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### The relationship between attachment style and self-efficacy beliefs with regard to sex

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#### ABSTRACT

*The main objective of the article is to examine the relationship between attachment style and self-efficacy beliefs of students with regard to sex. To this end, three hundred and sixty nine students were chosen by multi-stage cluster sampling, from different schools, and examined by Hazan and Shaver (1978) adult attachment styles test tools, and self-efficacy questionnaire of Sherer and colleagues (1982). The collected data were analyzed using two-way variance analysis. Results showed the effect of gender was not significant, but the effect of attachment styles is significant. Attachment styles explained 5.3% percent efficacy variance. Late results of the comparison showed that there are significant differences between self-efficacy of people with safe styles and self-efficacy of people with avoidant styles on one hand and self-efficacy of people with safe styles and self-efficacy of people with ambivalent style on the other hand. In addition, people with safe styles have more of self-efficacy than people with avoidant and ambivalent styles. The findings suggest that individuals with higher levels of self-efficacy are securely attached. According to the study, the interaction between gender and attachment style is not significant.*

**Keywords:** attachment, life skills, students

#### INTRODUCTION

Attachment is defined as creating a deep emotional relation with special people so that the incorporation would lead them to get happiness and joyness and make each other relaxed when they are stressed. Attachment is known as emotional relationship between the growing child and parent or caregiver – the person that gets the main responsibility of taking care of the infant and the child makes him understand his/her mental energy. This theory is based on Bowlby and Ainsworth research. From their point of view, attachment determines the mental health of the person [9] and plays an important role in personality development, interpersonal relationship and significant coping strategies and social adjustment [9]. Bowlby, primarily, points out some behavioral systems like intaking, hanging, crying and smiling. These behaviors indicate the child attachment and are organized based on previous capabilities. Attachment which is both innate and adventitious, plays a supportive role like an adult who is defending some vulnerable child against attacking, and is as important as nutritional and sexual behavioral. During the life cycle, attachment is transferred from mother to relatives and then to foreign and finally to more expanded groups [1]. Bowlby in his theory on attachment speaks of attachment scale system. In fact, his theory is considered as an improvable system by target. This system is some kind of internal mental organization which acts to make closer and to create relationship with attachment scale and therefore to feel secure. If the attached child is in the

