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STUDY OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN OBJECT RELATIONS AND DEFENSE MECHANISMS WITH MARITAL SATISFACTION

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ABSTRACT

Objective: The present survey launched an investigation between object relations and defense mechanisms with marital satisfaction. **Methodology:** The studied group was the employees in Shahr Bank, 136 of whom was between 25 and 50 year old and has been married for at least two years and was selected by convenience sampling. The seriannoitsequ were applied to conduct this research are Bell's Object Relations questionnaire, Defense Mechanisms DSQ-40 and Golombok-Rust Marital satisfaction .It is noted that higher score in Golombok-Rust questionnaire indicates lower martial satisfaction. Descriptive statistics and inferential statistics) Univariate regression were used for the analysis of the data. **Result:** There is positive and significant connection between marital dissatisfaction and the two object relations components (insecure attachment and egocentricity (and immature defense mechanism . There is also reverse connection between mature defense mechanism and marital dissatisfaction. **Conclusion:** This research shows that there is a relation between defense mechanism and object relations and marital satisfaction.

Keywords: *Object Relations, Defense Mechanism, Marital Satisfaction*

INTRODUCTION

Marriage induces the formation of relationship which is unique in meeting needs, compared to other forms of human relations. Other human relations mostly encompass about one aspect of human life, but marriage covers the physical, emotional and social aspects, and through which starts a biological, economic and psycho-social relation between the couple (Lucas, 2002; from Danesh, 2010). Researches reveal that: factors like attachment, commitment, empathy, trust, faithfulness and intimacy are effective in the quality of marital relationship (Hazan and Shaver, 1987; Feeney, 1999; Thompson and Stewart, 2007; Blair, 2008; Gouin, 2009; Atik, 2010; Altin, 2010; Dattilo, 2010; Asefchi, 2009; Hatamy and Colleagues, 2011).

According to object relations approach, the relationship between couples depends on pre-introjected patterns, and the ability to love and to be loved, comes from the early interactions with mother. The term "object" which is a scientific term and is brought up by Freud, refers to anything that meets a need. In a broad concept the term object refers to an important person or thing that is the aim or subject of someone's feelings or drives (St Clair, 2000). Object relations theorists believe the interactions between mother and child is the most important factor of the psychological development of a child. This theory postulates that the mind of child takes shape and develops via early experiences with child's caretakers, and these early patterns of relation are permanent during the life course of and any disturbance in this relations can explains the psychopathology (Cicchetti and Cohen, 2006).

Although Freud didn't explain a widespread theory of object relations, but maintained that choosing a desired object in adulthood and having emotional relations and quiddity and quality of child's relations in early years (Sadock and Sadock, 2007). Like Freud, Melanie Klein believed in innate drives but emphasized the significance object relationships in development and psychopathology (Summers, 2007). She believed that immediately after a baby's birth, it starts relations with people. Klein concludes that the introjection of these early object relations that forms the life of the child. Her theory is the origin of Object Relations theory. One of its results was the importance of the role of mother, while Freud's classic theory maintains that fathers have the essential role in personality development (Susan, 2006).

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Fairbairn didn't believe that a person is motivated by their subconscious sexual force or anger; rather he believed that libido looks for object and not for pleasure (Spaulding, 1997). According to Fairbairn's theory, infant personality is built from the infant's perception of the actual family experience. This mixture of experiences, determines the psychic structure of the mind. This structure is one consisting of a system of conscious and subconscious object relations, that comes from baby's experiences from real relations. Fairbairn's Mind Structure theory had the greatest impact in marital therapy with object relations approach (Scharff and Scharff, 2004).

Donald (1915) didn't agree with Freud, either about the need for pleasure being the main drive. Rather, he believed that intimacy and relations with others are the essential needs. He believed that pleasure is a secondary need. "Transitional object" is a term invented by Winnicott. Transitional object is a toy or warm blanket that whenever a child recognizes that its mother is a separate person and can be away, the child hold onto the transitional object instead. Winnicott believed that a transitional object is not an internal object, yet it is not an external object. The quality of this internal object depends on the external one. Winnicott emphasized that attachment to a transitional object results from experiencing a good caretaking by mother. In a longitudinal study on 33 mother-baby, some of whom were attached to a transitional object showed more secure attachment towards their mothers, in comparison to the babies with less attachment to transitional object (Bachar, 1997). Absence of a good mother in a child's attachment phase, and failure in reparation, will make the child search for what he missed and to compensate, he'll take other objects as substitute for his mother (Winnicott, 1951; from Summers, 2007).

