, which leads to either emotional cutoff (maintaining considerable emotional distance from those close to you, particularly parents or a partner) or fusion with significant people (emotional dependence resulting in intolerance of differences between oneself and others, and problems with identifying and expressing one's beliefs) (Kerr & Bowen, 1988).

Bowen assumes that the ability to differentiate is shaped by the emotional climate present in the family of origin, and is transferred to children through generation transmission. He also indicates that partners decide to enter a marital relationship with a person characterized by a similar level of self-differentiation (Bowen, 2004) and that this arrangement becomes stable in time.

Family Systems Theory has been successively verified (*e.g.* Skowron, 2000; Miller, Anderson & Keala, 2004; Rovers *et al.*, 2007). Researchers have noticed a positive relation between the level of self-differentiation and such variables as psychological well-being, mental health (Gavazzi, Anderson & Sabatelli, 1993; Bohlander, 1999), marital satisfaction and couple happiness (Skowron & Friedlander 1998; Rovers *et al.*, 2007). They also observed a negative correlation with symptoms of depression and distress (Elieson & Rubin, 2001; Skowron & Friedlander, 1998; Tuason & Friedlander, 2000), levels of anxiety (Maynard, 1997; Kriegerlewicz, 2008), neuroticism (Kriegerlewicz, 2008) and marital discord (Kossek, 1998; Skowron, 2000).

Psychological literature, however, provides scarce data to verify that partner selections are based on the level of self-differentiation. Some examinations do compare the level of differentiation between spouses and randomly selected partners, but the results are inconsistent. Kear's analysis of 30 newlyweds shows that there is a greater similarity of spouses demonstrating self-differentiation than there are partners chosen at random (Kear, 1978 after: Skowron, 2000). Bartle (1993), however, achieves opposite results. Considering only the construct's multidimensionality allows scholars to confirm complete or partial spousal similarity in terms of this variable (Bartle, 1993; Day, St. Clair & Marshal, 1997; Rovers *et al.*, 2007). Family therapists indicate that partners often employ different, but complementary, ways of easing marital tension, which could explain the difference in scope of this construct's particular dimensions. This seems to be confirmed by the research. Skowron notices significant correlations between the tendency of husbands to emotionally cut off from their wives, and wives' emotional reactivity (Skowron, 2000).

Kriegelewicz also confirmed partial similarity of the spouses concerning levels of self-differentiation (Kriegelewicz, 2008). She examined a group of 190 mature marital couples by using two tools to measure differentiation of self. The first tool was the widely popular *Differentiation of Self Scale-Revised* (DSI-R) created by E. A. Skowron, M. L. Friedlander and T. A. Schmidt (Skowron & Friedlander, 1998; Skowron & Schmitt, 2003), which, apart from indicating the general differentiation level, also considers the scales of emotional reactivity, I-position, emotional cutoff and fusion with others. The second tool constituted the author's *Relation Questionnaire* (RQ) consisting of six scales referring to the examined person's relations: separately with their parents and with their partner (the method is described in detail in the further part of the paper).

The analysis of RQ's theoretical accuracy performed by Kriegelewicz revealed a very high correlation with the results obtained from DSI-R. Preliminary analyses indicated a significant correlation between the differentiation level of husbands' and wives' selves regardless of which measurement tool was used. Research confirmed that the spouses were similar to each other in levels of self-differentiation when measured with RQ as well as in such differentiation aspects as triangulation with a feeling of responsibility for parents, emotional cutoff from parents and autonomy (scale RQ); as well as the tendency to separate oneself from others (scale DSI-R). Wives proved to be emotionally dependent, and dependent on their parents (scale RQ). Furthermore, they gained higher results on the emotional reactivity and fusion scales (DSI-R). Husbands, in turn, were characterized by a higher general differentiation level measured by DSI-R, and higher indicators of emotional cutoff and fusion with a partner (RQ scales). Sex differences seem to be

influenced by different ways in which men and women socialize (Skowron, Van Epps, & Cipriano, in press).

