



Original Article

Prediction of female college students' self-esteem based on their moral identity and attachment styles

Shahram Vahedi^{1*}; Manijeh Yari-Sis²

¹ Associate professor of psychology, Faculty of Education Sciences and Psychology, Tabriz University, Tabriz, Iran

² Ph.D. student in psychology, Faculty of Education Sciences and Psychology, Tabriz University, Tabriz, Iran

Abstract

Introduction: This research conducted to assess the relationship between attachment to parents, moral identity, and self-esteem among female college students.

Materials and Methods: The statistical community of this descriptive correlational study included all bachelor female college students of Tabriz University in 2010. So, 289 students of different academic courses were selected by cluster multistage sampling method. All participants were asked to complete Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, Inventory of Parent Attachment (IPPA), and Moral Identity Scale. In order to analyze the data, Pearson's correlation coefficient and stepwise multiple regression method and SPSS software were applied.

Results: The results of stepwise multiple regression indicated 3 significant stages. The third stage results indicated that the attachment to parents (trust and alienation), and the internalization subscale of moral identity, predicted 13 percents of the variance related to self esteem ($P < 0.05$, $F = 12.12$, $R^2 = 0.12$).

Conclusion: Based on the results of the present study, it can be concluded that a parental trust was the best and strongest predictor of self-esteem in female students.

Keywords: Attachment, Identity, Parents, Self-esteem

Please cite this paper as:

Vahedi Sh, Yari-Sis M. Prediction of female college students' self-esteem based on their moral identity and attachment styles. *Journal of Fundamentals of Mental Health* 2016 Jul-Aug; 18(4): 227-33.

Introduction

The development of healthy self-esteem is an important index of psychological adjustment. Self-esteem relates with cognitive, emotional and behavioral variables. People with high self-esteem are depressed, anxious and dependent to substance abuse lesser than people with low self-esteem. These people have more social skills and most likely they have safe attachment style (1).

Eriksson knows family as a main factor of socialization process. The first interaction with important individuals forms the attachment and communication with parents is the first contact to community and greater culture (2). The results of studies indicate that attachment style has a significant relation with self-esteem that some of them are mentioned: Deci and Ryan (3) suggested that parenting style has effect on self-esteem in the field of socialization. For example, people who are

liked and supported, can act independently and they can progress integrated and non-conditional self-esteem. People who be liked by their parents after supplement of their expectations tend to progress very conditional self-esteem because they learn that feel good sense about their successes not failures as a result of received acknowledgement for their good performance. So parenting style has an important role in development of children's self-esteem.

Ka-on man and Nicholas (4) studied the relation between attachment styles with students' self-esteem. 255 Chinese students and teachers fulfilled the attachment style questionnaire and self-esteem scales. The results showed that people with safe attachment style has higher self-esteem compared to those with unsafe attachment style (5). Hustinger and Luechen study (6) indicated that college students with safe attachment style have higher self-esteem and healthy behaviors compared to those with unsafe attachment.

The results of Moayyedfar et al. (5) indicated that the safe, avoidance and anxious/bivalence attachment styles can explain significantly the

*Corresponding Author: Faculty of Psychology and Education Sciences, Tabriz University of Mashhad, Tabriz, Iran

vahedi117@yahoo.com

Received: Apr. 09, 2014

Accepted: Sep. 30, 2015

variance of social self-esteem variable it means that enhancement of safe attachment can increase the social self-esteem and enhancement of avoidance and anxious/bivalence attachments can decrease it.

Hijazi and Negahban (7) suggested that the safe attachment to parents can predict information identity, normalization and commitment to identity but safe attachment to peers relates with normal identity style. Therefore, the past studies indicated that adolescents in conditions of confusion, report high familial challenge and low safety attachment to parents (2).

In addition to self-esteem, the formation of completed identity is an index of well psychological function (8). Erikson (9) believes that development of true self-evaluation relates with self-autonomy sense in primary childhood. The successful solving of task of ego, self-autonomy versus to shame or doubt means that child knows he/she is an independent individual with special wishes and tendencies. The doubt sense about ability to perform issues may lead to negative self-evaluations among adolescents and it decreases their tendencies to identity probing. On the other hand, positive self-esteem helps to maintenance of integration despite of growth transitions and life crisis (10).

