



Examination of University Students Emotion Regulation Skills in Terms of Attachment Styles and Self-Compassion¹

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ABSTRACT

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In this study, it was aimed to examine the emotion regulation skills of university students in terms of attachment styles and self-compassion. The participants of the study were determined using the appropriate sampling method. The participants consisted of a total of 414 university students, 230 (55.6%) of whom were female and 184 (44.4%) of whom were male. In order to collect the data, "Personal Information Form", "Emotion Regulation Scale (DBL)", "Experiences in Close Relationships II (CRI II)" and "Self-Compassion Scale" were used. SPSS 26.0 package program was used to analyze the data. In this analysis, Pearson product-moment correlation, multiple linear regression analysis and independent groups t-test methods were used. The findings of the study showed that emotion regulation skills have a positive and significant relationship with attachment styles and self-compassion. As a result of the regression analysis, it was concluded that the avoidant attachment sub-dimension of attachment styles and the consciousness sub-dimension of self-compassion significantly predicted the re-evaluation sub-dimension of emotion regulation skills. It was concluded that the consciousness and overidentification sub-dimensions of attachment styles and self-compassion significantly predicted the concealment sub-dimension of emotion regulation skills. It was determined that emotion regulation skills did not show a significant difference according to gender.

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INTRODUCTION

All people have emotions. Emotions have a very important place in individuals' lives, survival, communicating with others, continuing communication, and deciding who or what is important to them (Southam-Gerow, 2014). Although emotions are mostly beneficial, negative emotions have bad consequences. The concept of emotion regulation emerged in order to reduce the bad consequences of emotions and to maintain and increase positive emotions (Bozkurt-Yükçü, 2017). Emotion regulation is the process that involves what emotions individuals have, when they have these emotions, how they experience emotions and how they express them externally. These processes can be automatic or controlled, conscious or unconscious (Gross, 1998). The main psychological functions of emotion regulation include satisfying hedonic needs, supporting goal pursuits, and maintaining the global personality system (Koole, 2009). During emotion regulation, people can reduce, increase or maintain their positive and negative emotions. Accordingly, emotion regulation generally includes changes in emotional reactions (Gross, 1999). Emotion regulation response systems are not innate; they are normally acquired early in life (Dodge and Garber, 1991). Emotion regulation continues throughout people's lives, starting from infancy. This process essentially begins with the mother-infant relationship (Gross, 2001). At this point, it can be said that attachment styles affect the emotion regulation process.

Attachment styles are formed according to the nature of the relationship that the individual forms with the person who takes care of him/her in early childhood. Attachment styles established in the early periods of life form the basis of individuals' social relationships and different behaviors in later periods (Küçük, 2020). Developmental research has shown that caregivers have a fundamental role in regulating children's emotional states (Southam-Gerow & Kendall, 2002). Since a newborn baby does not have emotion regulation skills, he/she looks for emotional support from the person providing care when he/she experiences any problems (Zimmermann, 2004). When a person's attachment figures are not safely available and supportive, seeking closeness fails to relieve the distress that occurs. As a result, negative self-models are formed and the possibility of experiencing maladjustment and emotional problems increases (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2012). Studies have shown that people with anxious attachment have difficulty managing their emotions and can react negatively to events instantly (Carnelley et al., 2007; Gentzler et al., 2010). However, those with insecure attachment experience negative emotions more. It has been determined that these people use less constructive emotion regulation skills (Cabral et al., 2012; McCarthy, 2001; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2012). From this perspective, it can be said that attachment styles are related to emotion regulation skills.

Another concept that is thought to be related to attachment styles is self-compassion. Self-compassion; Rather than criticizing oneself harshly in situations of failure and pain, individuals accept the experience as a part of life, approach painful thoughts and feelings with awareness, and act kindly and compassionately towards themselves (Neff, 2003b). Relationships with the environment and early childhood experiences are important in the development process of self-compassion (Neff & McGehe, 2009). Individuals who receive compassion from their parents during childhood can show compassion to both themselves and the people around them when they grow up. Conversely, it is observed that individuals who do not receive affection from their parents during childhood have low self-compassion levels in adulthood (Neff, 2003a). Therefore, it is thought that attachment styles affect the level of self-compassion. Studies show that securely attached people have high self-compassion levels (Joeng et al., 2017; Pepping et al., 2015). The results of the study conducted by Neff and Beretvas (2013) showed that individuals with high self-compassion were securely attached.