The matter is similar with young couples. Peleg & Yitzhak (2011) used the DSI-R tool to compare the level of self-differentiation in young Israeli couples married up to six years. The results indicated partial similarity of the spouses in the two DSI-R scales: I-position and emotional cutoff. What is more, the Israeli wives presented a higher level of emotional reactivity and fusion with others than the husbands. Thus, it seems that spouses can be similar to each other in their separate dimensions of self-differentiation, depending on their age and marriage duration.

Corporal Self

Following Olga Sakson-Obada (2009), physical self can be defined as an element of self, which cognitively analyzes experience connected with corporeity. This definition underlines the elemental meaning of this kind of experience in a person's psychological development. Sakson-Obada states that a properly functioning corporal self is strong (*ibid.*) It enables one to adequately perceive the intensity and modality of impressions coming from both one's body and the external world. What is more, it allows a proper regulation and interpretation of the experience in terms of physical and emotional states. People with a strong corporal self feel good, understand their physique and properly care for it. Additionally, they experience physical and emotional comfort in relations with other people. The basis for such behavior is accepting and demonstrating a positive attitude toward one's body.

A weak corporal self is, in turn, connected with decreased sensual sensitivity often resulting in feeling indifferent and apathetic with regard to one's own corporeity (Sutton, 2004; Streeck-Fischer & van der Kolk, 2000) or an increased awareness of feelings coming from one's body and perceiving them as threatening (Schmidt, Lerew & Trakowski, 1997). Additionally, a dysfunctional corporal self is characterized by reluctance to accept and to have a negative attitude towards one's corporeity, and to be unable to regulate psychophysical states or to properly take care of this sphere. People with a weak corporal self experience more discomfort in close relations with other people. They are also characterized by a high level of anxiety and avoidance, as well as by an "unsafe" style of attachment (Sakson-Obada, 2009). It is worth highlighting that in comparison with men, women display considerably more anomalies of the corporal self (*ibid.*).

An improperly operating physical self results from a failure to recognize proper feelings coming from one's body; consequently, there is an inability to mentally distance oneself from the world of bodily experience and its symbolization (desomatization) (Krystal, 1988). A weak corporal self develops when there is a

prevalence of negative experiences and tension connected with one's body. The origins for experiencing negative emotions and tensions are connected with either a lack or inadequate meeting of a child's corporal needs by the child's guardian. In addition another mechanism responsible for a weak corporal self is experienced trauma (Krystal, 1988; Sakson-Obada, 2009).

Due to the fact that both the corporal self and its capabilities are responsible for regulating emotional experiences and that both develop on the basis of similar experiences (the ability to adequately name, interpret and deal with one's own or a child's emotions by a guardian), they should be related to each other. Indeed, such a relation has been confirmed (Kochan-Wójcik, 2011). The relation between the function of physical self's strength and the self-differentiation level in a group of young women proved that such a correlation does exist, and is meaningful ($r=0.56$). Similar relations were also discovered between factors on both scales, and were highest between self-differentiation and interpretation of experience concerning emotions ($r=0.49$), and regulating emotions ($r=0.60$). The above research confirmed the connection between remaining in a partner relationship, self-differentiation levels, and the strength of physical self. Women who declared staying in a partner relationship were characterized by a higher strength of physical self and a higher level of self-differentiation. In contrast to single women, they also presented fewer identification and interpretation dysfunctions of their own emotional states (*ibid.*). The above mentioned research indicates that both high levels of self-differentiation and a strong corporal self can constitute a good basis for creating a satisfactory partner relationship.

Research Matters and Hypotheses

The aim of this research is to verify two hypotheses through examinations carried out on a group of young spouses. The first hypothesis is the probability of selecting partners on the basis of self-differentiation levels. From the perspective of clinical practice and available research, (Skowron, 2000; Kriegerlewicz 2008; Peleg & Yitzhak, 2011) it can be assumed that the spousal differentiation levels correlate; however, the spouses differ with regard to particular dimensions of the variable: wives are more emotionally dependent and are more dependent on their parents; husbands, on the other hand, present higher self-differentiation levels, but at the same time tend to employ more diversified strategies for coping with marital tension: cutting off from, or fusing with, a partner. Spousal similarities, in turn, should be revealed with respect to autonomy (perceiving and tolerating differences between oneself and a partner, the ability to identify and express one's convictions as well as pursue one's goals even without other people's approval).

