

Full Length Research Paper

The multiple relations between attachment styles and big five personality traits with assertiveness in a sample of Iranian girl

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Accepted 13 September, 2013

The purpose of this study is to examine the multiple relationships between attachment styles and personality traits with assertiveness in female high school students of Falavarjan (Isfahan, Iran, 2013). The research method was cross-sectional and multiple correlations. 200 girls in grades two, three, and four were randomly selected. Research measurements included Revised Adult Attachment Scale Collins and Read (RAAS), NEO personality inventory, and Assertiveness Scale for Adolescents (ASA). Data was analyzed through descriptive statistics and regression. The results showed that the anxious attachment style, neuroticism, extraversion, openness, and conscientiousness have significant relationships with assertiveness. The multiple regression results also showed that anxious attachment and conscientiousness can predicate assertiveness. The conclusion showed that improving conscientiousness and avoidance attachment style can improve assertiveness.

Key words: Assertiveness, attachment styles, personality traits

INTRODUCTION

Assertiveness

Assertiveness refers to one's ability to express and advocate ideas, interests, and feelings appropriately and without anxiety (Lizarrage, Ugarte, Cardelle-Elawar, and Lriarte, 2003). Assertiveness is an interpersonal behavior that promotes the quality of human relationships by assisting an individual to give expression to his/her rights, thoughts and feelings, an assertive person is in a manner that neither denies nor demands, but recognizes and respects those of others (Alberti and Emmons, 1982; Freeman and Adams, 1999).

According to Alberti and Emmons (1982), assertiveness is viewed as a skill and capacity in interpersonal communications. Assertiveness improves an individual's assertive beliefs and behaviors, which can help him or her to change the way he or she views himself and to establish self-confidence and interpersonal

communication and subject well-being (Lin, Shiah, Chang, Lai, Wang, and Chou, 2004). Assertive people feel free to express their feelings, thoughts and desires. They are also able to initiate and maintain comfortable relationships with other people. They know their rights. They have control over their anger, however, this does not mean that they repress the feeling, but it means that they control anger and talk about it in a reasoning manner. Assertive people are willing to compromise with others, rather than always wanting their own way, and also they tend to have good self-esteem (Reid and Hammeorrsly, 2009). The research paid attention to relations among attachment styles and big five personality factors with assertiveness.

Attachment styles

John Bowlby (1982) postulates that all individuals are born with an innate desire to seek proximity to others, in times of need or distress, in order to enhance their

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survival prospects. The extent to which these efforts gain proximity is a sense of security developed by individuals. This sense of security then becomes the basis of their own individuals' attachment style which then remains relatively fixed over the lifespan of the individuals. Although secure or insecure strategies were originally measured in categories, in recent years researchers have begun to assess adult attachment on a dimensional basis (Creasy, and Ladd, 2004). Based on Brennan, Clark, and Shaver (1998) study, two reliable dimensions emerged from factor analysis, namely attachment avoidance and attachment anxiety. The interaction between these two dimensions determines the person's attachment strategies and security level. Accordingly, attachment security represents the ability to approach a partner for affection and keeping him/her close, when necessary (Edelstein and Shaver, 2004). On the other hand, attachment insecurity has been identified as having either higher levels of attachment avoidance or attachment anxiety (Brennan et al, 1998).

Personality

Personality is the particular combination of emotional, attitudinal, and behavioral response patterns of individuals. Different personality theorists present their own definitions of the word based on their theoretical positions (Engler, 2009). Personality is usually broken into components called the Big Five. The Big Five Personality Traits are five broad domains or dimensions of personality that are used to describe human personality. The theory based on the Big Five Factors is called the Five Factors Model (FFM) (Costa, and McCrae, 1997).