According to Erikson theory (9), the identity formation depends on the individuals' independency and future managing. For example, Marcia suggested that people with successful identity reported the high levels of self esteem compared to people with stopped, premature and confused identity (11). As the same, youth people with successful or stopped-identity are at low risk of manipulation of self-esteem in stressful conditions (2). In addition the developmental researches showed that individuals, who had high self-esteem without controversies during adolescence period, received academic high scores and they had at least sensitivity about peers' tension, and they experienced substance abuse less than the others (12). Overall, the positive self-esteem has important role in formation of identity.

People with high self-esteem display flexibility against challenging issues with their identity in condition of potential stressful information. As the same, the social background can affect on the individuals satisfaction about absorption of the aspects related to culture, occupational/educational environments, friends, family and society and it may improve the self-autonomy and healthy feelings about independency. Adolescents, who know the specific value for exploration, have sense of relation to their family, friends and society probably involve

in identity assessment. Also, some aspects of interaction between individual and environment can improve identity identification in process of identity formation (2).

Many studies have been conducted through approach of identity assessment that it is indicated identity is related to most of underlying, interpersonal and personal traits. Based on the experimental evidences, peoples who classified as successful identity trend to play their role as well in the stressful conditions, they explain the higher levels of ethical development and they resistant against manipulation of self-esteem and that they have inner self-regulatory process (11, 13).

It is indicated that their families have emotional attachment/integration, high levels of praise, obvious individuality, medium-low parent-adolescent conflicts and at least usage of behavioral control as parenting style (14). The people with stopped identity are the same to the successful young people but they have more anxiety and they accept dictation values at least compared to people with premature identity (15). As the same, the families of children with stopped-identity have self-expressiveness and expressiveness but they have weak family integration (14, 16).

In the other hand, people with premature identity have supported dictation beliefs more than others and they evaluated lesser in moral development compared to people with successful and stopped identities and they had most rigid thought process (11). In addition, Branden theory suggests that high permanent self-esteem is augmented through the methods such as responsibility for self-actions, truth acceptance about self and insist on acting accordance with virtue. So, the maintenance of self-esteem has direct relation with virtue and moral identity (17).

One of the effective variables on self-esteem is moral identity. The moral identity includes the structure of commitment to moral principles. Although moral identity is a rich and multidimensional structure but one of important its aspects may be a cognitive self-schema. It is about common language (honesty, kindness and justice), association of systematic ethical traits and it is important for personal and public aspects of person's identity. This definition makes 2 hypothesizes: first, the relation between moral identity and behavior guides through the maintenance of self-schema related to moral self-schema. Second, person's moral schema is imaginable in relation with other moral goals and behavioral models in social community.

The power of this association is related with self-

imaging of moral identity. So that, if person's moral identity for the understanding of importance of self as high (low), then remind of self-related schema may affect on justice and high moral behavior (low). The moral identity is a main source of motivation which leads to more concordance between person's moral principles and moral actions. According to Erikson theory, moral identity has two different aspects. It defines experienced identity which roots in its core nature and includes honesty about self-actions (18).

According to Erikson theory (19), self-esteem and development of individuals' identity are relative with each other closely but few studies assessed the relationship between moral identity and self-esteem so the present study aimed to assess the relationship between dimensions of attachment and components of moral identity with female students' self-esteem.

Materials and Methods

The statistical community of this descriptive-correlational study concluded female college students in first and second academic term of bachelor course of Tabriz University in academic year of 2009. The sampling conducted through multi-phases clustering method. The sample size calculated by Tabachnick and Fidell formula (20) and 289 female students were selected among female students of Tabriz University (one or two classes of faculties of human sciences, basic sciences, engineering).

The questionnaires of self-esteem, parenting and peers attachment styles and moral identity were fulfilled after describing the purposes of research.

Research instruments

- *Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale (RSES)*: This 10-item scale is a most common instrument for measurement of self-esteem and many studies supported its validity and reliability (21). Judge et al. (24) reported its reliability in four cases as 0.82, 0.80, 0.88 and 0.89. Sheikhshabani et al. reported its reliability through Cronbach's alpha and split-half as 0.75 and 0.60 respectively. For assessment of its validity the scores of this scale were correlated with the scores of self-efficacy and job satisfaction. The results showed that the correlation between self-esteem scale with self-efficacy and job satisfaction are 0.64 and 0.27 respectively which both of them are significant in 0.001 (22).