exhaustion, panic or depression mode, the attachment scale gets more activated and when the attachment component is in a normal mode and he/she is being supported or assisted, the child would get relaxed [20]. Ainsworth identified three methods of child – mother attachment by creating unfamiliar situation. These methods are: secure attachment to caregivers, including those who are sensitive and responsive [14]. These people could have some fearless relationship and know themselves as the interesting persons and see others as reliable ones; Avoidant insecure attachment to caregivers, including those who have a cold and rejecting caregivers. These people greatly desire to avoid intimacy and interdependence, and do not attempt to make communication. Ambivalent insecure attachment includes those with irrational caregivers. These people highly tend to communicate with others, but along with a great fear of being rejected. Attachment, in the psycho-analyzing school, is considered as a kind of secondary pushing factor based on the primary nutrient needs. In Bowlby system, uniqueness and novelty of attachment concept proves the hypothesis that the need for attachment is a primary component thus Bowlby gets away from the child just with physical needs [6]. The adult attachment hypothesis [13, 15, 16] along with the development of Bowlby and Ainsworth hypothesis [1, 4] was improved to explain individual differences in cognition, emotions and behaviors in the frame of adult intimate relationships. According to this theory, individual differences in attachment scale are rooted in past intimate relationships, which get started from the child- mother attachment. Hazan and Shaver (1987) explain adult attachment along three scales of secure attachment, as intimate, cheerful, friendly, reliable and with a sense of empathy and life satisfaction. An important difference between child and adult attachment is that the adult attachment relationships have mutual qualities in which childhood asymmetric attachment was never been placed [7]. A key concept in the theory of attachment that explains the bonding between children and adults attachment relationships is the concept of internal effective patterns [3]. According to Bowlby, during the early years of growth, people create their own internal effective patterns based on their experience in terms of attachment figures and interaction with the physical world and. These patterns help person to understand and interpret phenomena, predict events and builds plans ( [5]. According to attachment theory, those aspects of adult life most directly affected by internal effective patterns include character and intimate relationship. Colin (1996) gained these results in his study. Different scales of attachment determine duration, stability and quality of adult romantic relationships. That is, safe people in romantic relationships have more trust, warmth and positive emotions than two insecure groups. Avoidant adults are afraid of intimacy and can't rely on the other person, but anxious ambivalent people are full of the fear of relationships. The method of attachment affects the person dealing with stressors [9]. While acknowledging the situation, secure people easily ask others to help them, avoidant people will get into trouble while acknowledging the situation and seeking help, and the significant sign of uneasy ambivalent person is high sensitivity on negative emotions and attachment scales, so that it would prevent their autonomy [12], while anxiety reduction is a function of secure attachment, avoidant attachment scale makes person to adopt a non-defensive manner [13]. In the context of adult relationships, most authors [18] consider the attachment importance as a communicative concept and are agreed on its continuous development. Balini (1980) stipulates the causal relationship between individual experience and the capacity to empower parents with the future emotional ties. Review of the literature showed that the teens with warm relationship with their parents have a deeper sense of self confidence, higher levels of psychological adjustment and are involved with the problems and try to find the right solution [7]. In the course of adolescence, attachment behavior turns toward the people other than parents, and especially, contact with peers will be increased. Patterson and colleagues (1995) concluded that the quality of attachment to peers affects identity formation, social competence and self-esteem optimizing. Several studies have shown that attachment scales can predict the psychological processes related to attachment relationships observed in intimate relationships and subjective life satisfaction [13, 8, 16]. If the person remains a coddle like a spoiled child attached to the mother, he/she would more or less be like a parasite which always expect others to satisfy his/her needs, no matter what is taught by the passion and desire [2]. Alston's study (2000) showed that individuals with a history of insecure attachment and with significantly greater amount of exposure to threatening situations, including relationships within the family, or family problems, and problems with others, use defense mechanisms. Diener, Sun, and Lucas and Smith (1999) in their studies found that life satisfaction is an indicator of mental health. Life satisfaction means attitudes, and general assessment on totality of life, or some aspect of life such as family, education and experience. Keys Kerry et al (2003) define life satisfaction in two dimensions of psychological well-being and social optimization. Psychological well-being emphasizes on the challenges people experience in their personal lives and includes three components of life satisfaction, pleasant emotions and unpleasant emotions. Keys and Shapiro (2004) argue that social welfare is centered on social tasks within the social structures which the human is coping with. Social Welfare has been explained as self-reported quality of relationships with family, friends, school and the environment in which the person lives. World Health Organization (1998) defines the quality of life as self-perception in the context of cultural and personal values and goals [18]. Eskolak (1996) in his study found that the insecure attachment would decline the individuals' quality of life. Vimer and Schwartz (1997) also found that the attachment scales are kind of