The Big Five Factors are openness to experiences, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness and neuroticism. Neuroticism is the tendency to experience unpleasant emotions easily, such as anger, anxiety, depression, or vulnerability. Neuroticism also refers to the degree of emotional stability and impulse control, and is sometimes referred to by its low pole-emotional stability. Extraversion is energy, positive emotion, assertiveness, sociability and the tendency to seek stimulation in the company of others, and talkativeness. Openness to experiences is appreciation for art, emotion, adventure, unusual ideas, curiosity, and variety of experiences. It reflects the degree of intellectual curiosity, creativity and a preference for novelty and the variety a person has. It is also described as the extent to which a person is imaginative or independent, and depicts a personal preference for a variety of activities over a strict routine. Agreeableness is a tendency to be compassionate and cooperative rather than suspicious and antagonistic toward others. It is also a measure of one's trusting and helpful nature, and whether a person is generally well tempered or not. Conscientiousness is a tendency to

show self-discipline, act on duty, and aim for achievement, planned rather than spontaneous behavior, organized and dependable. (Atkinson, Atinkson, Smith, Bem and Hoksema, 2000).

In high school, development of self-understanding others becomes more sophisticated, emotional understanding improves, and moral reasoning advances. They spend more time with peers, but parents continue to play important roles in their development, especially in guiding their academic achievement and managing their opportunities. Peer status and friendship and school takes on a stronger academic focus (Santrock, 2010). It seems to assertiveness is the best way to defend privacy and satisfaction of human needs and to allow a person to get rid of some habits and stereotyped behaviors or practical obsessive. It helps adolescents to foster the power to choose despite of influence of peers. The following is the aims of this research:

- i. The multiple relations between attachment styles with assertiveness in high school girls.
- ii. The multiple relations between big five personality traits with assertiveness in high school girls.
- iii. The multiple relationships between attachment styles and big five personality traits with assertiveness in high school girls.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study examined the multiple relations between attachment style and personality traits with assertiveness in high school girls in Falavarjan (Isfahan, Iran). Samples, consisted of 200 students, were randomly selected among the students of the second, third and fourth grades of high school. Then selected students completed research measurements that they included Revised Adult Attachment Scale Collins and Read (RAAS), NEO Personality Inventory Revised and Assertiveness Scale for Adolescents (ASA) .

Statistical population

The study population consists of high school girls of Falavarjan city. Among 12 high schools, 4 schools were selected by cluster sampling method then some classes in the second, third and fourth grades were chosen randomly from each school. The means of age was 16.24 and standard deviation was 2.1.

Measures

Assertiveness scale for adolescents (Lee, Hallberg, Slemon, and Haase, 1985)

The ASA is a 33-item instrument designed for children in

Table 1. Correlation between variables

Variable	Mean	Standard deviation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1 Assertiveness	3.74	3.50	1	.082	.052	.231	.167	.184	.016	.139	.363
2 Secure Attachment	20.27	3.44		1	.224	.065	-.039	.246	.120	.08	.013
3 Dependend Attachment	14.94	3.57			1	.066	-.126	.153	-.009	.172	-.06
4 anxiose Attachment	17.90	4.31				1	.474	-.107	.037	.153	.195
5 Neurotic	36.19	7.15					1	.317	.117	.320	.373
6 Extroverted	40.13	5.32						1	.049	.325	.325
7 Agreeableness	38.4	5.13							1	.127	.025
8 Openness to experince	41.31	6.13								1	.379
9 Conscientiousness	44.14	7.20									1

grades 6 through 12. It describes 33 interpersonal situations and provides the respondent with three options as to what he or she would usually do in each situation. The three options are classified as assertive, unassertive and aggressive or passive-aggressive. Lee, Hallberg, Slemon, and Haase (1985) reported acceptable internal consistency, test-retest reliability (stability) and validity. In our study the internal consistency of the ASA was calculated thorough Choronbach Alpa. In order to increase internal consistency, items 6, 7, 10, 13, 14, 15 omitted and calculated Cronbach Alpha ($\alpha = 0.60$).

Revised adult attachment scale (Collins and Read, 1990)

The Revised Adult Attachment Scale (RAAS) is an 18-item measure of adult attachment dimensions. It consists of three subscales: Close, Depend and Anxiety. The Close subscale measures the level of comfort the individual feels with closeness and intimacy. The Depend subscale assesses if the individual feels they can depend on others to be available when needed. The Anxiety subscale measures the level of anxiety the person feels about being rejected or unloved. High scores on close and depend, and low scores on the Anxiety dimension, indicate a secure attachment style. Each item is scored on a 5-point Likert scale with some items being reverse scored. They reported Cronbach's alpha coefficients of .69 for Close, .75 for depend, and .72 for anxiety. Test-retest correlations for a 2-month period were .68 for Close, .71 for Depend, and .52 for Anxiety. In our study the acceptable internal consistency of the every attachment styles was calculated thorough Choronbach Alpa.