- *Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment (IPPA)*: The modified version of this inventory concluded 25 items which evaluates the emotional, cognitive and behavioral aspects of attachment to parents. This inventory has been made to assess the dimensions of

attachment included mutual trust, quality of communication and alienation. The trust subscale has 10 items measures participants' security sense about parents' response to their emotional needs, communication subscale has 9 items and it measures the quantity and quality of communication and alienation subscale has 6 items which measures the senses of alienation and isolation. The high scores in each subscale, indicates more safe attachment. The validity and convergence of this scale has been approved through calculated correlation between conflict, family support, internal well-being, life satisfaction, depression/anxiety, life events and etc (23). Jonathan (24) estimated the reliability of this scale as α : 0.68 to 0.91 and reliability after 3 weeks calculated as 0.93. The validity of translated version was assessed by the researcher. After validity and content validity, the reliability of this inventory for attachment to mother, father and peers calculated as 0.85, 0.83 and 0.86.

- *Moral Identity Inventory*: This inventory included two 5-item subscales: internal (degree of moral traits which is important for participants self-image ($\alpha=0.84$)) and symbolization (participants present what degree of social identity based on the moral traits ($\alpha=0.85$)). The list conclude 9 moral traits presented to participants (for example compassionate, kind, honest, just and etc.) and asked them to imagine the image of person with these traits and score 10 sentences in a 7 degree system from completely disagree (1) to completely agree (7). The noticeable evidences were found in support of the validity of measurement of moral identity (25).

Results

In this research, 289 female college students of Tabriz University (faculties of human sciences, basic sciences and engineering) assessed in term of relation between dimensions of attachment and moral identity with self-esteem. Table 1 indicated the total mean and standard deviations of variables. The mutual correlation between the variables indicated that trust dimension ($P<0.01$, $r=0.24$), alienation ($P<0.01$, $r=0.16$) and subscale of internal-moral identity ($P<0.01$, $r=0.22$) had great correlation with self-esteem. This significant relation model was found about components of moral identity with trust dimension ($P<0.05$, $r=0.12$), component of symbolization with alienation ($P<0.05$, $r=0.13$), components of moral identity with each other ($P<0.01$, $r=0.35$). In addition, communication dimension in attachment to parents had not significant relation with any of

variables ($P>0.05$).

Table 1. The indexes of descriptive statistics and correlative matrix between predictor and pattern variables

Variable	Mean	Standard deviation	Self-esteem	Trust	Communication	Alienation	Internalization	Symbolization
Self-esteem	41.96	8.00	-					
Trust	13.32	2.63	0.24**	-				
Communication	13.85	2.73	0.04	0.43**	-			
Alienation	10.54	2.83	0.16**	0.04	-0.06	-		
Internalization	25.16	4.00	0.22**	0.12*	0.10	-0.04	-	
Symbolization	18.54	4.69	0.03	0.12*	0.009	0.13*	0.35**	-

** $P<0.01$ * $P<0.05$

The partial portion of each predictor variable (attachment styles and moral identity) in changes of self-esteem identified using multiple regressions with step by step method. In this method, the variables of subscales of attachment styles and moral identity as predictor variables and self-esteem as criterion variable were assessed. The predictor

variables according to their relations with criterion variable (strongest to weakest) entered to equation respectively and the predictor variables which have not significant portion in increasing accuracy of prediction of criterion variable have not been entered. The results have been shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Summary of multiple regressions with step by step method in parent dimensions, moral identity for prediction of self-esteem

Variable	Index				Index					
	B	β	t	P	R	R2	$\Delta R2$	S.E	F	P
Model 1					0.22	0.05	0.04	7.79	13.51	0.001
Trust	0.47	0.22	3.71	0.001						
Model 2					0.30	0.08	0.07	7.69	13.78	0.001
Internalization	0.44	0.20	3.53	0.001						
Trust	0.67	0.18	3.14	0.001						
Model 3					0.31	0.10	0.09	7.58	9.88	0.001
Internalization	0.41	0.19	3.32	0.001						
Trust	0.65	0.18	3.12	0.007						
Alienation	-0.42	-0.13	-2.23	0.006						

