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The Relationship between Attachment and Subjective Well-being: The Mediating Role of Emotion Regulation Skill

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Attachment styles are considered important not only for adults' close relationships but also for individual's well-being, reflecting the subjective quality of life, covering positive mood, vitality, and interest in things. Emotion regulation is considered to be in direct relation with these variables and expected to play a mediating role in the association between attachment and well-being. The aim of this study was to obtain better insight into the associations between attachment styles and subjective well- being, by testing the possible mediating role of emotion regulation skill. The methodology employed in this study was descriptive methodology. Sample demographics were 130 students of University of Isfahan, Iran, who were selected based on multi-stage simple sampling method. Direct effects of attachment styles on emotion regulation skill were all significant ($p<.05$). Direct effects of secure and avoidance styles on SWB were both significant ($p<.05$). Indirect effects of attachment styles on SWB were all significant ($p<.05$). Indirect effects of avoidance style on SWB was-0.11, indirect effects of secure style on SWB was 0.4, and indirect effects of ambivalence style on SWB was -.21 ($p<.05$). Model fit indices were: CMIN/DF= 1.69, GFI= .84, CFI= .96, PCFI= .83, REMSEA= .07, and HOELTER= 91. Emotion regulation skill has the mediating role in the relation between attachment styles and subjective well- being.

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Subjective Well-Being (SWB) is a complex structure t consisting of several components including evaluative judgment, positive memories, mindfulness, optimism and a consistent dose of positive and negative emotions over time (Kim-Prieto, Diener, Tamir, Scollon & Diener, 2005). Based on empirical evidences, SWB consists of three components of life satisfaction, positive and negative affect (Diener, 2006). SWB reflects the Subjective Quality of Life (SQL) covering positive moods and interest in the environment (Karreman & Vingerhoets, 2012).

The internal working model proposed by Bowlby (1969) is a schematic representation formed by the connection between a child and his/her caregiver. This model acts as a guideline for the interpretation of events and formation of expectation in the future (Bowlby, 1969). In other words, the attachment theory offers a strong framework for a better understanding of individual differences in the process of adaptation in adulthood (Bowlby, 1973; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). The attachment styles are related to not only close relationships and the adaptation process in adulthood, but also to people's SWB and SQL that include positive mood, vitality and interest in different fields (Who, 1999). Numerous studies address the relationship between quality of attachment and SWB such as Kafetsios & Sideridis, 2006; Lavy, Littman-Ovadia, 2011; La Guardia, Ryan, Couchman & Deci, 2000; Wie, Liao, Ku & Shaffer, 2011, which all reported that high level of SWB is associated with secure attachment and expectedly, low level of SWB is associated with insecure attachment.

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On the other side, Bowlby (1982) believed that emotions are strongly connected to attachment, and emotional stress plays an important role in the formation, maintenance, cessation, and restoration of attachment relationships. Thompson (1998) suggested that a child can achieve emotional competence by experiencing secure attachment; while Saarni (1999; 1990) defined emotional competence through the capacity to understand emotions, power to express emotions, empathy, emotion regulation, effective coping skill and effective emotional relationships with others.

Sufficient relationships and dialogues about emotional issues between a child and his/her caregiver and provision of sufficient information about emotional experiences by a caregiver can facilitate the process of emotion regulation in a child (Capatides & Bloom, 1993; Dunn, Brown & Beardsall, 1991; Liable, 2004). Emotion Regulation (ER) is the internal and external response processes to issues such as control, monitoring and evaluation and the adjustment of emotional interactions to fulfill the goals (Thompson, 1994). ER can be performed either consciously or unconsciously, temporarily or permanently and behaviorally or cognitively (Gross, 1998).