Individuals with a high level of self-compassion are aware of the problems they experience and are aware of their own shortcomings. Despite the problems and shortcomings they have, they approach themselves with understanding and compassion rather than adopting a cruel, harsh and critical attitude towards themselves. As a result, self-compassion plays a protective role when individuals encounter

adverse events in their lives. This helps them achieve positive emotions by enabling them to overcome events more easily (Leary et al., 2007). However, self-compassion transforms individuals' feeling bad about their inadequacies or failures, that is, negative self-affect, into positive self-affect (feeling compassion and understanding towards oneself) (Neff, 2003b). Therefore, it can be said that self-compassion plays an effective and important role in emotion regulation. Self-compassion has a helpful effect in coping with difficulties encountered in the emotion regulation process (Vatan, 2019). In their study, Gün et al. (2020) found that there were significant relationships between emotion regulation and self-compassion. Because of what was stated above, it was thought that emotion regulation skills, attachment styles and self-compassion might be interrelated concepts. Based on this idea, the purpose of the study was determined to examine the relationship between the level of emotion regulation skills of university students and their attachment styles and self-compassion.

METHOD

In this section; Information was given about the research model, study group, scales used and how the collected data were analyzed.

Research Design

The study aimed to determine the relationship between the participants' scores from the emotional regulation skills scale and their scores from the attachment styles and self-compassion scale. Therefore, the descriptive (relational scanning) method, one of the quantitative research methods, was used in the research (Sönmez & Alacapınar, 2018).

Study Group

This study was conducted with 414 participants determined by non-random convenience sampling method. 230 (55.6%) of the participants were female students and 184 (44.4%) were male students. The age range of the study group varies between 18-26; The average age is 20.21.

Research Instruments and Processes

The scales used to collect data are introduced in this section.

Personal Information Form

It was created to obtain demographic information such as age and gender from participants.

Emotion Regulation Scale

This scale, which consists of 10 items, was developed by John and Gross (2003). The scale has two subscales: reappraisal and concealment and has a Likert structure. Eldeleklioğlu and Eroğlu (2015) conducted the Turkish validity and reliability study of the scale. Cronbach's alpha values for the scale's reappraisal and concealment were found to be .78 and .73, respectively. This result shows that the scale is suitable for use in studies. The finding values (.72-.78) obtained from the reliability analysis conducted for this research are within the reliable range.

Experiences in Close Relationships Inventory II

Fraley et al. (2000) developed this scale, for which Sümer et al. (2005) conducted a Turkish validity and reliability study. The scale, developed to detect individuals' feelings and thoughts about their romantic relationships, has two sub-dimensions. These are anxiety and avoidance respectively. The scale, consisting of 36 items, has a Likert structure. The scale contains reverse coded items. As a result of the studies, it was revealed that the Cronbach's alpha coefficient was .90 for the anxiety dimension and .86 for the avoidance dimension. The finding values (.84) obtained from the reliability analysis conducted for this research are within the reliable range.

Self-Compassion Scale

Neff (2003b) developed this scale, which was adapted into Turkish by Akin, Akin and Abaci (2007). The scale has six subscales and 26 items. The scale has a five-point Likert structure. The internal consistency Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the scale was calculated as .72 for awareness of sharing, .72 for self-judgment, .80 for isolation, .77 for self-compassion, .74 for overidentification and .74 for consciousness, respectively. The finding values (.72-.76) obtained from the reliability analysis conducted for this research are within the reliable range.

Data Analysis

The data collected in the research was collected using the appropriate sampling method, which is not random. The collected data were evaluated with the SPSS 26 package program. Accordingly, Pearson correlation was used to calculate the relationship between university students' emotion regulation skills, attachment styles scores and self-compassion scores. Regression analysis was performed to calculate the effect of the scores obtained from the attachment styles and self-compassion scales on the scores received by university students from the emotional regulation skills scale. The relationship between gender and emotion regulation skills scores was calculated by independent samples t test.

