



## The Role of Identity Styles and Attachment Styles in Prediction of Positive Psychological States among the Women Referring to Family Counseling Clinics

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### A B S T R A C T

The present study seeks to examine the relationship between life orientations with marital adjustment among parents of exceptional children in Ghazvin (Iran). This study is a correlative one. To collect data, a sample of 80 parents of exceptional children in Ghazvin was selected through random cluster sampling method. Tools used to achieve the objectives of the study were: Carver and Scheier's (1985) revised life orientation test and Locke-Wallace's (1959) marital adjustment. To analyze the data, descriptive statistics such as mean, standard deviation and inferential statistics such as Pearson correlation and multiple linear regression analysis were used using SPSS software. The results showed that there is a significant positive relationship between life orientations with the marital adjustment. As well as the factors of optimistic orientation and pessimistic orientation can predict marital adjustment up to 28%. Therefore, with an optimistic attitude to life, which is addressed in the form of life orientation, one can take steps to reduce the marital problems and increase marital adjustment.

**Keywords:** Life Orientation, Marital Adjustment, Parents Of Exceptional Children.

### INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the pathological approach towards the study of human health has been criticized. New approaches lay emphasis on goodness rather than badness in such a way that the absence of symptoms of mental illness is not the indicator of health. However, compatibility, happiness, self-confidence, and other similar positive features represent health; and the main purpose of people in life is to actualize their capabilities (Graham & Crown, 2014). This tradition in the United States was totally changed by Seligman et al. In fact, Seligman et al. initiated the foundation of positive psychology as a complement to deficit-oriented approaches. In this regard, the image that positive psychologists present about human nature is optimistic and promising, because they believe in the ability of humans to develop, nurture, and actualize as well as in human perfection and potential of conversion to what humans are able to be (D. Schultz & Schultz, 2007; D. P. Schultz & Schultz, 2016). In his studies, Seligman concluded that psychology has somewhat overlooked human capabilities for a long time with an emphasis on mental disorders and disease model. In this regard, he introduced positive psychology in an

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attempt to help people experience a more productive and dynamic life and to discover and use their capabilities(Alex Linley, Joseph, Harrington, & Wood, 2006).

Positive psychological states include such emotions as optimism, happiness, a sense of self-efficacy, hope, and life satisfaction(Myers, 2000). Positive psychological states play an important role in the success of individuals in such a way that people with favorable and positive states show an optimistic attitude towards the events around them and try to make optimal use of these events rather than hold a negative bias towards the events around them(Keshavarz, MOULAVI, & KALANTARI, 2009). The review of related literature in this area suggests that several factors are effective in the improvement of strengths and positive psychological states; in this regard, the researcher's attention was attracted to some of the variables.

The concept of attachment styles is one of these factors that may be effective in this domain and also one of the purposes of this study is to assess the effectiveness of this variable. E. J. M. Bowlby (2010) believes that attachment is a primary need that has not been derived from any other need and is an essential need for personality transformation. J. Bowlby (2005) viewed the security that is created by attachment as the most important feature of relationships during life and viewed the initial relationship as a model for future social relationships. In addition, the experiences leading to attachment styles are encoded as dynamic patterns in early childhood(E. J. M. Bowlby, 2010).

These patterns become effective similar to screening schemas and include beliefs and expectations about the self and others. Both concepts of attachment styles and positive psychological states are based on the experiences that have been encoded as generalized cognitive schemas and determine the direction of behaviors, thoughts, and emotions(Clore & Ortony, 2000; Safran, 1990). People with secure attachment are able to receive their parents and peers' support when needed; indeed, the receipt of others' support and positive expectations from others give people a positive outlook(Mikulincer, Florian, Cowan, & Cowan, 2002). This positive view brings success and optimism through the expectation principle. In addition, the pattern of self in the attachment system represents one's self-valuing that is created in the relationships of early life with caregivers(Benard, 2004). If the individual has welcoming, accessible, and responsive caregivers, the pattern of self will be positive in that person and s/he will understand that s/he is worth being loved, cared, and respected. Hence, people with secure attachment can have positive thinking, optimism, hope, and self-esteem because they have mental preparation in this field and their past experiences (that have produced their schemas) give them such a permission(Norem & Chang, 2002).