John Bowlby proposed the attachment theory to explain different patterns of relations between babies and caretakers. According to Bowlby's theory of ethology, feelings of attachment resulted from child-parent relations are crucial to the emotional development. Evidently, the memories of childhood attachment are a reliable predictor for emotional relations in adulthood. Adults, who described their past attachments as secure, were able to easily settle intimate relations and hardly worried about being left or being intimate. Factors like inability to be intimate, seclusion, distrust and faithlessness, inability to solve a conflict, are the factors behind marital dissatisfaction, all of which them are the characteristics of a person with insecure attachment. People with insecure attachment show vulnerability to being left, they fear isolation and loneliness, and are also worried about someone hurting them. (Hazan and Shaver, 1987; Feeney, 1995; Feeney 1999; Bell, 2003; Muraru and Turliuc, 2012; Besharat, 2001; Besharat, 2011; Ganji, 2011) Another function of ego is defense mechanism. The purpose of the defense is to remove unpleasant feelings. Most defenses act as a moderator of feelings resulted from inner conflicts, and are mostly created in special points in phase of development (Blackman, 2004). There are many evidences that choosing the defense mechanism, explains different people's reactions towards stressful situations (Vaillant, 1992). Generally, defense mechanisms are subconscious responses towards threats received by inner conflicts or beliefs and emotions involved, that include five characteristics (Vaillant, 1986; from Grimm, Brannon and Juni, 1997).

- They manage instincts and emotions.
- They are unconscious processes.
- Each defense is a discrete entity.
- Although they often indicative of major psychopathology, they are not inalterable.
- They can be pathologically adaptive.

Based on hierarchical classification of defense mechanisms (Vaillant, 1976, 1971), 20 mechanisms are classified into 3 categories, mature defense, neurotic and immature defense. Mature defense mechanisms use adaptive, normal and useful defense methods, and immature and neurotic defense mechanisms use inflexible and not viable defense methods (Besharat, 2012). Based on the results of the studies it can be inferred that mature defense mechanisms can understand and accept the amount and modality of the threat, and they act in order to minimize the stress caused by the threat. Neurotic defense mechanisms on the other hand, adjust the stress by distorting the meaning or effect of the threat source. Hence using these methods are effective to some extent, but compared to mature defense mechanism they have more negative ramification and are less effective in resmoving stress. Immature defense mechanism distorts the

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importance and scale of an event to lessen the stress. One result of this will be lack of awareness; another effect is that immature defense mechanisms usually lead to inappropriate or ineffective actions (Braddy *et al.*, 2002; Farjad, 2013).

The application of defense mechanisms indicates conflict in case they become the customary response to hardship. For instance, a research conducted has revealed that: many defense mechanisms have features of “self control” and “self acceptance” (Fenichle, 1945; Kuhat, 1977; from Cramer, 2007) Another research has shown that, men that use mature defense mechanisms like sublimation and repression, have higher levels of psychological stability in middle age, and those who use immature defense mechanisms like projection and self-attack, will be facing psychological problems in their lives (Cramer, 2003).

According to above mentioned points, object relations and defense mechanisms are both effective in conditions of marital life, and due to inadequate studies and researches, there have always been a weakness of psychodynamic theories. Hence because there have been few researches about the effect of object relations and defense mechanisms on marital satisfaction, this research helps visualize what is predominantly noetic.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study group surveyed, were the employees in Shahr Bank who were between 25 and 50 year old and have been married for at least two years and had an academic degree of diploma or higher. Sampling method was convenience, and of the 220 questionnaires were distributed among them, 142 of which were returned. After taking out 6 of them, 136 questionnaires (93 men and 43 women) were studied data collection was carried out as follows:

Golombok Rust Inventory of Sexual Satisfaction (GRISS)