A second subject in this dissertation is to verify spousal similarity concerning strength of the physical self. Research shows that young women remaining in a partner relationship have a stronger corporal self than single women (Kochan-Wójcik, 2011), whereas men have a stronger corporal self than women in general (Sakson-Obada, 2009). Thus, a general strength of physical self, as well as its particular dimensions, indicate that partners are similar to each other - but with one exception: attitudes toward their own bodies. Women are much more critical of their bodies than men, and have more negative emotions (*e.g.* Fallon & Rozin 1985; Tiggeman, 1992; Lamb, Jackson, Cassiday & Priest, 1993; Kochan-Wójcik, 2003).

Participants

Research was carried out on a group of 112 young people with higher (71%) or secondary (29%) education. The group consisted of 56 young couples remaining in a relationship for five years or less (the average length of a relationship before the marriage was 3.9 years and 1.1 years afterward. The men averaged age 27.7 (range 23-37) and the women 25.8 (range 21-34). The participants resided in Wrocław and neighboring areas. Twelve couples had one child. Each spouse filled in two questionnaires.

Methods

The differentiation level was measured by O. Kriegielewicz's *Relation Questionnaire* (RQ) (Kriegielewicz, 2005). The questionnaire assessed both the general differentiation level (the total results of all questionnaire items) and the chosen parts of this variable (the total points received on the scales). The scales were based on the author's empirical experience using factor analysis; the analyses proved to be reliable and satisfying. They are as follows: 1) Emotional dependency; 2) Triangulation and responsibility for parents; 3) Emotional cutoff from parents; 4) Autonomy; 5) Emotional cutoff from the partner; 6) Dependency on parents; and 7) Fusion with the partner. The questionnaire consisted of 69 items, the objective being to assess each respondent's experience on a scale of 1-6. Generally test results varied from 69 to 414 points. The higher the general result, the lower the level of differentiation.

To measure corporal self strength, I employed *The Body Self Questionnaire* created by O. Sakson-Obada (2009). It consists of 90 statements presenting a distorted perception of one's body. It serves to assess various aspects of the corporal self (the average total of the individual scales) and the corporal self strength (the average total of all the scales concerning the corporal self: scales 1-7). The scales

were determined theoretically, and their reliability was confirmed empirically by the questionnaire's author. The scales are 1) Elevated experience thresholds; 2) Lowered experience thresholds; 3) Experience interpretation in emotional terms; 4) Experience interpretation in physical states terms; 5) Experience interpretation in terms of one's disrupted corporal identity (loss of one's body boundaries, the feeling of inner emptiness, estrangement from bodily experience); 6) Regulation of physical states (knowledge of their causes and the ability to cope with them); 7) Regulation of emotions (knowledge of their causes and the ability to cope with them); 8) Emotional attitudes towards the body; 9) Comfort in situations of physical closeness; and 10) Body protection. The higher the result on each scale, the greater the disruption of the corporal self.

Both methods above have good psychometric values and both have their theoretical justification. Furthermore, they underwent verification according to Polish standards.

The results

The aim of the analyses was to determine whether spouses were similar to each other concerning self-differentiation levels, the strength of physical self and the dimensions of these constructs. The results dependence achieved by the spouses was analyzed by the correlation factor. Analysis of the differences, in turn, was used to observe whether the spouses differed from each other according to selected variables despite potential covariance.

The results confirmed nearly all initial assumptions concerning the partners' similar self-differentiation. The examination proved that the husbands' and wives' differentiation levels positively correlated ($r=0.54$; $p<0.001$). Similar positive correlations were discovered in all the variable scales with the exception of Emotional cutoff from parents and Triangulation with responsibility for parents. Additionally, an essentially higher self-differentiation level and a higher tendency to fuse with a partner were observed in the men's group (lower general result of men in RQ indicates a higher level of self-differentiation). The wives, on the other hand, proved to be more emotionally dependent. They also achieved higher results in the Parents dependency scale, as well as in Emotional cutoff from parents and Triangulation with responsibility for parents. Lack of any differences between partners was visible in two scales: Autonomy and Emotional cutoff from a partner. Thus, only the assumption about a higher tendency of men rather than women to employ emotional cutoff from a spouse was not confirmed. The detailed results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Comparison of self-differentiation levels of husbands and wives, with consideration of questionnaire subscales¹