Berking and Znoj (2008) proposed a skill based version of the Adaptive Coping with Emotions (ACE) Model. In the ACE Model, ER has been introduced as a situation-dependent process including 9 sets of skills: (a) The ability to be consciously aware of emotions, (b) The ability to identify and (c) Correctly name emotions, (d) The ability to identify what has caused and maintains one's present emotions, (e) The ability to actively modify emotions in an adaptive manner, (f) The ability to accept and (g) Tolerate undesired emotions when they cannot be changed, (h) The ability to approach and confront situations

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likely to trigger negative emotions if this is necessary to attain personally relevant goals, and (i) The ability to provide compassionate self-support when working to cope with challenging emotions.

It has been indicated that attachment is significantly related to SWB and ER and SWB is related to ER (Bigdeli, 2013). However, no study has been conducted yet in Iran, to determine the mediating role of ER in the relationship between SWB and attachment; thus, the present study aimed at determining the mediating role of ER in the relationship between SWB and attachment. In other words, the direct effects of attachment on ER and SWB and ER on SWB and the indirect effect of attachment on SWB with the mediating role of ER were examined in the present study.

Method

The statistical population of the study comprises students studying in University of Isfahan around 2014-2015; which were about 12190. The sample of this study consisted of the University of Isfahan's students. The sample (74 girls and 58 boys) were selected based on the multi-stage simple sampling method. To this end, among the departments of the University of Isfahan, 5 departments were selected by equal chance for every department. Finally, in each department about 30 students were asked to answer the questionnaires. From the all participants, 20 were pretermitted considering they had not met the entrance criteria of the present study.

The Adult Attachment Scale (AAS)

The 15-item AAS was developed in 1990 based on earlier works of Hazen and Shaver (1987). The AAS is scored on a 5-

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point Likert-type scale. Using factor analysis, Collins and Read (1994) extracted three main factors of secure, avoidance and anxious/ambivalent. Its test-retest reliability (.81) and Cronbach's alpha (.78) were reported by Hazen and Shaver (1987). Collins and Read determined its reliability (.79). In a study on a group of university students (n=1480, 860 female and 620 male) Cronbach's alphas for the subscales of secure, avoidance and ambivalence for the total samples were .86, .84, 0.85, respectively (for female students: .86, .83 and .84; for male students: .84, .85 and .86) indicating the AAS good internal consistency. Kendall's coefficients of concordance (validity) for the subscales of secure, avoidance and ambivalence were reported as .80, .61 and .75 respectively (Rahimian Boogar, 2007)

The Emotion Regulation Skill Questionnaire (ERSQ)

The 27-item self-report ERSQ, developed by Berking and Znoj (2008), consists of 9 subscales of awareness (attention towards emotions: AE), clarity (CL), sensation (bodily perception of feelings: S), understanding (UN), modification (MO), acceptance (AC), resilience (tolerance and endurance of feelings: RS), readiness to confront distressing situations (RC) and self-support (SeS). Each subscale measures one ER skill. The ERSQ has been developed based on the ACE model. This questionnaire is scored on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 0 (not at all) to 4 (almost always). The Cronbach's alpha of .95 indicates high reliability of the ERSQ (Berking and et. al, 2010; 2012). Accordingly, the 9 subscales of the ERSQ were confirmed in Iranian population and its Cronbach's alpha (.87) indicated its adequate reliability (Moradi, Lukas, Amiri, Trevisi Fuentes & Berking, in press).

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The Ryff Scales of Psychological Well-Being (RSPWB)

The 18-item RSPWB, developed by Ryff (1989), consists of 6 subscales of self-acceptance, positive relations with others, environmental mastery, purpose in life, personal growth and autonomy. The RSPWB is scored on a 6-point Likert scale. Internal consistency (.52-.9) and Cronbach's alpha (.9) of this questionnaire have been confirmed by VanDierendonck (2005).

According to Ghasemi (2010) AMOS software is appropriate for SEM analysis, so using the SPSS (version 22) and AMOS (version 22) software, the collected data were analyzed through path analysis. In order to examine the final model, factor model of each variable was analyzed in advance. Factor loadings and fit indices of factor models were all in appropriate range.