Ethic

The necessary ethics committee permissions for the research were obtained from the Konya Necmettin Erbakan University Social and Human Sciences Ethics Committee with the decision numbered 5.21.83.

FINDINGS

Simple correlation method was used to determine the relationship between emotion regulation skills, attachment styles and self-compassion. Descriptive results obtained from the correlation analysis are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Relationships between participant's from the scales

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1.Reassessment	-									
2.Hiding	.594**	-								
3.Anxious Attachment	.485**	.539**	-							
4.Avoidant Attachment	.618**	.523**	.805**	-						
5.Self-Kindness	.525**	.358**	.488**	.595**	-					
6.Self-Judgment	.224**	.423**	.611**	.471**	.278**	-				
7.Sharing	.513**	.385**	.536**	.596**	.666**	.357**	-			
8.Isolation	.227**	.361**	.588**	.431**	.285**	.722**	.322*	-		
9.Mindfulness	.547**	.391**	.441**	.540**	.703**	.280**	.644**	.284**	-	
10.Over-identification	.272**	.443**	.592**	.485**	.292**	.708**	.380**	.668**	.307**	-

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

When the results of Table 1 are examined, it can be seen that the reappraisal sub-dimension of emotion regulation skills has a positive, moderately significant correlation with the anxiety ($r=.485$, $p<.01$) and avoidance ($r=.618$, $p<.01$) sub-dimensions of attachment styles. It has been found that there is a relationship. The reappraisal sub-dimension of emotion regulation skills is related to self-compassion, self-kindness ($r=.525$, $p<.01$), sharing ($r=.513$, $p<.01$) and mindfulness ($r=.547$, $p<.01$). positive moderate level with its sub-dimensions, self-judgment ($r=.224$, $p<.01$), isolation ($r=.227$,

p<.01) and over-identification (r=.272, p<.01). A positive, low-level significant relationship was found.

It was determined that the concealment sub-dimension of emotion regulation skills had a moderate positive relationship with the anxiety (r=.539, p<.01) and avoidance (r=.523, p<.01) sub-dimensions of attachment styles. Self-compassion, the concealment sub-dimension of emotion regulation skills, is related to self-kindness (r=.358, p<.01), self-judgment (r=.423, p<.01), sharing (r=.385, p<.01). A positive, low-level significant relationship was found with the sub-dimensions of , isolation (r=.361, p<.01), mindfulness (r=.391, p<.01) and over-identification (r=.443, p<.01).

The effects of attachment styles and self-compassion on the reappraisal sub-dimension of emotion regulation skills were calculated by regression analysis. The results of the calculation are given in Table 2.

Table 1. Regression analysis results regarding attachment styles and self-compassion predicting the reappraisal sub-dimension of emotion regulation skills

Model	B	S.H.	β	t	p
Still	4.419	1.377	-	3.208	.001**
Self-kindness	.110	.101	.063	1.091	.276
Self-Judgment	-.156	.092	-.102	-1.695	.091
Sharing	.179	.109	.090	1.649	.100
Isolation	-.033	.110	-.017	-.301	.764
Mindfulness	.526	.125	.231	4.210	.000***
Over-identification	.018	.110	.009	.168	.867
Anxious Attachment	.006	.027	.017	.233	.816
Avoidant Attachment	.177	.028	.440	.6,422	.000***
R=.679, R ² =.451, F ₍₄₃₋₃₇₀₎ =8.654, p<.001					