The results of Table 2 indicate the great prediction ability of attachment styles and moral identity in girl students' self-esteem among all independent variables. According to the results of first phase it may be suggested that multiple correlation coefficient ($R=0.24$) and explanation coefficient ($R^2=0.06$ in level of $F=0.001$) are significant. It means that trust as a one dimensions of parent attachment can explain 6% of common variance of self-esteem. The results of second phase suggest the significance of multiple correlation coefficient ($R=0.30$) and explanation coefficient ($R^2=0.09$ in level of $F=0.001$). It means that subscales of internalization and trust have 9% of common variance with dependent variable. The results of third phase indicate the significance of multiple correlation coefficient ($R=0.34$) and explanation coefficient ($R^2=0.11$ in level of $F=0.001$). It means that sum of predictor variables in this model (internalization, trust and alienation) can explain 11% of variance of criterion variable.

Finally, based on the results of fourth phase, addition of integration as one of the subscales of the religious identity increased 2% of self-esteem. So, 13% of self-esteem is predicted by sum of two dimensions of attachment and moral identity. Overall, amongst all variables, greatest level of explanation and prediction of self-esteem specified to trust.

Discussion

The results of this research indicated the positive relation between trust and self-esteem while alienation is significantly related to self-esteem negatively. People with safe attachment have positive internal models about themselves while unsafe, anxious and bivalent individuals have negative internal models. Therefore, having positive self-image provide this possibility for individuals with safe or avoidant attachment to have higher self-esteem compared to anxious-bivalent persons, also safe persons have balanced and integrated self-structure. Self-esteem in safe individuals is more correlated with self-liking. It means that self-evaluation in safe persons is based on the positive attention of others (26). Armsden and Greenberg (23) assessed the relation between attachment styles and mental health in adolescents. They found that there is significant relationship between psychological health and quality of attachment to parents. Safe adolescents have higher self-esteem compared to adolescents with unsafe attachment. It seems that parents' acceptance and intimacy are involved in children's acceptance and efficacy and

they lead to positive self-conception (27). The relationship between students' mental health and attachment styles has been assessed. In a study, 255 students and teachers responded to attachment styles inventory and self-esteem scale. The results showed that individuals with safe attachment have higher self-esteem compared to the unsafe individuals (5). The results of Hustinger and Luechen study indicated that college students with safe attachment have higher self-esteem and better health behaviors compared to the unsafe individuals (6).

Another finding of the present study indicated that there is positive and significant relationship between internalization and self-esteem. It may be suggested that the relation between self-esteem and moral norms is a positive and creative interaction. The person with high self-esteem observes moral norms and it may lead to enhancement of self-esteem.

Adolescents through using their intellectual skills find that there is difference between their act and thoughts. Accordingly, they can concern different possibilities for behavior and thought and they are disposed for dissatisfaction about themselves. In another hand, it seems that adolescents who have informational identity usually achieve more success and receive positive social feedbacks so they have positive self-image and higher self-esteem but adolescents with confused/avoidant identity have not chance for success achievement and positive feedbacks and they have low self-esteem because their closeness to new experiences (28).

Although the present study provides evidences in prediction of attachment styles and moral identity with college students' self-esteem but there are some limitations. One limitation is related to the sampling among women students of Tabriz University. So, the results cannot be generalized to the other populations. It is recommended that the researchers assess these relations among other populations.

According to the results of this research, it is recommended that authorities of universities concern to the role of psychologists and consultants in enhancement of students mental health through responding to their questions about self-esteem, aid to identification of available goals to motivate them for activities, training of appropriate social behaviors and promotion of religious mentality. In addition, the psychologists of consultancy centers of universities should train appropriate educations to the professors that they use occasional opportunities in classrooms to guide their students. It is hoped that the results of the present study are effective in cognition of college students problems and they help to problem solving among this age group through

an appropriate planning.

Based on the results of the present study, it can be concluded that parental trust is the best and strongest predictor of self-esteem in female students.