Main prerequisite in SEM analysis consist of best sample size, normality in multivariate analysis and multicollinearity of dependent variables. According to Houman (2014), adequate sample size for SEM analysis should be 5-15 for each subscale, which in present study 7 samples were considered for each subscale. Normality of the data in multivariate analysis could be checked by Mardiha Coefficient critical ratio that is under 2.58, so it is a representation of normality of data. Since there was just one dependent variable in this analysis (attachment styles), there was no need for checking collinearity.

Results

Descriptive and Correlation among the Variables

Table 1 presents the means and standard deviations of the variables assessed while Table 2 displays the matrix of correlations among the AAS, ERSQ, and RSPWB. Insecure styles of AAS are both negatively correlated while secure style is positively correlated with ERSQ and SWB. The ERSQ are all

positively and highly correlated with each other. The same situation is between SWB subscales and also between ERSQ and SWB factors.

Table 1

Mean and Standard Deviation of Attachment Styles, Emotion Regulation Skills, and Subjective Well-Being (N=128)

Variable			Mean	Standard Deviation
Attachment Styles	1.	Avoidance style	12.01	4.27
	2.	Secure style	13.46	4.57
	3.	Ambivalence style	13.77	4.07
Emotion Regulation Skills	4.	Awareness	9.41	2.77
	5.	Sensation	9.62	2.82
	6.	Clarity	9.38	2.93
	7.	understanding	9.69	2.91
	8.	acceptance	9.44	2.77
	9.	resilience	9.42	3.17
	10.	Readiness	9.55	3.03
	11.	Self-Support	9.43	3.06
	12.	Modification	9.60	3.07
Subjective Well-Being	13.	Self-acceptance	10.85	4.18
	14.	Environmental mastery	11.14	3.99
	15.	Positive relation	11.07	3.95
	16.	Purpose in life	10.69	4.30
	17.	Personal growth	11.06	4.16
	18.	Autonomy	10.49	3.92

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Table 2

Correlation Matrix of Attachment, Emotion Regulation Skills, and Subjective Well-being (N=128)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
1.Avoidance	1																	
2. Secure	-.07	1																
3.Ambivalenc	.03	-.39**	1															
4.AE	-.18*	.6**	-.4**	1														
5.S	-.19*	.6**	-.45**	.78**	1													
6.CL	-.16	.59**	-.41*	.80**	.83**	1												
7.UN	-.23**	.59**	-.47**	.81**	.80**	.85**	1											
8.AC	-.17*	.58**	-.49**	.77**	.80**	.81**	.81**	1										
9.RS	-.16	.63**	-.52**	.72**	.77**	.79**	.79**	.82**	1									
10.RC	-.22*	.62**	-.50*	.74**	.76**	.76**	.76**	.76**	.85**	1								
11.SeS	-.24**	.65**	-.46**	.73**	.72**	.74**	.76**	.78**	.80**	.80**	1							
12.MO	-.11	.68**	-.50**	.76**	.73**	.80**	.79**	.76**	.79**	.79**	.83**	1						
13.Self-acceptance	-.31**	.67**	-.47**	.68**	.70**	.73**	.73**	.75**	.78**	.80**	.70**	.80**	1					
14.Environmental mastery	-.29**	.66**	-.50**	.63**	.69**	.70**	.71**	.69**	.73**	.73**	.71**	.75**	.90**	1				
15. Positive relation	-.24**	.66**	-.49*	.65**	.66**	.72**	.70**	.70**	.75**	.71**	.71*	.76**	.86**	.89**	1			
16. Purpose in life	-.24*	.68**	-.44*	.68*	.69*	.70**	.73**	.74**	.75**	.86**	.70*	.72**	.88**	.83**	.84**	1		
17. Personal growth	-.28**	.64**	-.48**	.69**	.68**	.72**	.74**	.71**	.75**	.75**	.69**	.75**	.89**	.90**	.90**	.86**	1	
18. Autonomy	-.29**	.63**	-.63**	.65**	.67**	.72*	.69**	.69	.70*	.74	.69**	.74**	.84**	.83**	.83**	.84**	.85*	1

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Pattern of Influences

Figure 1 presents the diagram of path analysis model, positing direct and indirect effects. The figure includes all the path coefficients.

