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Happiness and willingness to communicate in three attachment styles: a study on college students

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to investigate happiness and willingness to communicate in three attachment styles on college students. Using cluster sampling method, 400 students were selected as sample. Hazan and Shaver’s Adult attachment styles scale, Memorial University of Newfoundland Scale of Happiness (MUNSCH) and willingness to communicate scale were used for collecting of data. Data analysis using one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) and post hoc multiple comparison were performed. The results showed that there are significant difference among attachment styles on happiness. Students with secure attachment style than non-secure have a higher happiness and student with avoidant attachment style compared with ambivalent attachment have a higher happiness. Another result showed that there are significant differences among attachment styles on willingness to communicate. Students with secure attachment style than non-secure students have a higher willingness to communicate and also students with ambivalent attachment style compared with avoidant students have a higher willingness to communicate. These results suggest that secure attachment style is a main factor in happiness and willingness to communicate of individuals.

Keywords: happiness; willingness to communicate; attachment style.

1. Introduction

According to Bowlby’s theory, primary relations of mother-child shapes the individual attachment style and affects the person’s idea about himself, others and way of managing interpersonal relationships. According to this theory, the effects of attachment quality in all periods of life continues and clarifies individual differences in coping with internal annoyance and managing interpersonal relations (Bowlby, 1973; 1977; 1980).

Hazan and Shaver (1987) based on Bowlby’s attachment theory, have founded adult’s attachment. These researchers defined adult’s attachment in two ways:

a) Internal representations or patterns that leads interpersonal behavior and information processing. b) special ways and methods that people use for keeping their own safety (Hazan, & Shaver, 1987).

Hazan and Shaver (1987) introduced adult’s attachment styles in three categories of secure, ambivalent and avoidant based on results of research done in field of infant’s attachment styles:

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Secure people are comfortable in having friendly relationships, and are willing to be dependent on others for getting support and are sure that others like them. They describe their attachment faces as warm people, have positive image of themselves and have positive expectations from others. The people of ambivalent category have a lot of eagerness for having close relationship, but have a lot of fear of expulsion. They think of being welcomed from others as a necessary requirement for having good feeling. These people have a negative image of themselves but have positive image for others. The main problem of avoidant people is self-reliance. When it is possible that they get shunned by others, try to keep their own positive image by denying attachment need. Avoidant people have negative image and expectations from others. Avoidant insecure attachment groups have high self-value feeling and underestimate having close relationship with others; but ambivalent people experience deep feeling of being worthless. Inappropriate self-revealing, inappropriate expression of emotions, recurrent cries in front of the observant, and being dependent on others have been reported in ambivalent people and when their needs wouldn’t be satisfied, they experience much irritation and being highly vulnerable have been seen in such group (Bartholomew, & Horowitz, 1991).

About “happiness” different definitions have been presented, but Veenhoven’s (1992) definition of happiness, seems complete: “It’s the degree which a person judge the quality of his life as a satisfying life” (Veenhoven, 1992).

Researchers define happiness as psychological well-being and having satisfying state of mind ” (Veenhoven, 1992; Diener, 1999; Eysenck, 1990; Myers, 1992; & Argyle, 2001). According to Argyle, Martin and Lu (1995) three fundamental bases of happiness are: Positive emotion, satisfaction of life and not having negative emotions as depression and anxiety. He and his colleagues found that positive relationship with others, having a goal in life, personal growth, loving other and nature are other parts of happiness (Argyle, Martin, & Lu. 1995). One of relevant matters to happiness is existence of support network, and because of that Mayers and Diener (1995) say that when people are asked that who is a happy person, in their replies they refer to a support network of relationship in a culture that leads to positive and optimist interpretation of life events. Therefore, one of the fundamental component of happiness is its cognitive component (Myers, & Diener, 1995). Schwartz and Strack (1991) believe that happy people are those who have bias in information processing, which means that they process and interpret information the way which ends in their happiness. Therefore, happiness in a concept that have many fundamental components. The first is emotional and mood component which causes the happy person always be happy and delight. The second is social support component that causes expanding social relationship and the third is cognitive component which causes the happy person have his own special thought and information processing and interprets daily events in a way which ends in being optimism (Schwartz, & Strack, 1991).

