



Short Communication

Fear and fragility of happiness as mediators of the relationship between insecure attachment and subjective well-being



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ABSTRACT

Prior research indicates that anxious (or preoccupied) and avoidant (or dismissing) attachment orientations can lead to an aversion to the experience and/or expression of happiness. The present study predicted and found positive relationships between insecure attachment, fear of happiness (the idea that happiness should be avoided because it causes bad things to happen) and fragility of happiness (the idea that happiness is fleeting and may be easily and quickly replaced by less favorable states). In addition, it was found that fear and fragility of happiness mediated the relationship between insecure attachment and subjective well-being.

1. Introduction

Attachment insecurity can be represented across two major dimensions: attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016). Whereas attachment security has been found to promote overall well-being, both dimensions of attachment insecurity have been found to contribute positively to mental disorders (Carr et al., 2010), and negatively to subjective well-being (SWB; e.g., Lavy & Littman-Ovadia, 2011; Wei, Liao, Ku, & Shaffer, 2011). As Mikulincer and Shaver's (2016) comprehensive review shows, researchers have identified many of the mediators of the relationship between insecure attachment and indicators of psychopathology and SWB, including anxiety, self-esteem, and self-efficacy expectancies. The present study suggests that fear of happiness (FOH) and fragility of happiness beliefs may also function as mediators of this relationship. FOH and fragility concern people's personal beliefs about happiness and its desirability. The research to date has not investigated the potential role of conceptions of well-being as mediators of the influence of attachment insecurity on well-being.

FOH is defined by Joshanloo (2013) as an aversion to the experience and/or expression of happiness due to the belief that happiness may cause bad things to happen. Fragility of happiness is defined as the view that happiness is fleeting and may easily turn into less favorable states (Joshanloo et al., 2015). FOH and fragility reflect a hesitation towards the positive value of happiness and its pursuit. Research has documented negative relationships between FOH and fragility and SWB (Agbo & Ngwu, 2017; Joshanloo et al., 2015).

1.1. Attachment insecurity, fragility, and FOH

Previous research indicates that insecurely attached persons may feel unconformable with the experience/expression of happiness (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016). For example, Mikulincer and Shaver's (2016) review of the empirical evidence suggests that attachment-anxious persons are more likely than securely attached persons to endorse an external locus of control (e.g., emphasizing luck and powerful others), leading them to perceive less control over life events. This external locus of control is consistent with considering happiness and life in general as fragile and difficult to control (Joshanloo, Park, & Park, 2017). Avoidant people tend to regard the experience/expression of happiness as an undesirable indicator of interpersonal closeness, and hence a sign of vulnerability which they are inclined to avoid (Cassidy, 1994). Insecurely attached persons have been found to be prone to experience distress and confusion in reaction to a partner's expression of happiness (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2005). Consistent with these findings, an fMRI study (Moutsiana et al., 2014) found differential patterns of activation and deactivation in brain regions of secure and insecure persons, indicating insecure individuals' relative inefficiency in regulating positive emotions.

In sum, empirical evidence suggests that insecure attachment orientations tend to interfere with the process of savoring happy feelings and capitalizing on positive emotions. Insecurity also tends to lead to a hopeless and fatalistic outlook on life and happiness in general (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016). This may lead to the expectation that happiness is difficult to achieve, and when achieved will not last long. Therefore, insecurity is expected to be associated with higher levels of FOH and fragility, and this association may be one of the mechanisms

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Table 1
Descriptive statistics, internal consistencies, and correlations.

	M	SD	α	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Dismissing	3.55	0.82	0.72	1.00					
2. Preoccupied	4.00	0.83	0.71	0.27**	1.00				
3. FOH	2.60	1.31	0.90	0.32**	0.25**	1.00			
4. Fragility	4.98	1.16	0.83	0.15**	0.32**	0.34**	1.00		
5. Negative affect	2.20	0.85	0.87	0.32**	0.44**	0.38**	0.35**	1.00	
6. Positive affect	3.08	0.79	0.91	-0.27**	-0.16**	-0.25**	-0.22**	-0.54**	1.00
7. Life satisfaction	4.10	1.24	0.86	-0.14*	-0.30**	-0.26**	-0.30**	-0.49**	0.53**

* $p < 0.05$.
** $p < 0.01$.