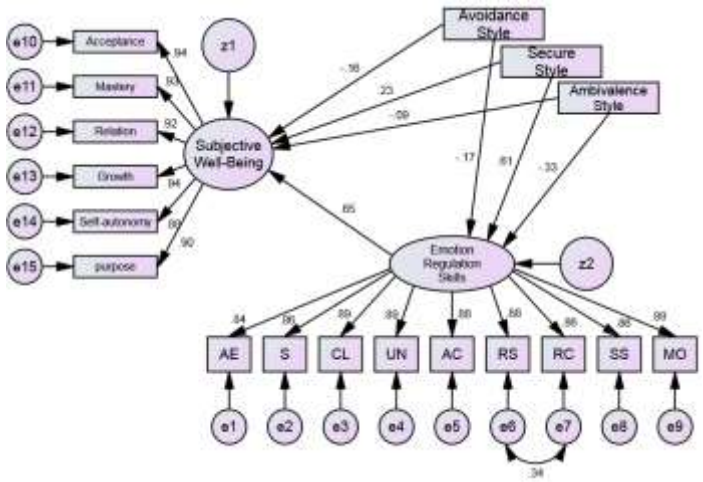


Figure 1. Path Analysis Model of Attachment Styles, ERS, and SWB

The fit indices of model includes CMIN/DF= 1.69, GFI= .84, CFI= .96, PCFI= .83, RMSEA= .07, and HOELTER= 91. According to Hu & Bentler (1997) that indicated cut of point for each index as Relative Chi-Square (CMIN/DF) with cut point of <.5, the Comparative Fit Index (CFI) with cut point of >.8, the Parsimonious Comparative Fit Index (PCFI) with cut point of > .5, the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) with cut point of <.09 and the Hoelter index which is indicated on the proportion of the sample size with cut point of <200, this model has a great fit.

The direct effects of avoidance, secure, and ambivalent styles on emotion regulation skills were all significant, and the direct effects of secure and avoidance styles on subjective well-being

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were significant (p<.05). The indirect effects of avoidance, secure, and ambivalence styles on subjective well-being were all significant (p<.05). The indirect and total effects of the analysis are represented in Table 3.

Table 3

Indirect and Total Effects of Attachment Styles on Subjective Well-being and Emotion Regulation Skills

Independent Varibale	**Dependent variable**	**Indirect Effect**	**Sig**
Avoidance Style	Subjective	-.21	.01
Secure Style	Well-Being	.40	.005
Ambivalence Style		-.11	.02
Independent Varibale	**Dependent variable**	**Total Effect**	**Sig**
Avoidance Style	Emotion	-.17	.02
Secure Style	Regulation	.61	.008
Ambivalence Style	Skills	-.32	.03
Avoidance Style	Subjective	-.27	.01
Secure Style	Well-Being	.63	.02
Ambivalence Style		-.30	.01

As shown in Table 3 all indirect effects of attachment styles on subjective well-being were significant, so the main hypothesis of the analysis were confirmed; thus, based on evidence on Table 3 and model fit indices the effect of attachment on subjective well-being were mediated by emotion regulation skills. Also, the total effects of attachment styles on emotion regulation skills and subjective well-being were all significant.

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Discussion

This study aimed to investigate the relationship between attachment and Subjective Well-Being (SWB) with the consideration of the mediating role of Emotion Regulation (ER). Attachment has been identified as an important variable in human life and its relationships with different aspects of the quality of life have been thoroughly investigated. For example, sensitive and compassionate caregivers try to develop deep relationships with children and these relationships are both qualitatively and quantitatively beneficial. In early childhood, verbal communication between a child and his/her caretaker mostly occurs about emotional events and leads to the child's emotional awareness and the formation of underlying mechanisms such as ER. Emotion-based talks activate the potential of ER in a child and provide him/her with many opportunities for practical experiences. In other words, through emotional talks, the child's potential of ER is activated in the real world and conclusions will be drawn by the child itself.