p<.01 *p<.001

In Table 2, it was examined according to regression analysis whether attachment styles and self-compassion predicted the level of reappraisal subdimension of emotion regulation skills. As a result of this analysis, it was revealed that the regression model created was significant (F(43-370)=8.65, p<.001). It is seen that attachment styles and self-compassion explain 45% of the variance in the reappraisal sub-dimension of emotion regulation skills (R² = .451). When looking at the regression coefficient (β), the relative importance of the predictive variables on the reappraisal sub-dimension of emotion regulation skills is; avoidant attachment, mindfulness, sharing, self-kindness, anxious attachment, over-identification, isolation and self-judgment. When the regression coefficients were examined, it was seen that the mindfulness sub-dimension of self-compassion (β=.526, t=4.210, p<.001) and the avoidant attachment sub-dimension of attachment styles (β=.177, t=6.422, p<.001) had a significant effect on re-evaluation. It seems that its prediction is significant. Self-kindness (β=.110, t=1.091, p>.05), self-judgment (β=-.156, t=-1.695, p>.05), sharing (β=.179, t= 1.649, p>.05), isolation (β=-.033, t=-.301, p>.05), over-identification (β=.018, t=.168, p>.05) and anxious attachment (β=.006, t=.816, p>.05) does not seem to have a significant effect.

The effects of attachment styles and self-compassion on the concealment sub-dimension of emotion regulation skills were calculated by regression analysis. The results of the calculation are given in Table 3.

Table 3. Regression analysis results regarding attachment styles and self-compassion predicting the hiding sub-dimension of emotion regulation skills

Model	B	S.H.	β	t	p
Still	1.975	1.083	-	1.823	.069
Self-kindness	-.022	.079	-.018	-.279	.781
Self-judgment	.110	.072	.101	1.529	.127
Sharing	.001	.085	.001	.012	.990

Isolation	-.078	.087	-.056	-.896	.371
Mindfulness	.247	.098	.151	2.515	.012*
Over-identification	.213	.086	.152	2.475	.014*
Anxious Attachment	.058	.021	.216	2.760	.006**
Avoidant Attachment	.052	.022	.181	2.408	.016*

$R=.595$, $R^2=.341$, $F(27-696)=8.688$, $p<.001$

* $p<.05$ ** $p<.01$

In Table 3, it was examined according to regression analysis whether attachment styles and self-compassion predicted the level of hiding sub-dimension of emotion regulation skills. As a result of this analysis, it was revealed that the regression model created was significant ($F(27-696)=8.69$, $p<.001$). It is seen that attachment styles and self-compassion explain 34% of the variance in the hiding sub-dimension of emotion regulation skills ($R^2 = .341$). When looking at the regression coefficient (β), the relative importance of the predictive variables on the hiding sub-dimension of emotion regulation skills is; anxious attachment, avoidant attachment, over-identification, mindfulness, self-judgment, sharing, self-compassion and isolation. When the regression coefficients are examined, it is seen that self-compassion is associated with consciousness ($\beta=.247$, $t=2.515$, $p>.05$) and over-identification ($\beta=.213$, $t=2.475$, $p>.05$) sub-dimensions; It is seen that the anxiety ($\beta=.058$, $t=2.760$, $p>.05$) and avoidant attachment ($\beta=.052$, $t=2.408$, $p>.05$) sub-dimensions of attachment styles are significant in predicting concealment. Self-compassion is related to self-kindness ($\beta=-.022$, $t=-.279$, $p>.05$), self-judgment ($\beta=.110$, $t=.1529$, $p>.05$), sharing ($\beta=.001$, $t=.012$, $p>.05$), isolation ($\beta=-.078$, $t=-.896$, $p>.05$) sub-dimensions are not significant in predicting concealment.

Within the scope of the study, independent groups t-test was conducted to determine whether emotional regulation skills scores differed significantly according to gender. The results of the test are shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Independent groups T-test result on whether participants' levels of emotion regulation skills differ according to gender

Sub-Dimensions	Gender	N	\bar{x}	SS	t	p
Reassessment	Female	230	26.83	6.98	-.097	.923
	Male	184	26.89	6.86	-.097	.923
Hiding	Female	230	16.50	4.80	-.610	.542
	Male	184	16.80	5.16	-.605	.545

Independent samples t-test was used to analyze whether the reappraisal and concealment sub-dimensions of emotion regulation skills differed significantly according to gender. As a result of the analysis; It was concluded that the levels of reassessment ($t=-.097$, $p>.05$) and hiding ($t=-.610$, $p>.05$) of emotion regulation skills did not differ according to gender.