This questionnaire consists of a 28 question item. In 4 degree Likert scale, it measures problems in marital relations regarding sensibility and care about the other's needs, and commitment, faithfulness, cooperation, sympathy, expressing love, trust, intimacy and empathy, from score 0 to 3. Hence, the total score will be between 0 and 84. The standardized score of features are calculated in 9 degrees based on the intensity of marital problems. Note that higher score indicates marital deterioration. The Persian translation of this questionnaire was calculated with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.92 for wife samples and 0.94 for husband samples, indicating homogeneity of the questionnaire. Correlation coefficients between scores of features, in two rounds with a two weeks interval were calculated $r=0.94$ for all features, women features $r=0.93$ and $r=0.95$ for men features, indicating stability of retest of the questionnaire (Besharat, 2008).

Defense Style Questionnaire (DSQ40)

The defense mechanisms questionnaire of Andrews and Colleagues (1993), includes 40 questions that are in 9 degree Likert scale (from absolute agreement to absolute opposition), measures 20 defense mechanisms according to 3 defense mechanism categories, mature, neurotic and immature. The questions 2, 3, 5, 21, 24, 29 and 35 represent mature defense mechanisms, the questions 1, 6, 11, 17, 28, 33, 34, and 40 represent pathological defense mechanisms, and the rest of the questions represent immature defense mechanisms. Mature defense mechanisms include sublimation, humor, anticipation, and suppression, and neurotic defense mechanisms include undoing, pseudo-altruism, idealization and reaction formation. The immature defense mechanisms include 12 mechanisms, projection, and passive aggression, acting out, isolation, devaluation, autistic fantasy, denial, displacement, dissociation, splitting, rationalization, and somatization. Face validity of DSQ40 is high and agreement between assessors (5 assessors) to synchronize each defense with its subject is reported 0.74 (Andrews and colleagues, 1993). Correlation between mature defenses is 0.97, for neurotic 0.94 and for immature 0.95. Correlation for test –retest in 18 months period for a sample of 56 people for mature defense mechanisms were reported 0.60 and for immature defense mechanisms 0.71. In Iran, the internal correlation of questions with Cronbach's alpha coefficient for a sample of 214 students of Tehran University, for mature, immature and neurotic defense mechanisms is respectively 0.75, 0.73 and 0.74 (Besharat and Colleagues, 2001). Cronbach's alpha coefficient for questions of each defense mechanism is considered satisfactory by Andrews and

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Colleagues (1997). Psychometric properties of the Persian version of Defense Style questionnaire in researches done in years 1999-2006 on unhealthy subjects (423 people) and normal subjects (1397 people) is analyzed and verified (Besharat, 2001; Besharat and Colleagues, 2011)

3- Bell Object Relations and Reality Testing Inventory (BORRTI)

This questionnaire was devised by Bell, Billington and Becker in 1986. Shortened version of it is made up of 45 items and is a part of the 90 items Object Relations and reality testing inventory, which is a self-reporting means of assessing the object relations. This questionnaire has been standardized for clinical and non-clinical populations, and has been applied in many studies about interpersonal relations, and in diagnosis and predicting mental pathology (Hansen, 2002; From Gholizadeh). Bell’s object relations questionnaire presents 4 sub-scales to measure different aspects of object relations, those are: alienation (ALN), insecure attachment (IA), egocentricity (EGC), social incompetence (SI).

The estimate of inner homogeneity through Alpha and Spearman-Brown’s splitting coefficient, for the 4 subscales of object relations is reported to be between 0.78 and 0.90 (Selby, 2000; Hoprich, 2003; from Gholizadeh, 2009). Gholizadeh (2009) has translated this questionnaire into Persian and has confirmed its face validity and content validity through many specialists, and has obtained its test-retest reliability for different subscales between 0.6 and 0.8.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Studying the first hypothesis: There’s a connection between object relations “alienation, insecure attachment, egocentricity and social incompetence” and marital satisfaction.