In this regard, pursuant to Bowlby's research on attachment, Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, and Wall (2015) identified three styles, namely secure, avoidant, and ambivalent attachment styles. Attachment styles influence the individual's methods of coping with stressful situations. Individuals with secure attachment styles simply find help from others while acknowledging the situation; and those with avoidant attachment styles encounter difficulty acknowledging the situation and finding help and support from others. The individuals with ambivalent attachment styles are characterized by hypersensitivity to negative emotions and this blocks their success(Zeinali, Sharifi, Enayati, Asgari, & Pasha, 2011). Given that attachment styles are

involved in the orientation and coding of thoughts, behaviors, and emotions, it seems that attachment styles are interrelated with psychological positive states. On the other hand, it seems necessary to evaluate how each of these styles predicts positive psychological states because of the presence of different attachment styles that exist in the range of safety to insecure styles.

Identity style is another factor whose predictive power of positive psychological states is examined in this study. In an attempt to conceptualize the social-cognitive processes involved in identity discovery (Berzonsky, 1990), defined three identity styles, including informational, normative, and diffuse-avoidant ones. This orientation is a cognitive model based on those social processes during which individuals are placed in different situations as per their preferred method of informational processing about the self and discussion about the issues relating to individual decisions (Soenens, Berzonsky, Vansteenkiste, Beyers, & Goossens, 2005).

People with diffuse identity usually use processing and diffuse-avoidant styles. They always attempt to avoid facing individual issues, conflicts, and decisions. This identity style is associated with emotion-oriented coping strategies, expectations of external control, and maladaptive decision-making strategies; furthermore, this identity style has a negative correlation with psychological well-being indicators (Soenens et al., 2005). This is so while people with successful or delayed identity style (also referred to as informational) will act in a more deliberate way in dealing with the issues of identity. This identity style holds a significant relationship with problem-oriented coping, psychological well-being, and conscientiousness (Sandhu, Singh, Tung, & Kundra, 2012). Finally, people with early or normative identity style encounter the internalization of beliefs and values pertaining to others with identity themes in a random and automatic method. Numerous studies have shown that people with normative style have little tolerance for ambiguity, highly need a structure, and act in a closed method against the information inconsistent with their value system although they have a positive sense of well-being (Berzonsky & Kuk, 2005).

Given that different identification styles have different effects on mental health and lead to varying results, it assumes importance to examine what manifestations turn up by these differences and whether they have the predictive power of positive psychological states or not. Finally, considering the above-mentioned points and the importance of this issue as well as due to the fact that no study has directly addressed this issue to date, the present study aims to assess whether it is possible to predict the positive psychological states of women referring to counseling centers in Hamadan based on attachment styles and identity styles.

## METHODOLOGY

This research is a descriptive study with a correlation research design. The women referring to family counseling clinics in Hamadan in the first six months of 2006 constituted the statistical population of this study. From among the population of the women referring to family counseling clinics of the multiple districts in Hamadan, 150 participants were selected via convenience sampling method based on Cochran formula. Then, the participants were evaluated by the research scales. In this research, Positive Psychological States Questionnaire, Collins and Read (1990) Adult Attachment Scale (RAAS), and Berzonsky's Identity Style Inventory (ISI-6) were used for measuring positive psychological states.

**Positive Psychological States Questionnaire:** This questionnaire consists of 96 items, which measure the total of 15 positive psychological states, including hope, purposefulness, sense of control, trust in God, efficacy, optimism, sociability, forgiveness, self-esteem and self-worth, sense of relief, gratitude, positive mood and happiness, life satisfaction, conscientiousness, and the meaningfulness of life. Cronbach's alpha method has been used to calculate the reliability of this scale. In addition, the validity of this questionnaire was approved by professors and experts in the field.

**Collins and Read's Adult Attachment Scale (RAAS):** RASS includes the self-assessment of relationship building skills and the self-description of the formation of attachment relationships relative to close attachment figures. It contains 18 items that are scored on a Likert scale. Factor analysis shows that this scale consists of three following subscales, each containing 6 items:

- Dependence (D): This measures the extent to which participants trust each other and are relied upon. In fact, it is assessed whether the examinees are available when necessary.
- Closeness (C): It measures the level of comfort in conjunction with measures of intimacy and emotional bonds.
- Anxiety (A): It measures the fear of having relationships.