DISCUSSION

In this section of the research, the results of the findings are included. The results are discussed respectively in the light of the relevant literature. In addition, in order to enrich the discussion, the results of studies showing similarities with the subject of the study are also included.

As a result of the findings obtained in the study, when the relationships between the variables were examined, it was determined that there was a positive, moderately significant relationship between the reassessment and hiding sub-dimensions of emotion regulation skills and the anxious and avoidant sub-dimensions of attachment styles. When the relevant literature was examined, it was seen that there were studies revealing the relationship between emotion regulation skills and attachment styles (Roque, 2013; Uyar, 2019; Uğur, 2020; Vatan & Oruçlular Kahya, 2018; Zimmermann et al., 2001). The findings of the research are parallel to the relevant literature. For example, in the study conducted by Yönet-Demirhan (2021), there is a positive significant relationship between emotion regulation skills and sub-dimensions of attachment styles. Likewise, in the research conducted by Öner and Asçı (2020)

with athletes, it was determined that there was a significant relationship between emotion regulation skills and attachment styles. The result of another study by Henschel et al. (2020) revealed that anxiously attached individuals have higher emotion regulation difficulties than secure and avoidant individuals. The basis of attachment is the emotion regulation relationship that occurs simultaneously between the mother and the baby (Schore, 2000). Accordingly, it can be stated that attachment styles have very important effects on the emotional development of the baby. Based on this, it can be said that the attachment styles formed between mother and baby have an impact on individuals' emotion regulation skills.

Another finding of the research was that there was a significant positive relationship between emotion regulation skills and self-compassion. Accordingly, the reassessment sub-dimension of emotion regulation skills and the self-compassion, self-kindness, sharing and mindfulness sub-dimensions are at a positive moderate level; It was revealed that there was a positive, low-level significant relationship with the sub-dimensions of self-judgment, isolation and over-identification. It was determined that the hiding sub-dimension of emotion regulation skills had a low positive relationship with all sub-dimensions of self-compassion. When the relevant literature is examined, studies show that there is a positive relationship between emotion regulation and self-compassion (Diedrich et al., 2016; Neff, 2003b; Vatan, 2019). In the study conducted by Gün et al. (2020) with students living in dormitories, the scores received by the participants from the emotional regulation and self-compassion scales were positively significant. Accordingly, it appears that the findings obtained with the relevant literature are consistent.

According to the results of the regression analysis conducted with the reassessment sub-dimension of attachment styles and emotion regulation skills, it was concluded that avoidant attachment, which is the sub-dimension of attachment styles, predicts the reassessment sub-dimension of emotion regulation skills. Attachment styles play a role in whether the child's emotion regulation skills are weak or strong, through the open and free expression of emotions or not (Yüksel, 2014). Children with an avoidant attachment style do not report or deny the difficulties they experience in order to reduce the possibility of rejection. This allows maintaining appropriate proximity to the attachment figure without causing discomfort. These children downplay their emotions as an escape from their attachment needs (Howe et al., 1999). However, individuals with an avoidant attachment style prefer to keep their emotions separate from their thoughts and actions. This situation provides them with a safe space (Mikulincer and Shaver, 2012). Accordingly, it can be said that individuals with an avoidant attachment style regulate their emotions by re-evaluating themselves in order to maintain closeness to the attachment figure by keeping themselves in a safe space. When the regression analysis results between attachment styles and the hiding sub-dimension of emotion regulation skills were examined within the scope of the study, it was determined that the anxiety and avoidance sub-dimensions of attachment styles predicted the hiding sub-dimension of emotion regulation skills. There are many studies in the relevant literature that support the findings of the research (Aydemir, 2020; Hwang, 2006; Kısmetoğlu, 2019; Yıldız, 2014). In their study, Mikulincer et al. (2003) stated that the attachment style that occurs when the child encounters a threat or seeks closeness from the primary caregiver and, as a result, the caregiver is not accessible, is related to negative emotion regulation. It is stated that children with an insecure attachment style are not considered worthy of sharing their feelings by their parents, are criticized and are not respected. This makes it difficult for children to regulate their emotions. As a result of these conditions, differences in emotion regulation occur between children with a secure attachment style and children with an insecure attachment style (Thompson & Meyer, 2007). In their study, Karabacak and Demir (2017) revealed that anxious and avoidant attachment had a positive and significant relationship with suppression, the dysfunctional sub-dimension of emotion regulation skills. In summary, it can be said that the findings of the research are consistent with the relevant literature and that individuals with insecure attachment style use the hiding skill, which is the negative sub-dimension of emotion regulation skills, in order to regulate their emotions.