Conclusion

References

1. Passmore NL, Fogarty GJ, Bourke CJ, Baker E, Sandra F. Parental bonding and identity style as correlates of self-esteem among adult adoptees and non adoptees. *Fam Relat* 2005; 54(4): 523-34.
2. Forthun LF. An examination of identity formation during adolescence: A person-oriented approach. Ph.D. Dissertation. Faculty of Texas Technology University, 1999.
3. Deci EL, Ryan RM. Human autonomy: The basis for true self-esteem. In: Kernis MH. (editor). *Efficacy, agency, and self-esteem*. New York, NY: Plenum; 1995: 31-49.
4. Ka-on Man NH. The relationship between attachment and causal attributions in Chinese trainee teachers. *Pers Individ Diff* 1998; 24(3): 357.
5. Moayedfar H, Aghamohammadian H, Tabatabaei SM. [Relationship between attachment styles and social self-esteem. *Psychological studies* 2007; 3(1-2): 61-72. (Persian)
6. Hustinger T, Luechen GLJ. Attachment relationships and health behavior: Mediation role of self esteem. *Psychol Health* 2004; 19(4): 515-26.
7. Hijazi E, Negahban S. [Relationship between parent and peer attachment style and identity style in adolescents]. *Journal of psychology and educational sciences* 2009; 39(1): 107-31. (Persian)
8. Waterman AS. Identity as an aspect of optimal psychological functioning. In: Adams GR, Gullotta TP, Montemayor R. (editors). *Adolescent identity formation*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage; 1992: 50-72.
9. Erikson EH. *Identity: Youth and crisis*. New York: Norton; 1968.
10. Shirk SR, Renouf AG. The tasks of self-development in middle childhood and early adolescence. In: Lipka RP, Brinthaup TM. (editors). *Self-perspectives across the life span* Albany, NY: State University of New York; 1992: 53-90.
11. Marcia JE. The empirical study of ego identity. In: Bosma HA, Graafsma TLG, Grotevant HD, De Levita DL. (editors). *Identity and development: An interdisciplinary approach*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage 1994; 67-80.
12. Zimmerman MA, Copeland LA, Shope JT, Dielman TE. A longitudinal study of self-esteem: Implications for adolescent development. *J Youth Adolesc* 1997; 26(2): 117-41.
13. Meeus W. Studies on identity development in adolescence: An overview of research and some new data. *J Youth Adolesc* 1996; 25(5): 569-98.
14. Papini DR. Family interventions. In: Archer SL. (editor). *Interventions for adolescent identity development*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage; 1994: 47-61.
15. Marcia JE. Identity in adolescence. In: Adelson J. (editor). *Handbook of adolescent psychology*. New York, NY: Wiley; 1980: 159-87.
16. Willemsen EW, Waterman KK. Ego identity status and family environment: A correlational study. *Psychol Report* 1991; 69: 3.
17. Branden N. [Self-esteem power]. Etami M. (translator). Tehran: Peyvand; 2003. (Persian)
18. Hardy SA, Bhattacharjee A, Aquino K, Reed A. Moral identity and psychological distance: The case of adolescent parental socialization. *J Adolesc* 2010; 33: 111-23.
19. Erikson EH. *Identity and the life cycle*. New York: Norton; 1980.
20. Tabachnick BG, Fidell LS. *Using multivariate statistics*. 4th ed. Boston: Allyn and Bacon; 2001.
21. Judge TA, Erez A, Bono JE, Thoresen CJ. The core self-evaluations scale: Development of a measure. *Pers Psychol* 2003; 56: 303-31.
22. Seykhshabani KB, Sayedesmaeil H, Manoochehr T, Abdolkazem N. [Investigation of psychometric properties of core self-evaluations scale]. *Research in clinical psychology and counseling* 2011; 1(1): 99-118.
23. Armsden GC, Greenberg MT. The inventory of parent and peer attachment: Individual differences and their relationship to psychological well-being in adolescence. *J Youth Adolesc* 1987; 16: 427-57.
24. Jonathan PS. *The relationship between attachment to parents and psychological separation in college students*. American College Personnel Association; 2004.
25. Aquino K, Americus R. The self-importance of moral identity. *J Pers Soc Psychol* 2002; 83: 1423-40.
26. Ahadi B. [Relationship between loneliness and self-esteem with students' attachment styles]. *Psychological studies* 2009, 5(1): 95-112. (Persian)

27. Carlson C, Uppal S, Prosser EC. Ethnic differences in processes contributing to the self-esteem of the early adolescents girls. *J Early Adolesc* 2000; 20: 44-67.
28. Pourostadi N. [The relationship between family affective environment, self concept, self esteem and socioeconomic status on the establishment of young individuals' identity]. *Journal of Andisheh and Raftar* 2008; 3(9): 62-75. (Persian)