positive and significant predictors to their quality of life. Vimer and Palmer (2003), Brackett (1985) and Vimer and Eskolak (2001) found a similar result. Few studies have been conducted on life satisfaction, well-being and quality of life for adults, including the research team from North Carolina in America (1983) which suggests that individuals with a secure attachment style are more satisfied with their lives. Sheldon and Karls (1995) showed that people with more life satisfaction would feel less hopeless and insecure and people who act on the basis of insecure style and hopelessness are less satisfied. In secure attachment style, experience of happiness and life satisfaction is significantly high and feeling of sadness and unease is often considered to be an obstacle in the way of tasks [14]. Several studies have shown the impact of attachment problems with other disorders, including eating disorders, difficulties in social competence, personality differences, suicide, stress, fear, anger, and aggressive toward peers, substance abuse, social avoidance, antisocial behavior, and social problems [10, 16, 19]. Increased stress and behavioral problems, frustration, anxiety, depression, dissatisfaction with life are among negative effects with consequences such as lowering the morale of seeking social participation, and cooperation. Considering the available evidence, this study attempts to answer a number of important psychosocial issues about the role of attachment styles on the life satisfaction of students. Along with his own predecessors, Bowlby also claims that primary and necessary needs (like need for nutrition) should be satisfied, However, he stresses that beside the needs ever explored as primary needs in human, there is another need called secondary need which includes attachment. Bowlby system is unique and innovative because it considers attachment as a primary need, beside emphasizing on experimentation. That is not derived from any other requirements necessary for the delivery of basic character [12]. The function of this system is rooted firstly in infant relationship. Infant shows social signals such as crying, clinging to the mother or caregiver and if a parent or caregiver does not respond the baby's behavior would be affected (ibid.). According to the attachment classification system, communicative patterns of attachment are classified as secure attachment, ambivalent attachment, and avoidant attachment styles [1]. Safe Style: It is easy for people with secure way to make close interact with others and to rely on others and allow them to rely on. They have no fear of being left with others or getting too close to them. People with avoidant style: People with this style feel unhappy when getting close to other people and they can't completely rely on others. It is hard for these people to allow themselves to rely on others and when they see someone is getting too close to them, they get nervous and feel that people mostly want get closer to them in such a way that they don't feel comfortable anymore. Anxious ambivalent style: People with this style are those who do not want to have a close relationship with others that like them so much. They often worry that their partners do not really love them or not to live with them in the future. They want to assimilate some people but this wish sometimes makes others uncomfortable [15]. Concept of internal practical functions (1969) has been suggested by Bowlby. This concept points to the imagines in child's mind about the relationships that they have with their parents or other important people, which refers as the attachment. Practical model of inner includes feelings, beliefs, expectations, strategies and rules of behavior, orientation, attention, memory organization and data interpretation [8]. On the other hand, self-efficacy is one of the factors influencing the mental health of people which entered the history of psychology by Bandura's (1977) article. From Bandura's perspective, self-efficacy is defined as the beliefs of people about their ability to do designed levels of performance. Bandura's research has shown that feelings of low self-efficacy are interconnected with increased stress and less motivation to pursue health-related programs. In contrast, high self-efficacy is interconnected with feeling less biological responses to stress, ability to adapt more and more interest in wellness programs. Self-efficacy beliefs influence behaviors associated with human health in two ways: one via the effects of these beliefs on behaviors associated with individual health and the other via its effect on the performance of her life, Namely the incidence of various diseases and the improvement of the disease process affects. Self-efficacy beliefs affect the way people think, how to deal with problems, emotional health, decision making, coping with stress and depression, access to targets that. Belief systems also play a role in improving behavior, health and life satisfaction and on the other hand many of the problems of people come from these beliefs. According to Bandura perceived inefficiency plays a role in depression, anxiety, stress and other emotional state plays. It can also lead to feelings and beliefs of emptiness. Siukaucheng and Stephens findings (2000) suggest that enhanced self-efficacy is associated with improved mental health. The study suggests that one of the ways of helping people who suffer from anxiety and depression is to increase self-efficacy and provide a social environment that is supportive. Furthermore, it has been observed that low self-efficacy and loneliness is associated with both depression and anxiety. Kim (2000) in his study on high school students came to the conclusion that the efficacy and some component of mental health (stress, anxiety, depression and hostility) are related.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

The present research was descriptive and would be classified as casual – comparative. 369 students of Kermanshah University were selected using multi-stage cluster sampling. Data collection was conducted through a questionnaire.

### Data collection instrument:

- 1) Hazan and Shaver's adult attachment test
- 2) Sherer et al. self-efficacy beliefs questionnaire

### Attachment measuring tools:

In order to collect data, adult questionnaire, designed by Hazan and Shaver (1987) was implemented. In this test, a single agent reported that their relationships with adults are accommodated and a very common instrument to measure adult attachment styles. The main assumption of this test is that there could see similarities in infant's attachment style - the caregiver and in adult relationships [(Finney, 1994). These gauges include three words describing the feelings about relationship and intimacy in relationships based on Ainsworth et al (1978). The infant's attachment classification is designed to fit the characteristics of adult relationships. In the questionnaire, each description stands for an attachment style (secure, avoidant, ambivalent), and the test should choose one of these descriptions fit to their intimate and close relations than two others [17]. Forced choice method comes with some statistical and psychometric limitations and in order to overcome these limitations some researchers [18] have recommended the applicability of each description subject on a Likert scale of 9 degrees. In the present study, we have used this approach to conduct adult attachment scale. Thus by choosing subjects in addition to the description of one of the three, a score of one to nine the descriptor is assigned for each account. If the score assigned is two or three times, the scale would be the criteria for selection of the three options. Otherwise, the option with the highest score is considered as subject attachment. Reliability and validity: Several researchers define these psychometric properties of the self-report instruments as satisfying. This instrument has been shown to be a very powerful communication feature and predict in adult attachment style [16]. The validity of this questionnaire is contextual. This means that the content is similar to structural concepts of attachment theory and consistent with adult relations extend its functionality, compatibility. The reliability coefficient of the survey questionnaire is reported in Sedghi (1383) and Aziz and colleagues 73% and 72%.

### Sherer General self- efficiency Questionnaire:

In order to measure students' beliefs of self-efficacy beliefs, Sherer and colleagues efficiency Questionnaire (1982) were used. This scale which is intended for your general efficiency includes 17 items. For each item, five answers have been suggested and 1 to 5 points is awarded for each item.