Table 1: Descriptive indicators of variables studied

Component	Max	Min	Standard deviation	Mean	Kurtosis	Skewness
Marital Satisfaction	52	3	2.5	3.64	-0.741	0.667
Alienation	18	2	3/67	6/72	0/813	0.230
Insecure Attachment	13	0	2/76	4/88	0/418	-0/09
Egocentricity	29	7	4/17	15/76	0/573	0/815
Social Incompetence	19	0	4/48	5.58	0/778	0/117
Mature	68	8	11/05	42/37	0/140	-0/490
Pathological	68	8	10/62	41/19	0/235	-0/483
Immature	168	24	26/82	103/84	0/596	-0/008

Table 2: Correlation coefficients of object relations “alienation, insecure attachment, egocentricity, social incompetence” and marital satisfaction

Pearson’s Correlation Coefficient	Marital Satisfaction	Alienation	Insecure Attachment	Egocentricity	Social Incompetence
Marital Satisfaction	1	0/325**	0/376**	0/382**	0/09
Alienation		1	0/567**	0/6**	0/489**
Secure Attachment			1	0/604**	0/448**
Egocentricity				1	0/259**
Social Incompetence					1

Numbers marked by ** are meaningful to 0.01

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Table 1 shows the maximum and minimum of scores, the mean and standard deviation of variables, according to the kurtosis and skewness, the distribution of the data is normal.

Since, according to table 2, the correlation between object relations “alienation, insecure attachment, egocentricity” as the predictive variable and marital satisfaction as the criterion variable, is significant and positive, to explain and analyze the role of each, the data of research were put in stepwise regression equation, and of the 4 components of object relations, only insecure attachment and egocentricity have positive and significant relation with marital dissatisfaction, and both together explain 18.1% of marital satisfaction, that is illustrated in tables 3, 4 and 5.

Table 3: Regression analysis between marital satisfaction, and egocentricity and insecure attachment

Component	R (Regression Coefficient)	Square root of correlation coefficient	Adjusted Coefficient	Estimated Standard Error
Egocentricity	0/382	0/146	139	2/30
Egocentricity and Insecure Attachment	0/452	0/181	0/168	2/26

Table 4: Summary of regression analysis of marital satisfaction through insecure attachment and egocentricity

Model	Square Root's Summation	Degrees Of Freedom	Square Root's Average	F	Significance level
Regression Effect	105/309	1	75/155	14/655	0/001
Remaining Effect	682/036	134	5/128		
Summation	346/832	135			

Table 5: ???

Component	Beta Coefficient		Standard Beta Coefficient	T Ratio	Significance level
	B	Standard Error			
Consonant	1/802	0/408		4/619	0/001
Insecure Attachment	0/158	0/66	0/234	2/280	0/019
Egocentricity	0/133	0/504	0/241	2/451	0/016

Studying the second hypothesis: There's a relation between defense mechanisms and marital satisfaction.

Table 6: Correlation coefficient between defense mechanisms “mature, pathological and immature”, and marital satisfaction

Pearson's Correlation Coefficient	Marital Satisfaction	Mature	neurotic	Immature
Marital Satisfaction	1	-0/102	0/002	0/252**
Mature neurotic		1	0/558**	0/354**
Immature			1	0/540**
				1

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According to table 6, there is a positive and significant correlation between “immature” defense mechanism as predictive variable, and marital satisfaction as criterion variable. But to check the covering effect and to analyze and explain each one’s role, the research’s data was put in stepwise regression equation, and the results are:

Table 7: Regression analysis between marital satisfaction, and mature and immature defense mechanisms

Component	R (correlation Coefficient)	Correlation Coefficient’s Root	Square	Adjusted Coefficient	Estimated Standard Error
Immature	0/252	0/064		0/057	2/41
Mature and Immature	0/325	0/106		0/092	2/36

Table 8: Summary of regression analysis of people’s marital satisfaction through defense mechanisms “immature” and “mature”

Component	Summation of Square Roots	Degree of Freedom	Average of Square Roots	F amount	Significance level
Regression Effect	87/880	2	43/940	7/850	0/001
Remaining Effect	744/465	133	5/597		
Summation	832/346	135			

Table 9: The variable of defense mechanisms immature and mature is put in regression equation

Component	Beta Coefficient		Standard Coefficient	Beta	t Ratio	Meaning Level
	B	Standard Error	Beta			
Consonant	2/494	0/976			2/555	0/012
Immature	0/031	0/008	0/33		3/763	0/001
Mature	-0.049	0/02	-0/219		-2/494	0/014

According to square root of correlation coefficient in table 7, it is specified that 10.6% of marital satisfaction is explained by “mature” and “immature” defense mechanisms, and according to tables 8 and 9 it is specified that there is a positive and significant relation between immature defense mechanism and marital dissatisfaction, also there is a negative relation between mature defense mechanism and marital dissatisfaction.