According to the regression analysis conducted between emotion regulation and self-compassion in the study, it was concluded that the mindfulness sub-dimension of self-compassion significantly predicts emotion regulation skills. Mindfulness constitutes one of the basic parts of self-compassion (Neff, 2003a). Mindfulness enables the person to find a way to become aware of the moments in which he/she suffers and the situations in which he/she criticizes oneself (Germer, 2009). It also involves keeping one's difficult and distressing thoughts and feelings in balance, not getting carried away by them, and not overly identifying with them (Marlatt and Kristeller, 1999). Allen and Leary (2010) stated that the mindfulness feature of self-compassion can be defined as a harmonious emotion regulation strategy. Based on this, it can be said that the person consciously regulates his/her emotions in order to be kind and compassionate towards oneself. Another finding of the study was that the over-identification sub-dimension of self-compassion significantly predicted the hiding sub-dimension of emotion regulation skills. Self-compassion has the effect of providing powerful motivation for a person's growth and development. Being sensitive to oneself; It enables him/her to stop performing self-destructive behaviors and to encourage oneself to perform the behaviors he/she needs in order to get to a better position, even if it is difficult (Neff, 2003a). Self-compassion has a structure consisting of three components. These three components are divided into two different parts: positive and negative. Awareness is one of the three components that make up self-compassion. The negative side of mindfulness is the over-identification part of self-compassion (Neff, 2003b). Over-identification is when individuals define themselves by integrating with their emotions (e.g., I am a helpless person), overly identify with the situations experienced, and think that painful and difficult experiences are permanent rather than temporary (Costa et al., 2016). Over-identification lags behind awareness (Neff and Tirsch, 2013). Awareness is the ability to look at thoughts without suppressing or judging them (Neff, Kirkpatrick, & Rude, 2007). According to Neff (2003a), awareness; It is the individual's ability to be aware of his/her own feelings and thoughts in the face of a painful experience and to handle them in a balanced way while maintaining his/her composure. As a result of their research, Feldman et al. (2007) found that as the level of mindfulness, one of the sub-dimensions of self-compassion, decreases, the scores of maladaptive emotion regulation strategies such as suppression, rumination and avoidance increase. In this regard, it can be stated that individuals who use the over-identification dimension of self-compassion in order to be kind to themselves use the hiding skill, which is the dysfunctional sub-dimension of emotion regulation skills, in order to regulate their emotions when they encounter a difficult event due to their low level of awareness.

Finally, when the findings of emotion regulation skills by gender were examined, it was concluded that the level of emotion regulation skills did not differ according to gender. Accordingly, no difference was detected between the scores of boys on the emotional regulation skills scale and the scores of girls on the emotional regulation skills scale. In this case, when the relevant literature was examined, in the study conducted by Güler (2022) with students studying at the faculty of sports sciences, it was concluded that emotion regulation skills did not show a significant difference between girls and boys. In a study conducted by Carlson and Wang (2007) with preschool children, it was concluded that emotion regulation did not differ in girls and boys. In Young et al.'s (2022) study with adolescents, it was found that emotion regulation skills did not differ significantly in terms of gender. Individuals develop different emotional regulation skills due to their different learning experiences and temperaments. There are individual differences in the use of developed emotion regulation skills (Gross and Thompson 2007). According to these results, it can be said that the reason why the level of emotions do not differ between boys and girls is the characteristics of the individual.

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