Level of differentiation of self	Full scale		Emotional dependency		Triangulation with responsibility for parents		Emotional separation from parents		Autonomy ²		Emotional separation from partner		Dependency on parents		Fusion with partner	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Husbands	187.7	31.1	33.2	8.8	35.4	9.2	26.6	8.3	26.4	6.4	17.4	5.7	19.2	6.4	29.4	6.4
Wives	203.9	29,6	39.2	9.6	38.6	9.1	32.9	8.1	25.3	6.6	16.7	4.7	23.4	6.1	27.7	6.5
r	r(P) = 0.54***		r(S) = 0.41**		r(S) = 0.21		r(P) = -0.15		r(P) = 0.41**		r(S) = 0.37**		r(P) = 0.41**		r(P) = 0.54**	
Tests of significance of differences	t = -3.81***		Z = 3.93***		Z = 2.28*		t = -3.48***		t = 0.22		Z = 0.52		t = -4.24***		t = 2.03*	

*p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001

¹ With reference to the normal distribution variables the difference analyses were conducted with a t-test for the dependent trials, and an r-Pearson correlation coefficient was established; for the variables distribution deviating from the standard one, the difference analyses were conducted with the Z Wilcoxon test (Z) and Spearman's rank correlation (r).

² The higher the score, the less autonomy.

The second hypothesis referring to spousal similarity of the corporal self has also been partly confirmed. Concerning a general corporal self strength, as well as its seven sub-scales, the results of both husbands and wives were characterized by a weak, though statistically significant covariance. No correlations whatsoever were discovered regarding the Experience interpretation in emotional and physical states terms scales. As predicted, spouses differed significantly with respect to Attitudes toward their own body. Moreover, it was discovered that the differences were also meaningful with respect to the Regulation of emotions and Body protection. Concerning the first two variables the wives displayed more disorders than the husbands, whose ability to cope with body protection, on the other hand, was significantly worse. With regard to the remaining scales, the partners were similar. Detailed comparisons and statistical values are presented in Table 2.

Research analysis additionally allows one to seek for a relation between corporal self strength and the self-differentiation level, separately within in the groups of men and women. For this purpose a regression analysis was carried out, where a general factor of the physical self was used as a dependent variable. Different self-differentiation dimensions (RQ scales) were used as its predictors. Both models proved essential (for the men $F(7.44)=5.93$; $p<0.001$; and for the women $F(7.43)=6.40$ $p<.001$). All predictors explained 48% of the dependent variable in the men's group ($R^2=0.48$). However, only one variable included in the model had an essential influence on the strength of psychical self: motional cutoff from a partner ($\beta=0.40$; $t=2.98$; $p<0.01$). Among the women all predictors explained 51% of the dependent variable ($R^2=0.51$), and also only one predictor had an essential influence on the strength of self-differentiation: emotional dependence ($\beta=0.32$; $t=2.23$; $p<0.05$). Hence, it can be concluded that corporal self disorders are strong in emotionally dependent wives, and in husbands with the tendency to employ emotional cutoff from their partners.

Discussion

The analysis of young spouses indicates that even though the results concerning level of self-differentiation among the men and women are moderately correlated, the partners turned out to differ in five out of seven dimensions. Men proved to be more differentiated. In the group of young single men, differentiation levels were similar to the those acquired by Kriegielewicz (2008), which could suggest consistency of both results. Yet, an essential difference between young and mature men's levels of self-differentiation was pointed out during Kriegielewicz's analysis, and favored the younger ones. It is also worth mentioning that the differentiation level among men and women oscillated around similar values in the research

Table 2. Comparison of husbands and wives corporal self with the consideration of the questionnaire subscales¹