Discussion

This research was conducted to study early relations with objects and their effects on marital satisfaction, and it is specified that there’s a significant and positive relation between marital dissatisfaction and two components of object relations “insecure attachment” and “egocentricity”, these two explain a total of 18.1% of marital satisfaction. Egocentricity indicates lower empathy, willingness to protect self in relationships, and tendency to control and use other people. Higher scores in egocentricity indicates three attitude towards relationships, which are suspicion and mistrust towards others’ motives, taking advantage of relationships, and misusing others to reach personal desires. These people never express empathy in their relations, and have no awareness or concern about other people’s understanding or emotions (Bell, 2003). Characteristics mentioned for being egocentric are features of a dynamic psyche, or a narcissist and borderline personality. Klein believed that a borderline or narcissist personality is a result of fixation in the non-psychosis period of schizoid-paranoid. Research has shown that empathy, is

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the precursor for intimacy and positive interactions in a relationship (Dattilo, 2010). Lack of empathy in personalities causes prejudice, which is a feature of relations between discordant couples (Blair, 2008). Also control and taking advantage of a relation that should be based on empathy, intimacy and cooperation can impair to the bilateral relation.

The role of parents, especially mother and early caretaker, in creating a kind of attachment, has been shown in different researches. Kernberg, an object relations theorist, believes that “structures”, or permanent psychological patterns, are created because the baby introjects its first relations with the environment, especially relations with mother. Kernberg names it “introjected object relations”. This introjected object relation later in the growth process will develop internally and externally, and externally it will turn into complicated relations with people in that environment (St Clair, 2000). According to attachment theory, the attachment pattern of a person is formed during childhood and predicts later relations of the person (Feeney, 1999). Hence in line with this survey, many researches were conducted and showed that the attachment pattern has effects on marital relationships, depending on the pattern “secure” or “insecure”, may cause marital satisfaction or dissatisfaction. The results of this research are in agreement with findings of Hazan and Shaver (1987), Feeney (1999), Thompson and Stewart (2007), Gouin (2009), Atik (2010), Altin (2010), Asefchi (2009), Hatamy and Colleagues (2011), Wongpakaran (2012), and confirms them.

People with avoidant style insecure attachment are distrustful and cold, and self-disclosure is hard for them (Cooper *et al.*, 1998; Feeney and Noller, 1990; from Kaplan, 2002). Lack of trust towards people causes separation and losing people’s support. People with insecure attachment are afraid of close relations and avoid intimacy (Hazan and Shaver, 1987). Fairbairn believes that the primary need of a child is for his object to accept his love, and if the object rejects his love, the child faces failure which results in feeling shameful, weakness and desperation, also he won’t feel lovely and to protect himself, he will avoid objects (Summers, 2007).

In a research conducted by Feeney in 1995, it was shown that people with insecure attachment feel more uncomfortable with intimacy and close relations, and they experience much stress in their relationships, and remember more negative experiences, they also have more control over their negative feelings like anger, disturbance and stress. These cases are due to their high stress in relationships (Feeney 1995; from Feeney 1999). People with avoidant style insecure attachment considers love to be a property, and demand absolute coalescence, and are erratic and jealous. For people with ambivalent style insecure attachment, it’s easy to fall in love but hard to find true love. They are dependent, and demand assurance and are afraid to be left alone (Cooper *et al.*, 1998).