The answers are: strongly disagree, disagree, no opinion, agree and strongly agree. Higher scores indicate stronger self-efficacy and lower scores indicate lower self-efficacy .in this study, the reliability coefficient using Cronbach's alpha equals to 0.74. Validity and reliability: Scherrer (1982) mentions the calculated Validity by Cronbach's alpha for the general efficiency as 0.76. Validity of this scale has been achieved through the narrative structure. Barati, in order to assess the reliability and validity of this scale, conducted the scale on 100 subjects who were high school student. The Correlation (61/0) obtained from the two scale s , self-esteem and self- evaluating with self-efficacy scale, confirmed the validity of this scale [2].

## RESULTS

The total sample included 369 individuals (57.2) percent were between 18 to 21 years old and (42.8) percent were between 22 and 37 years old. As for Education all the students were in the undergraduate and postgraduate courses. Out of 369 persons participated in the study, 345 (93/5 percent) were single and 24 (5.6 percent) were married.in addition, 225 (61%) were male and 144 (39%) were female. To test the hypothesis that attachment styles and self-efficacy beliefs of students are related, Two-way analysis of variance used. The results are shown in the tables below.

**Table 1. status of participants by gender**

valid percentage	frequency	Group	variable
61	225	F	Gender
39	144	M	
100	369	Total	

Table 2. Relationship between attachment style and self-efficacy by gender

variable	Source of changes	total square	Df	M	F	Sig	Chi Eta
Self - efficacy	Gender	26.291	1	26.291	0.345	0.55	0.001
	Attachment style	1411.039	2	705.519	9.271	0.000	0.053
	Gender attachment style		2	70.004	0.92	0.4	0.005
	Default	25417.067	334	76.099			
	Total	27224.047	339				

To investigate the relationship between attachment style and self-efficacy by gender, two-way ANOVA was used. The results in Table show that the interaction between gender and attachment style ( $F_{(2,339)}=0.92 \cdot P>0.05$ ) was not significant. Results showed a main effect of gender ( $F_{(1,339)}=0.345 \cdot P>0.05$ ) is not significant. But the effect of attachment styles ( $F_{(2,339)}=9.271 \cdot P<0.01$ ) is significant and attachment style explained 3.5 percent variance of self-efficacy. Late results of the comparison showed that there are significant differences between self-efficacy of people with safe styles and self-efficacy of people with avoidant styles on one hand and self-efficacy of people with safe styles and self-efficacy of people with ambivalent style on the other hand. In addition, people with safe styles have more of self-efficacy than people with avoidant and ambivalent styles.

Table 3. Late Comparison of self-efficacy in terms of attachment styles

ambivalent	secure	styles
-1.25	*3.69	avoidant
	*5.22	ambivalent

$P<0.05$

## CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

To investigate the relationship between attachment styles and self-efficacy by gender appropriate statistical methods were used. The results show that the effect of interaction between gender and attachment style is not significant. Investigating main effects showed that effect of gender was not significant, but the effect of attachment styles is significant. Attachment style explained 5/3 percent of self-efficacy variance. Late results of the comparison showed that there are significant differences between self-efficacy of people with safe styles and self-efficacy of people with avoidant styles on one hand and self-efficacy of people with safe styles and self-efficacy of people with ambivalent style on the other hand. In addition, people with safe styles have more of self-efficacy than people with avoidant and ambivalent styles. The findings suggest that individuals with higher levels of self-efficacy are securely attached. The findings show that people with higher levels of self-efficacy are securely attached. These findings are extremely valuable and are also consistent with theoretical research basics as well as with studies done by Bandura [19]. It can be said in explanation of the findings that high efficiency and which results in feelings of control over personal life events, has a Positive effect on the ability to overcome or cope with problems and thus leads to mental health. Furthermore, the results of the study has also shown that people with high self-efficacy levels, have a positive idea about their capabilities to face the issues, are More willing to enjoy life, are ready to put themselves in front of challenging goals. They also tend to do things that others have not done it yet. Evidence also suggests that high levels of self-efficacy by increasing life skills, prevent stressful influences and increase immune system of body. According to Bandura in 1977, 1982, 1986, when people are stressed they who see themselves as capable and efficient, Make more efforts to cope and deal with problems And people who see themselves as unable efficient to cope with their problems, they readily succumb to feelings of depression, anxiety and despair. It can be said in explanation of this finding that secure attachment, reduces fear of failure, enhances decision-making, improves problem solving and critical thinking abilities and in general, causes a change in efficiency beliefs and thereby increases the mental health of people.

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