Strength of the corporal self	Full scale		Elevated experience thresholds		Lower experience thresholds		Experience interpretation in emotional terms		Experience interpretation in physical states terms		Experience interpretation in terms of one's disrupted corporal identity		Regulation of emotions		Regulation of physical states		Emotional attitudes towards the body		Comfort in situations of physical closeness		Body protection	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Husbands	1.9	0.4	1.5	0.5	1.6	0.5	2.1	0.7	2.2	0.5	1.5	0.5	2.3	0.7	2.3	0.6	2.0	0.8	2.3	0.6	2.7	0.7
Wives	2.0	0.5	1.4	0.4	1.7	0.5	2.2	0.7	2.2	0.6	1.6	0.6	2.7	0.7	2.3	0.6	2.5	1.0	2.4	0.6	2.1	0.6
r	0.37**		0.39**		0.32*		0.06		0.15		0.40**		0.30*		0.38**		0.22		0.31*		0.32*	
Z	1.31		0.30		0.90		0.51		0.06		0.67		2.74**		0.92		2.49**		1.31		4.71***	

*p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001

¹ Due to the fact that the variables distribution included in Table 2. deviated from the normal distribution, the analyses were conducted with the Z Wilcoxon test (Z) and Spearman's rank correlation (r).

conducted in the group of mature marriages by Kriegielewicz. The results were similar to those received from the young wives in this dissertation. To sum up, young wives and mature husbands were characterized by a similar level of self-differentiation, whereas young husbands and unmarried men – by a significantly higher level.

Considering the initial hypotheses and attempting a more detailed analysis of partner differentiation, it was established that young husbands displayed a higher tendency than their wives to fuse with a partner: that is, to blur interpersonal borders, which resulted in decreased autonomy and individuality. A higher tendency to fuse was also observed in the group of mature men remaining in a relationship for more than twenty years (Kriegielewicz, 2008).

Fusion is an extreme mechanism of dealing with tension between spouses. Following Bowen's conception, fusing with another person activates a fear of being absorbed. Such tension results in an emotional cutoff from a partner that is, it introduces emotional distance into the relationship thus separating the partner from one's own experiences. Based on scientific literature and clinical practice, it was assumed that husbands represent a higher tendency to display this type of behavior than do their wives (sex differences in this variable and its higher intensity in the men, as well as a higher emotional dependence level in women were repeatedly confirmed, *e.g.* Skowron & Friedlander, 1998; Skowron, 2000; Peleg-Popko, 2004). Nevertheless, the spouses achieved similar results in Emotional cutoff. What is more, it was discovered that the average results of the spouses on the scale were lower than the results obtained in Kriegielewicz's research (2008) in the group of mature marriages and young unmarried people. Peleg and Yitzhak (2011) also noted that there were no differences between young married spouses in this field. Similarly, the results obtained by them with regard to emotional cutoff of newlyweds was lower than those found by Peleg (2008) in spouses married for more than ten years.

It can therefore be concluded that emotional cutoff from a partner develops in a husband during the time he remains in a relationship. The mechanism apparently constitutes a counterbalance to the higher tendency of men to fuse with a partner. The tendency remains high for both young and mature husbands. It is also possible that the tendency to separate from his partner is the husband's answer to the wife's higher emotional dependence (which in turn leads her to react more emotionally to every aspect of her husband's relation with other people). Wives' emotional dependence seems to stabilize over time, which can be confirmed by comparing young wives' similar intensity with the women married more than 20 years (Kriegielewicz, 2008).

Confirmation of the decreasing emotional cutoff dependency over time spent in a relationship, on the husband's reaction to his wife's emotional dependency, and by counterbalancing the tendency fuse with a partner requires further empirical research (especially longitudinal studies). These hypotheses, however, stand in opposition to the main assumptions of Bowen's Family Systems Theory, according to which the self-differentiation level remains relatively constant over time. Nevertheless, Bowen himself distinguishes between basic (solid self) and functional (pseudo-self) levels of self-differentiation. Solid self is non-negotiable with others and comprises an individual's firmest convictions and most integrated beliefs. Pseudo-self, by contrast, is negotiable with others. It consists of others' opinions absorbed as one's own without any personal conscious commitment to the beliefs and convictions underlying the absorbed opinions.