Collins and Read (1990) prepared the questionnaire based on the descriptions that existed in Hazan & Shaver's Adult Attachment Scale about three attachment styles. Anxiety subscale corresponds with anxious-ambivalent attachment; and closeness subscale is a bipolar dimension that basically brings secure and insecure descriptions against each other. Therefore, closeness is in compliance with secure attachment; and the dependence subscale can be roughly considered the opposite of avoidant attachment. On the basis of the questionnaire's instruction, 6 items pertain to each subscale. The participant's score is determined for each subscale considering the response s/he has given to each item on the answer sheet. Scores of 0 to 4 are assigned to options 1 to 5, respectively. Collins and Read (1990) showed that the subscales of closeness, dependence, and anxiety would remain stable within 2 months and even during 8 months. With regard to the reliability of the questionnaire, Cronbach's alpha coefficients of 0.81 and 0.82 (C), 0.78 and 0.80 (D), and 0.85 and 0.83 (A) were obtained on two samples of 173 and 100 subjects, respectively. Thus, the reliability coefficients are equal to or higher than 0.80 in all the subscales, which shows the scale enjoys high reliability. Moreover, the face validity and content validity of this scale have been confirmed by psychologists.

**Berzonsky's Identity Style Inventory (ISI-6):** Identity Style Questionnaire was constructed by Berzonsky (1989). This questionnaire contains 40 questions and measures the person's identity style and commitment. The items consist of four options, namely strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, and strongly disagree. The items numbered 9, 11, 14, and 20 are scored in reverse. This questionnaire measures four identity styles, including informational, normative, diffuse-avoidant, and commitment styles. White et al. revised this test in 1998 and the revised version of the scale (ISI-6) will be used in this study. Scholars and experts have confirmed the convergent validity of the questionnaire by referring to the strong theoretical relationships of identity styles with Marcia's Identity Statuses, identity orientation,

social-cognitive processes, and personal orientations. Berzonsky and Kuk (2005) reported the Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.71, 0.65, 0.75, and 0.78 for informational, normative, diffuse-avoidant, and commitment styles, respectively. In addition, the test-retest reliability coefficient of the scale (within a two-month interval) was reported to range from 0.71 to 0.75.

## RESULTS

In this study, multiple regression analysis was used to analyze the data. The results of this test are presented as follows:

Table 1. Matrix of correlations between the research variables

Variable	The correlation coefficient	Sig.
Attachment Styles	-0.26	0.001
Identity style	0.28	0.001

According to the obtained results about the predictor variables of attachment styles and identity styles at the significance level of (0.001) and the alpha below (0.005), the null hypotheses are rejected and the alternative hypotheses are confirmed. According to the correlation coefficient of attachment styles and the significance level of (0.001), which is smaller than alpha (0.005), it is indicated that positive psychological states are predictable based on attachment styles. In addition, considering the correlation coefficient of identity styles and the significance level of (0.001), which is smaller than alpha (0.005), it is supported that positive psychological states are predictable based on identity styles.

Multivariate regression analysis was used to predict positive psychological states based on attachment styles. The results of multivariate regression analysis showed that the coefficient of determination of attachment styles can explain 0.95 of the variance related to psychological states. Moreover, the placement of the Durbin-Watson test result between 1.5 and 2.5 also allowed to safely use regression analysis. The obtained F value of 5.798 for attachment styles at the level of  $P < 0.001$  is significant for psychological states.

Table 2. Coefficients of the regression analysis on the scales of attachment styles

Spiritual intelligence subscale	Non-standard coefficients		Standardized coefficients Beta	T	Sig.
	B	Standard error			
Constant	17.68	0.679		26.055	0.001
Secure attachment	0.753	0.116	0.305	6.465	0.001
Avoidant attachment	-0.462	-0.100	-0.187	-4.239	0.001
Anxious-ambivalent attachment	-0.805	-0.108	-0.362	-7.435	0.001