Researches show that people with insecure attachment styles are more inclined to face emotional and spiritual difficulties, and the more they feel unable in their interpersonal relationship, the lower their degree of happiness (Janika, 1993).

According to research findings, people with secure attachment are related to positive relationship characteristics including intimacy and happiness, people with avoidant attachment are related to low degree of intimacy and commitment and people with ambivalent attachment are related to excitement and concern about relationships with low happiness. Avoidant people show more eagerness to end the relationship as ambivalent people (Hazan, & Shaver, 1987; Feeney, & Noller, 1990). After ending previous relationships, reconstructing new relationship is different according to person’s attachment pattern. The avoidant people after ending a relationship, have less anxiety and worry than ambivalent people (Simpson, 1990). The latter start to have a new relationship more quickly (Feeney, & Noller, 1990). Horowitz, Rosenberg, Brtholomew (1993), Horowitz, Locke, Morse, Waiker, Dryer, Tarnow, Ghanam. (1991) research findings showed that different patterns of interpersonal relationship was according to different attachment styles (Horowitz, 1991; Horowitz, Rosenberg, & Brtholomew, 1993).

According to Kafetsios (2004) and Mc Carthy et.al (2001) it can be said that people with secure attachment styles, use effective methods in their relationship and capable to manage emotional relationship (Kafetsios, 2004; Mc, Carthy, Naomi, & Rachel, 2001). Therefore, in this research according to discussed literature and grounds, it has been tried to give more explicit examples for such demands according to comparison between happiness and willingness to communicate in three groups of attachment styles of college students population.
2. Procedure

2-1. Sample:
This research had been done on 400 non-native student of Tabriz university in bachelor degree that had been selected by cluster sampling method. After selecting the cases and opening the goals and attracting their cooperation, questionnaires were distributed among the subjects appealing them to study the questions carefully and select the answers according to their personality traits and do not leave the questions unanswered as possible. The data were summarized through descriptive statistics of mean, standard deviation and are analyzed through ANOVA test.

2.2. Instruments:
In this research, overall, three known scales used that are:

Adult’s Attachment Styles Scale: This scale has been made by Hazan and Shaver (1987) and is a self-reported scale that is made according to Ainsworth is three some attachment styles (secure, avoidant, and ambivalent) and with this presupposition that in adult’s relationships styles same as children attachment styles also can be found. This scale includes three descriptive phrases of person’s feeling about interpersonal relationship that each of them refers to one attachment styles. This scale includes two parts that in the first part, subjects answer to three descriptive phrases on a nine degree continuum, ranging from “completely inappropriate” (=1) to “completely appropriate” (=9). In the second part, the person chooses one of the phrases as the most suitable description about their feelings.

Baldwin and Feher (1383) have reported overall reliability of this scale 0.67; also alpha for secure, avoidant and ambivalent styles have been respectively 0.80, 0.57, and 0.32. In khavaninzadeh et al. study (1383) Cronbach alpha for this scale has been 0.64 (Hosseini,2004).

Memorial University of Newfoundland Scale of Happiness (MUNSCH): This scale for measuring happiness have been made by Kozma and Stones (2000) and has 24 questions that is scored as three items “yes” (=2) “No” (=0) and “I don’t know” (=1) (Kozma, Stones, & Stones, 2000). Reliability of this test has been 0.70 by using retest method after 18 months. In Babapoor et al. research (1382) internal consistency of this test is 0.71. In addition, he reported validity coefficient as 0.84 according to reliability index (Babapour, et al., 2002).

Willingness to Communicate Scale (WTC): This test has been made by James Mc Croskey (1992) and has 12 questions that is grades as “yes” (100) and “no” (0). reliability of this test has been reported by Mc Croskey as 0.92 and retest reliability has been reported as 0.79. In this research by using retest method, after 4 months, reliability was 0.72 and internal consistency of 12 some items by Cronbach’s alpha came out 0.69.

