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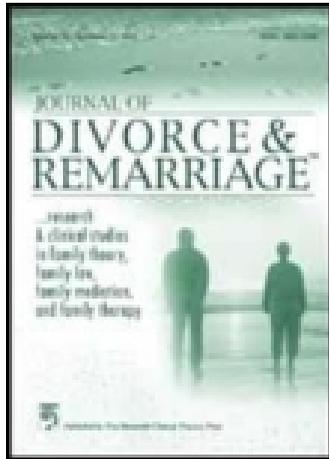
The Study of the Relationship Among Marital Satisfaction, Attachment Styles, and Communication Patterns in Divorcing Couples

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The Study of the Relationship Among Marital Satisfaction, Attachment Styles, and Communication Patterns in Divorcing Couples

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This article aimed to assess the relationship between attachment styles, communication patterns, and marital satisfaction in divorcing couples. The study utilized the descriptive correlation method. One hundred couples, who referred to the Shafa Court, were selected via available sampling. The research instruments included the Revised Adult Attachment Scale (RAAS), Communication Pattern Questionnaire (CPQ), and Enrich Questionnaire. The mean ± standard deviation of subjects in secure, avoidant, and anxious attachment styles were 2.99 ± 0.39, 3.08 ± 0.38, and 3.25 ± 0.66, respectively. There was a significant relationship between attachment styles and communication patterns. However, attachment styles and communication patterns are not predictors of marital satisfaction in divorcing couples.

KEYWORDS   attachment styles, communication patterns, marital satisfaction

Substantial evidence shows that married individuals are mentally healthier than never-married and previously married individuals (Marcussen, 2005). This is related to the fact that marriage helps individuals avoid the stress that follows relationship dissolution (Liu, Elliott, & Umberson, 2010).

Marital satisfaction is a common indicator of family happiness and sta-bility. Many factors such as demographic characteristics and external stress affect marital satisfaction. The family relationship is the most important factor for enhancing marital satisfaction; in fact, a balanced and successful family is dependent on it.

Attachment styles play a major role in establishing family relationships. Attachment theory describes the dynamics of long-term relationships among humans, and explains how parents' interaction with children influences their development (Alexandrov, 2010). Attachment styles might be more directly related to maladaptive relationship dynamics, as they are specific to romantic relationships.

The findings of Zhang's (2012) study showed that two dimensions of adult attachment styles (anxiety and avoidance) are related to self-improvement through various regulatory strategies. Moreover, anxiety and avoidant attachment styles are associated with various problems and disorders such as aggression (Hare, Miga, & Allen, 2009), Internet addic-tion (Senormanc, Senormanc, Güçlü, & Konkan, 2013), and Overeaters Anonymous (OA; Hertz, Addaad, & Ronel, 2012). Therefore, determining the effect of attachment styles on marital relationship is of high importance.

In this regard, another main factor is marital and family communica-tion in relationships. Communication plays an important role in determining marital satisfaction. In fact, in successful communication interactions, people have to learn to care for other people's emotions and thoughts. On the other hand, an unhealthy and dysfunctional relationship decreases care and sym-pathy among family members; therefore, communication problems lead to many relationship issues.

Communication patterns refer to common ways of communicating in a family. Some conflicts in communication patterns reflect strategies, which are less helpful for relationships; other studies represent active and constructive negotiations (Sadeghi et al., 2011). Also, many studies have shown that cou-ple communication in the face of conflicts is associated with or predictive of marital satisfaction (Noller & Feeney, 2002).

Most studies on marital and mental health have focused on the positive effects of marriage on the mental health of an individual, but few studies have assessed the potential moderators of family relationship (Raj, Saggurti, Balaiah, & Silverman, 2005).

Although marriage has been associated with many advantages, these benefits might not be similar across different groups; in other words, this positive association does not include all individuals. Contrarily, marriage might be unrelated or even harmful to the mental health of an individual (Williams & Umberson, 2004). Little is known, however, about the causes of conflict in relationships and processes through which interpersonal relation-ships become effective. Furthermore, most studies on relationship standards

have been conducted in Western countries, and further research is required in Asian and other cultures.