Melanie Klein believes that subconscious hatred of the love object at infancy will create a negative feeling of love. She believes that love and the ability to maintain romantic relationships depends on reparation experience from depression period. Without such experience, the person will be afraid that his anger would hurt the object that he loves, which will make his romantic relationship in ceaseless uncertainty and caution, especially when feeling of anger comes. Klein believes that a good relationship with object in adulthood depends on the result of the depression phase, and a successful romantic relationship next time, will complete the reparation of the depression phase (Summers, 2007). Researches confirm these results, in a research done by Muraru and Turliuc in 2012, it was shown that the structure of primary family, will determine the attachment pattern of romantic relationship, and this pattern is the predictor to stability to marital relationship (Muraru and Turliuc, 2012).

People with avoidant style insecure attachment, tend to report activities that indicate lower psychological intimacy, like extramarital sexual relationship, having affair for one night and loveless sex (Hazan, 1994). Winnicott believes that absence of a good enough mother in a child’s attachment phase, and failure in reparation, will make the child search for what he missed and to make up, he’ll take other objects as substitute for his mother. Winnicott says that the quest for the missing object in adulthood through satisfying the body, causes addiction to food, narcotics, alcohol or promiscuity (Winnicott, 1951; from Summers, 2007). Melanie Klein says that the reason some people are unable to be faithful to their partner and stay in one relationship, is because of their subconscious fear of hurting their love object that makes

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them deny their attachment to the object. In fact avoiding stress in the depression phase _ which is caused by lack of a good object is the cause of it. The reason for avoiding a romantic life and leaving all emotional bonds, is to prevent experiencing hurting the love object again (Summers, 2007). Researches show that people with insecure attachment have few commitments to marital life. There's a significant relation between insecure attachment and cheating in marriage (Andrewd, 2005; from Sohrabi and Rasouli, 2013).

Object relations are inside psyche structures not inter personal events. Object relations are greatly affected by early interpersonal relations, and they affect later interpersonal relations. Hence, it should be noted that in this article we tried to explain based on the two theories (attachment and object relations). Attachment theory aims to describe attributes and interpersonal relations of people with insecure attachment and many researchers have verified it, and object relation theory explains these attitude with emphasis on intrapsychic dimension.

Second aim is analyzing defense mechanisms in marital satisfaction, this correlation is also significant and is specified that immature defense mechanism has a positive significant correlation with marital dissatisfaction, and also mature defense mechanism has a negative significant correlation with marital dissatisfaction. Defense mechanisms are automatic psychological responses to internal or external causes of stress with emotional conflicts. Marital conflicts are stressful, and the way to deal with the stress, depending on using mature or immature defense mechanisms, has a great impact on directing marital conflicts. As researches show, mature defense mechanisms are effective in setting social relations and are a cause of mental health and longer life (Malone, 2013). Also Vaillant in his longitudinal 50 year study realized that those who use mature defense mechanisms have a normal stability in life. This stability manifests in stable economy position, happy life, satisfaction with marital life, and inner feelings and visual evidence of a healthy body (Sadock and Sadock, 2007). Primary psychological defenses, like projection, denial, devaluation and splitting, indicate tendency and willingness towards immature defenses that are interwoven to inner unconscious sources and desires, for example those who use splitting defense mechanism are unable to understand weak points and positive aspects of their partner simultaneously, or projection mechanism keeps one's feeling of anger by identifying another person as the cause of the anger, or projective identification, which was introduced by Melanie Klein, is also an immature defense mechanism, and is projecting one's part onto object; and the external object, by identification and control of the projected parts, is somehow captured, and is one of factors effective in marital conflicts, is the centre of attention of marital therapists with object relations approach. Research has shown that defense mechanisms are effective in reducing stress and in mental and physical health; some of those researches were done by, Vaillant (2000), McMahon (2005), Cramer (2007) and Malone (2013). Grimm, Brannon and Juni (1997) also showed that turning against self mechanism that includes defenses like displacement and identification, and turning against object mechanism including defenses like masochism and introjection, that are both immature mechanisms, has positive correlation with marital dissatisfaction. Limitation of this research is that sampling was done in convenience way, hence we can't generalize the result on the whole society. It is suggested that similar researches be done in other societies and sampling should be chosen randomly.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I thank Mr. A'layi, managing director of Planning Organization of Shahr Bank, and Mr. Pourmirza expert of research and development, and all employees in Shahr Bank especially those who took part in filling questionnaires and cooperated with me.

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