Big five dimensions

The 60-item NEO-FFI (Costa and McCrae, 1992) provides a short measure of the Big Five personality factors (Costa and McCrae, 1989). For each factor,

McCrae and Costa (1989) selected 12 items from the 180 items of the longer NEO-PI (and the full 240-item NEO-PI-R), based primarily on correlations between each NEO-PI item and factor scores (McCrae and Costa, 1989). We measured the Big Five factors using the Persian version of the NEO-FFI. There is wide agreement among personality investigators that these five factors are representative of cross-cultural individual differences in normal behavior and studies have replicated this taxonomy in a diversity of samples in world (Chamorro-Premuzic Furnham and Moutafi, 2004) and Iran.

RESULTS

To response to research questions, data was examined in two steps. The first step was to examine the intercorrelations matrix between dependent and independent variables. The results showed assertivness was significantly and meaningfully associated with anxious attachment ($r = -.231$, $p = .01$), neurotism ($r = -.167$, $p = .01$), extraversion ($r = -.164$, $p = .01$), openness to experince ($r = .139$, $p = .05$) and conscientiousness ($r = .363$, $p = .001$). Table 1 shows the result.

Predicting depression

Three multiple regression analyses was conducted to responses research questions in relation to predicting assertiveness. At first assertivness was entered as the dependent variable, and attachment styles were entered as the independent variables. Summary data are presented in part 1 of Table 2.

The results indicated a significant model fit, $F = 10.01$, $p = 0.001$, and that the independent variable (anxious attachment) included in the model was able to account for 5.8% of the variance ($R^2 = 0.058$). Then assertivness was entered as the dependent variable, and big five personality traits were entered as the independent variables. Summary data are presented in part 2 of Table 2. The

Table 2. Stepwise multiple regression of burnout based on career adaptability and occupational personality.

Part	Dependent variable	Dependent variable	Model	B	SEB	β	t	Sig.
1	Assertivness	Attachment styles	1 Anxious attachment	-.199	.062	-.241	-3.24	.001
2	Assertivness	big five personality traits	2 Conscientiousness	.167	.038	.346	4.33	.000
3	Assertivness	Attachment styles + big five personality	3 Conscientiousness	.158	.042	.320	3.77	.000
			4 Anxious attachment	-.139	.070	-.169	-1.99	.048

results indicated a significant model fit, $F = 18.79$, $p = 0.001$, and that the independent variable (conscientiousness) included in the model was able to account for 12% of the variance ($R^2 = .120$).

Then assertivness was entered as the dependent variable, and attachment styles and big five personality traits were entered as the independent variables. Summary data are presented in part 3 of Table 2. The results indicated a significant model fit for each models, for model 1, $F = 18.31$, $p = 0.001$, and that the independent variable (conscientiousness) included in the model was able to account for 12.8% of the variance ($R^2 = 0.128$), for model 2, $F = 32.31$, $p = 0.0001$, and that the independent variables (conscientiousness and anxious attachment) included in the model were able to account for 15.5 % of the variance ($R^2 = 0.155$).

DISCUSSION

We wanted to know whether big five personality and attachment styles are correlated with assertiveness and which of them can predict assertiveness. The results showed, relations between attachment styles and assertiveness. Similar fields of research in this area are very limited. However the findings of this research are in consonance with the findings of Ghobari Bonab and Haddadikoohsar (2011) Buck, Leenaars, Emmelkamp, and VanMarle (2012) and Banse (2004). This consonance is based on the negative relations of anxious attachment style with the positive constructs and its positive relations with the negative constructs.