According to the path coefficient of 0.305 and t-statistic of 6.465 and the significance level of 0.001, it can be claimed that positive psychological states are predictable based on attachment styles at the confidence level of 99%. In the same way, according to the path coefficient of avoidant attachment (-0.187) as well as t-statistic of -4.239 and the significance level of 0.001 and given to the path coefficient of anxious-ambivalent attachment (-7.435) and the significance level of 0.001, avoidant attachment style and anxious-ambivalent attachment

style are in a negative direction with positive psychological states. All these changes are significant with respect to the probability value of regression tests ( $P < 0.01$ ). Hence, the hypothesis asserting that positive psychological states are predictable based on attachment styles is approved. Multivariate regression analysis was used to predict positive psychological states based on identity styles. The results of multivariate regression analysis showed that the coefficient of determination of identity style can account for 76% of the variation of psychological states. In addition, the placement of the Durbin-Watson test result between 1.5 and 2.5 also allowed to safely use regression analysis for the evaluation of this hypothesis. The obtained F value of 5.794 for identity styles at the level of  $P \leq 0.001$  can predict positive psychological states.

Table 3. Coefficients of the regression analysis on the scales of identity styles

Spiritual intelligence subscale	Non-standard coefficients		Standardized coefficients Beta	T	Sig.
	B	Standard error			
Constant		0.216		16.473	0.000
Critical Existential Thinking	0.79	0.19	0.371	5.435	0.001
Personal Meaning Production	0.025	0.024	0.77	1.015	0.312
Transcendental Awareness	0.70	0.020	0.225	4.522	0.001
Conscious State Expansion	0.23	0.013	0.135	1.779	0.077

According to the obtained results in Table 4, including the path coefficient value of 0.227, the t-statistic of 3.050, and the significance level of 0.003, it can be argued that informational identity style has a significant positive effect on positive psychological states at the confidence level of 99%. Moreover, considering the path coefficient value of 0.217, the t-statistic of 2.973, and the significance level of 0.003, it can be claimed that commitment style has a significant positive effect on positive psychological states at the confidence level of 99%.

## CONCLUSION

The present study aimed to investigate the role of identity styles and attachment styles in the prediction of positive psychological states among the women referring to family counseling clinics in Hamadan. The results showed that attachment styles and identity styles can predict positive psychological states. This finding on the relationship of attachment styles, identity styles, and spiritual intelligence with psychological well-being and other positive psychological states is consistent with those of the studies conducted by Öztürk and Mutlu (2010), Kim, Carver, Deci, and Kasser (2008), Koohbanani, Dastjerdi, Vahidi, and Far (2013), Faribors, Fatemeh, and Hamidreza (2010), Naderi, Asgari, and Roushani (2010) and Besharat, Ghafouri, and Rostami (2007). To explain the findings of this research, one can argue that the individuals with secure attachment regard themselves as competent persons and have positive expectations of themselves according to the literature. These people believe that stressful situations can be converted to the opportunities where there is growth and maturity; and, thereby, the challenges of life may lead to the realization of inherent talents in people. Similarly, these individuals are able to absorb the support of their parents and their peers in contact with them when necessary

(Heinonen, Räikkönen, Keltikangas-Järvinen, & Strandberg, 2004). It seems that attached people have a sense of control, conscientiousness, and efficacy in the face of challenges in life with the aim of confronting and coping with the problem ahead since they have positive expectations of themselves. Moreover, as far as the early attachment style that is shaped in childhood can be expressive of the attachment style in adulthood, these people can draw the support of other people in an emergency situation.

Considering Positive Psychological States Questionnaire, the literature, and the research results, it can be stated that positive psychological states are predictable based on attachment styles. Finally, it can be said that successful identity formation comes into existence over time based on the experiences resulting from socially correct interactions. This makes it possible for the person to identify him/herself and guarantees his/her mental health and balance. In addition, people with a strong identity feel committed to actively align themselves with the social arenas and developmental problems and attempt to make right decisions towards the important challenges of life; in this regard, they also have a sense of commitment in doing so (Ratner, 2013). The desirable social relationships, goal-oriented and meaningful life, and commitment and conscientiousness are among the subscales of Positive Psychological States Questionnaire. As it was revealed in the research findings, informational identity style and commitment identity style made a higher contribution to the explanation of positive psychological states. Therefore, it can be claimed that positive psychological states are predictable based on identity style. Considering the findings of this research, it is finally suggested that psychologists and researchers examine the other effective and predictor variables of positive psychological states in future research in order to gain a clearer and more coherent view of this topic.

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