3. Findings

Results of one-way ANOVA on research variables show that there is a significant difference between average of scores of happiness and willingness to have relationship according to attachment styles.

| Variables                  | SS        | df  | MS     | F       | Sig.   |
|----------------------------|-----------|-----|--------|---------|--------|
| happiness                  | Between group | 5739/390 | 2    | 2869/695 | 33/642 | 0/000  |
|                            | Within group   | 16804/130 | 397  | 85/300  |        |        |
|                            | total          | 22543/520 | 399  |         |        |        |
| willingness to communicate | Between group | 93/253   | 2    | 46/627  | 11/378 | 0/000  |
|                            | Within group   | 807/302  | 397  | 96/098  |        |        |
|                            | total          | 900/555  | 399  |         |        |        |

In order to know which one of dependent variables have significant difference, performing multiple comparisons for dependent variables is necessary and have been done. Result of multiple comparison show that between average
of happiness and willingness to have relationship scores in secure attachment style group, also in avoidant and ambivalent groups there is a significant relationship (table 2).

Table 2: Least Significant Difference (LSD) test for comparing of happiness and willingness to communicate in three attachment groups

| Variables                  | MD     | SD     | Sig.  |
|----------------------------|--------|--------|-------|
| **happiness**              |        |        |       |
| Secure                     | 8/819  | 1/546  | 0/000 |
| Avoidant                   | 13/008 | 1/805  | 0/000 |
| Ambivalent                 | 13/008 | 1/805  | 0/000 |
| **willingness to communicate** | 1/616  | 0/339  | 0/000 |
| Secure                     | 1/616  | 0/339  | 0/000 |
| Avoidant                   | 0/538  | 0/339  | 0/176 |

4. Discussion and conclusion

This research showed that there is a significant relationship between attachment styles and happiness. In other words, people who have secure attachment style have higher happiness and people who have avoidant and ambivalent insecure attachment styles have lower happiness.

This results are consistent with Greenberg et. al. (1983) and Feeney and Noller (1996) results. They came to this conclusion in their research on happiness and attachment that there is a significant relationship between secure attachment and happiness. Meaning that secure attached people have higher happiness, and the more insecure the attachment, the lower happiness they experience (Greenberg, Sigel, & Leith, 1993; Feeney, & Noller, 1996).

The result are the same as the results coming out of Janika (1993) which showed insecure attachment style people are more apt to mental and spiritual problems and the more they feel unable they feel in interpersonal relationship, the lower their degree of happiness (Janika, 1993).

Another result of this research showed that there is a significant relationship between attachment style and willingness to have relationship, in other words, people who have secure attachment style have more willingness to have relationship and people who have avoidant and ambivalent insecure attachment style have little willingness to have relationship.

According to the results of the past findings it can be verified that secure attachment with positive relationship characteristic including intimacy and happiness, avoidant attachment with lower degree of intimacy and commitment and ambivalent attachment with excitement and concern about relationships with low happiness are related. Avoidant people are more willing to end the relationship than ambivalent people (Hazan, & Shaver, 1987; Feeney, & Noller, 1996).

After ending the previous relationships making new relationship is also different according person’s attachment style. The avoidant people after ending a relationship get less anxious and stressed than the ambivalent. The latter start to have a new relationship quickly (Feeney, & Noller, 1996).

Horowitz et.al. (1993) research findings and Horowitz et.al. (1991) also have shows that different ways of interpersonal relationship is in accordance with different attachment styles (Horowitz, 1991; Horowitz, Rosenberg, & Brtholomew, 1993).

Also, according to Kafetsios (2004) and Mc Cartey et. al. (2001) it can be also said that people with secure attachment styles use more effective ways of relationship and are able to manage emotional and excitement relationship (Kafetsios, 2004; Mc, Carthy, Naomi, & Rachel, 2001).

Overall, the results of this research verified the results of other researchers about relationship of happiness and secure attachment style. According to Bowlby’s theory, secure people interpret world as safe place and have lowest anxiety and tension. These characteristic cause the people with secure attachment style to have more happiness and willingness to communicate, but because people with ambivalent and avoidant attachment style have high distress and confusion, then have low happiness and willingness to communicate. these results suggest that secure attachment style is a main factor in happiness and willingness to communicate of individuals.
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