Results indicate that among attachment styles, the anxious attachment has a negative correlation with assertiveness, but there are no significant correlation between other attachment styles and assertiveness. In explanation of the relationship between anxious attachment with assertiveness, it seems, as regard to people who have anxious attachment are not sure about the feelings of other people towards them and the support they give (Bartholomew and Horowitz, 1991) they experience a feeling of fear and uncertainty which leads to suspicion, reassurance, frequent outrageous protests and envy in that people. But people who have a secure attachment style can easily trust others, are emotionally

open and happy, and are bound to long-term close relationships (Simpson, 1990). They also tend to have positive views of their relationships. They often report greater satisfaction and adjustment in their relationships compared to people with other attachment styles (Creasey and Hesson-McInnis, 2001, Sable, 2007). Thus, it seems that the students who have anxiety attachment think negatively about themselves and others. Such beliefs cause to have a negative impact on interpersonal relationships and self-esteem and to be flourishing. In the other hand, assertiveness is a skill that emerges in interpersonal relationships; therefore, a person who wants to learn this skill should be able to accompany others. People who have unsecure attachment may exhibit high levels of emotional expressiveness, worry, and impulsiveness in their relationships, and may have less positive views about themselves. Thus, it is expected to show less assertiveness by unsecure students.

The results showed negative and meaningful correlations between neuroticism with assertiveness and positive and significant relations between extraversion, openness to experiences and conscientiousness. These findings are congruent with other research findings (e.g. Gillbert, and Allen, 1993; Stéphane; Moskowitz, 1998; Vestewig and Moss, 1976). Individuals who are neurotic tend to experience feelings such as anxiety, anger, envy, guilt, and depressed mood (Mathews, Ian, and Whiteman, 1998). Therefore, they respond more poorly to environmental stress, and are more likely to interpret ordinary situations as threatening, and consider minor frustrations as hopelessly difficult (Barrick and Mount, 1991). They are often self-conscious and shy. They may have trouble controlling urges and delaying gratification; therefore, assertiveness skills are not expected to appear, because assertiveness is the ability to honestly express opinions, feelings, attitudes, and rights, without undue anxiety, in a way that it doesn't infringe on the rights of others.

An extroverted person takes pleasure in activities that involve large social gatherings, such as parties, community activities, public demonstrations, and business or political groups. The extroverted people are likely to enjoy their time with other people and find less reward in a time spent alone (Costa and McCrae, 1992).

They tend to be energized around other people, and they are more prone to boredom when they are by themselves. Therefore, it is expected that assertiveness skills appear, because assertiveness is the ability to honestly express opinions, feelings, attitudes, and rights, without undue anxiety, in a way that it doesn't infringe on the rights of others. In fact it seems, they can learn social skill fast.

People with openness to experiences are intellectually curious, appreciative of art and sensitive to beauty. They also tend to be more aware of their feelings. They usually think and act in individualistic, unconventional and nonconforming ways; even though, their actions may outwardly be conformist. All of this may help them to accept new environment, culture, work and people. In the other hand, assertiveness is the ability to honestly express opinions, feelings, attitudes, and rights, without undue anxiety, in a way that it does not infringe on the rights of others (Loehlin, McCrae, Costa and John, 1998). Therefore, it is expected that assertiveness skills appear among openness people.

Individual with conscientiousness are purposefully oriented, strong-willed, determined, hard-working, and ambitious, also, they have serious competence in dealing with problems and they are accurate (McCrae and Costa, 1997; Loehlin, McCrae, Costa and John, 1998). An assertive person is one who acts in his/her own best interests, stands up for the self, expresses feelings honestly, is in charge of the self in interpersonal relations, and chooses for the self. In the other hand, the basic message sent from an assertive person is "I am OK and you are OK". An assertive person is emotionally honest, direct, self-enhancing, and expressive. He/She feels confident and self-respecting, at the time of his/her actions as well as later; therefore assertiveness skills are expected to appear among people who are conscientiousness.

Study limitations

Results of this study should be viewed tentatively. Results were based upon a small sample for one area of Iran. All the students were Muslim even though there are Christians and other minority religions in Iran. Region in Iran can be very different in customs and practices related to social skills. In the other hand, it did not investigate the other possible causes (i.e., family function or power of peer). Also this study used a self-report measure for data collection. To minimize the effect of common method variance, future studies should obtain data from longitudinal designs

Conclusions

Despite the limitations, the implications of this study are

twofold. School psychologist or school counselor can use the predictive nature of extraversion, openness to experience and conscientiousness to improve assertiveness. Practitioners in family training in adolescence can use the results to training family about the role of attachment styles in forming assertiveness.

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