Table 2
Fit indices.

Model	χ^2	df	CFI	SRMR	AIC	BIC	RMSEA	90% CI for RMSEA	
								Low	Up
1. Initial model	49.109**	12	0.923	0.033	7627.1	7784.8	0.099	0.071	0.128
2. Final model	20.994*	11	0.979	0.023	7601.0	7762.5	0.054	0.015	0.088

SRMR = standardized root mean square residual, RMSEA = root mean square error of approximation, CFI = comparative fit index, AIC = Akaike information criterion, BIC = Bayesian information criterion.

** $p < 0.01$.
* $p < 0.05$.

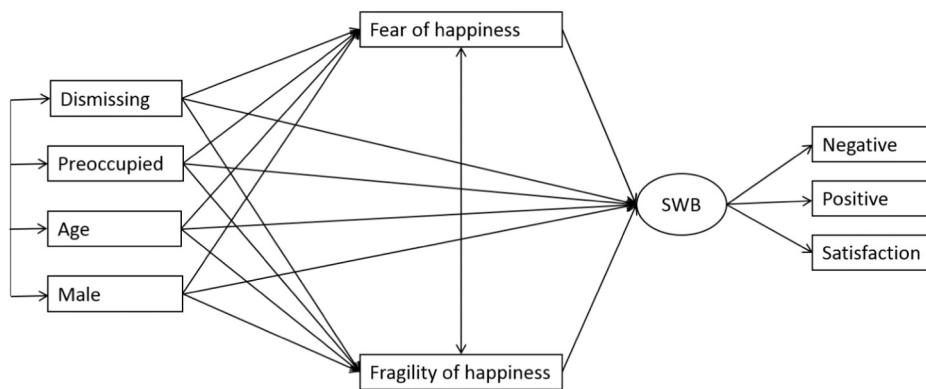


Fig. 1. The final model of the study.
Note. There is a covariance between preoccupied and positive affect which is not shown in the figure.

through which insecurity undermines SWB. It was predicted here that FOH and fragility would mediate the relationships between insecure attachment styles and SWB.

2. Methods

2.1. Participants

The study used a convenience sample of 316 students of various majors at a private university in Daegu, South Korea (65.8% females, $M_{age} = 20.63$, $SD_{age} = 2.65$). Participants responded to the questionnaires individually or in class groups. Participation was compensated for by a small gift. The study included other variables which were not related to the present study and thus were not used.

2.2. Measures

2.2.1. SWB

SWB is predominantly conceptualized as consisting of high life satisfaction, high positive affect, and low negative affect (Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999). The Satisfaction With Life Scale (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985) was used to measure life satisfaction. Each of the five items is rated on a 7-point scale ranging from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (7). The Negative and Positive Affect Scale

(Joshanloo, 2017; Mroczek & Kolarz, 1998) was used to measure positive and negative affect. The scale includes six items for negative affect (e.g., nervous) and six items for positive affect (e.g., cheerful). Respondents indicate how much of the time (ranging from 1 = none of the time to 5 = all of the time) during the past 30 days, they felt each of the affective states.

2.2.2. FOH

The fear of happiness scale (Joshanloo, 2013) was used to assess FOH (e.g., “having lots of joy and fun causes bad things to happen”). The five items are rated on a 7-point scale ranging from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (7). The scale has shown acceptable statistical properties across 14 nations, including Korea (Joshanloo et al., 2014).

2.2.3. Fragility of happiness

The 4-item fragility of happiness scale (Joshanloo et al., 2015) was used to measure fragility of happiness beliefs (e.g., “Happiness is fragile”). The items were rated on a 7-point scale ranging from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (7). The scale has shown acceptable statistical properties across 15 nations, including Korea (Joshanloo et al., 2015).

2.2.4. Attachment styles

The preoccupied (e.g., “I want to be completely emotionally

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