Considering the concept of goal-corrected partnership (Bowlby) which has two functions of 1) ability of reception and storage of the instruction to achieve target and 2) ability of comparison of system performance with the pre-determined instruction, and adjusting the function appropriately and sufficiently for children's experimental capabilities along with the creation of emotional harmony between children and their caretakers will reinforce emotional data and this knowledge will become skills over time. Berking and Znoj (2008) listed these skills as awareness (attention towards emotions), clarity, bodily perception, understanding, modification, acceptance, resilience (tolerance and endurance of feelings), readiness to confront distressing situations and self-support. Through reinforcement

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and secure attachment between a child and his/her caretaker, the potential of ER will be activated in the child and ER skills can be applied in real life. The results of studies indicated less anxiety and higher regulation of negative emotions in people with secure attachment, emotional secrecy in people with ambivalent attachment and self-determination and obsessive self-reliance in negative emotions in people with avoidant attachment.

One of the most important dimensions of SWB is emotional components, particularly high levels of positive emotions and low levels of negative emotions. In experimental studies on the improvement of people's SWB, Emotion Regulation Strategies (ERS) have been considered as a dynamic solution; for example, strategies such as expression of emotions, finding meaning in events with negative valence (or re-evaluation), self-rewarding, reduction of social comparison, exercising, asking for help, helping others, creation of a sense of humor and appreciation are thought to improve people's ER capability. Moreover, the suppression of emotions, distraction from events with negative valence and withdrawal are among the strategies of SWB considered in SWB education. Thus, it can be concluded that SWB, as a process through which people learn how to cope with different personal and emotional issues in their lives, is closely related to ER. In other words, familiarity with the cognitive and behavioral processes involved in ER can guarantee high levels of SWB.

Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) believed that SWB is the scientific name for what people know as happiness. Studies on SWB have indicated that achieving SWB depends on environmental conditions, personality characteristics and possessions including secure attachment. Diener and Seligman

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(2002) believed that having close personal relationships is very influential in people's happiness. The attachment theory offers a solid framework in which the ability to build close personal relationships with others is considered a strong coping strategy similar to ERS that lead to high levels of SWB.

The results of the present study indicated direct and indirect effects between attachment styles and SWB with the mediation of ERS. Therefore, attachment is related to SWB closely and affects the process of ERS. People with secure attachment and higher ER capabilities experience higher SWB while people with insecure attachment and lower ER capabilities experience lower SWB. These results showed that ambivalence style does not influence SWB directly and the mediating role played by ER is essential in their relationship. People with secure attachment and appropriate close relationships with others have the chance to experience emotional events securely. These secure experiences of emotional events create ERS and lead to the enhancement of positive emotions and reduction of negative emotions. Therefore, ER is one of the components of SWB.

The findings in this study were consistent with another study conducted by Karreman and Vingerhoets (2012) regarding the mediating role of ER in the relationship between attachment and SWB. They indicated that people with higher levels of attachment have better ER capabilities and higher levels of SWB. As indicated by Mikulincer and Shaver (2007), people with secure attachment suppress their emotions less and actively try to develop close relationships with others. Therefore, it can be concluded that people with secure attachment have a high ER potential and can gain more coping skills through their successful relationships leading to the improvement of both cognitive and emotional levels of their well-being. In other

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words, people with secure attachment have a positive internal working model of self that results in better application of ERS and higher levels of SWB.

According to the results of this study, it is recommended that the mediating roles of other variables such as emotional perspective taking, resiliency and mindfulness in the relationship between attachment and SWB should be examined. Furthermore, similar studies can be conducted on other population of society and other forms of evaluation could be used to understand the quality of attachment. Among the limitations of the present study, conduction of the study on university students sample can be mentioned.

Additionally, self-report and excessive questions on the questionnaire may result in bias. Finally, it must be noted that since the study was conducted on a group of university students, the generalization of data to other population of society must be done with caution.

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