The cultural masculinity model requires men to be resistant to external pressure, and to show limited emotionality and low emotional dependence. In this regard the model favors autonomy, supporting men in such emotionally difficult tasks as separation from the family of origin. The femininity model, on the other hand, consents to dependency, emotionality and its demonstration (Gilligan, 1982 after: Gubbins, Perosa, Bartle-Haring, 2010). As a result, women seem to experience more tension in separating themselves from their parents. The cultural models, then, could constitute a basis for the so-called pseudo-self for young men and women who stand at the threshold to adulthood, are inexperienced in their husband/wife and father/mother roles, and are only beginning to figure out how to separate from their family of origin. Hence, it seems that self-differentiation declared by the spouses in a self-description questionnaire is not a presentation of the basic, but rather of the functional self (Bowen, in the last years of his work, abandoned questionnaire differentiation studies for the benefit of the researcher's detailed observations and a direct contact with the examined person). In such a context, the deterioration of self-differentiation observed in a group of men along with the time spent in a relationship can be treated as a change within the scope of their pseudo-self, which, according to the Bowen concept, undergoes modification from family influences and life stressors. Long married spouses seem to describe self-differentiation at a different level. It is strengthened by life's experiences and real everyday marital relations. Hence, it can be closer to their solid-self and, as Bowen suggested, more attuned to their real level of differentiation.

Spousal psychological similarity was revealed to a great extent with the strength of physical self. Sakson-Obada (2009) in her research noticed clear sex differences to women's disadvantage in that field. The analyses within the groups revealed, however, that young women remaining in a relationship are characterized by a higher strength of corporal self (in intensity similar to this variable in

men), than single women are (Kochan-Wójcik, 2011). In this context, the spousal similarity in terms of corporal self strength and its dimensions was assumed.

Finally, it was discovered that partners were characterized by a similarity in their sensitivity thresholds, the interpretation of experiences in the physical states and emotional terms, a distorted feeling of corporal identity, regulations of physical states, and comfort in physical closeness. Wives presented more disorders in regulating emotions, which seems to be coherent with the result achieved in the emotional dependence of wives. They also presented a worse attitude towards their bodies, yet, they could take care of the sphere better. These results are consistent with research data on sex differences with respect to experiencing corporal self (e.g. Fallon, Rozin, 1985; Tiggeman, 1992). The predictor of disorders concerning the strength of physical self among the women proved to be emotional dependence, whereas among the men – emotional cutoff from a partner. This suggests that the more dependent the women and the more cut-off the men, the more disorders both display in their corporeity. It also confirms a relation between the level of self-differentiation and semiotic symptoms noted by various scholars (Harvey, Curry & Bray, 1991; Skowron, 2004).

Practical implications

The above mentioned results are doubtlessly meaningful for clinical practice. The research suggests that the high level of emotional cutoff of partners correlates negatively with marital satisfaction (Peleg, 2008), and that in marriages reporting greater marital discord a complementary dependence can be observed between wives' high emotional reactivity and husbands' emotional cutoffs (Skowron, 2000). The results indicate that in marital therapy, the therapist should place a particular emphasis on coping with tension, and while developing constructive strategies in the matter, he or she should also pursue the increase in self-differentiation levels of both spouses. One of the ways to achieving this is to deepen the spouses' corporal awareness, as well as develop their proper interpretation and regulation of the body experience. It is therefore an argument in favor of combining, in psychotherapy, work on self-differentiation and the client's experiencing of their bodies. Such psychotherapy is discussed in more detail in another paper (Kochan-Wójcik, 2011).

In marital satisfaction, it seems purposeful to deepen both fields before harmful mechanisms of coping with tension develop and become entrenched in the marriage. This goal would be perfectly adjusted to developmental tasks which young spouses have to face during this phase of family life: learning to live with a partner, recognizing similarities and discrepancies and establishing mechanisms

for coping with differences between the spouses' opinions (Carter & McGoldrick, 1999). Support which young couples could receive, for instance during the pre-marital instructions or developmental workshops, would constitute a good basis for building and maintaining satisfaction in a relationship.

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