This study aimed to assess the relationship among attachment styles, communication patterns, and marital satisfaction in divorcing couples. In this study, different aspects of five hypotheses were assessed to find the link between marital satisfaction, attachment styles, and communication patterns. These hypotheses are as follows:

1. There is a significant relationship between attachment styles and communication patterns in divorcing couples.
2. There is a significant relationship between attachment styles and marital satisfaction in divorcing couples.
3. There is a significant relationship between communication patterns and marital satisfaction in divorcing couples.
4. Attachment styles and communication patterns are predictors of marital satisfaction in divorcing couples.
5. Attachment styles have an indirect although significant relationship with marital satisfaction and communication patterns in divorcing couples.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Using a descriptive correlation method, this study was conducted on all divorcing couples referred to the Shafa Court in Mashhad, located in northeast Iran, in October, November, and December 2010. In this study, 100 individuals were selected from people referred to the Shafa Court using the available sampling method. Ninety-six questionnaires were completed by 47 and 49 women and men, respectively, and incomplete questionnaires were eliminated.

Written consent was obtained from all participants to confirm their willingness to participate in the study. This study was conducted following the ethical standards of the Iranian Psychological Association.

Research Instruments

REVISED ADULT ATTACHMENT SCALE

The Revised Adult Attachment Scale (RAAS) is an 18-item questionnaire on which participants rate their feelings about romantic relationships on a 5-point Likert scale. This scale measures three subscales of attachment styles including closeness (being comfortable with closeness and intimacy), dependency (capacity to depend on others), and anxiety (fear of being abandoned). The RAAS scores were converted into four categories: secure, preoccupied, dismissing, and fearful (Collins, 1996).

In this study, Cronbach's alpha for this scale was over .80. Each item cluster or scale was also normed for 100 adolescents in Iran. According to Pakdaman (2004), Cronbach's alpha was reported as .57, .45, and .71 for closeness, dependency, and anxiety subclasses, respectively.

COMMUNICATION PATTERN QUESTIONNAIRE

The Communication Pattern Questionnaire (CPQ) is a 35-item self-assessment of spouses' perceptions of marital interactions, rated on a 9-point Likert scale. In addition, on this questionnaire, couples independently self-report their interaction patterns. CPQ evaluates interactions within three time periods: when a problem occurs, during problem discussion, and after it (Futris, Campbell, Nielsen, & Burwell, 2010). This questionnaire was normed by Ebadatpour (2000) in Iran. According to Ebadatpour's study, the correlation coefficients of the three CPQ subscales, including mutual constructive communication, demand/withdraw communication, and demand/withdraw roles, were .58, −.58, and .35, respectively.

The internal consistency was calculated to determine the reliability of the questionnaires. Internal consistency scores were .50, .51, .53, and .55 for mutual constructive communication, demand/withdraw communication, male-demand/female-withdraw, and female-demand/male-withdraw subscales, respectively (Ebadatpour, 2000).

ENRICH QUESTIONNAIRE

The Enrich Questionnaire is an original 115-item questionnaire that includes 12 categories. Using this questionnaire, happily married couples can be distinguished from unhappily married couples with 85% to 95% accuracy. The questions on the Enrich Questionnaire have five options (*strongly disagree*, *disagree*, *neither agree nor disagree*, *agree*, and *strongly agree*), which are classified according to a Likert scale. The Cronbach's alpha of this questionnaire was reported at .92 by Olson.

In this study, we used the short form of the Enrich Questionnaire containing 47 items to evaluate marital satisfaction. Validity and reliability of this questionnaire have been measured in Iran. The Cronbach's alpha was .93, and test–retest correlation was calculated to be .78 and .83 in men and women, respectively (Atari, Amanelahifard, & Mehrabizade Honarmand, 2006). As shown by Sanaee Zaker (2000), the subscales of this questionnaire can separate happily married from unhappily married couples.

Design

In this study, we used descriptive and inferential statistics for calculating and analyzing the data. For the descriptive statistical analysis, we used descriptive

indicators such as mean and standard deviation. Inferential statistical index was used for analyzing the variables. For performing inferential statistical analysis, correlation coefficient was calculated to demonstrate the relationship between variables; a backward method was used to identify valuable predictor variables, and path analysis was employed to study the causal relationship between these variables. SPSS Version 17 was used for data analysis. A *p* value less than .01 was significant for all measurements.

RESULTS

Demographic Characteristics

According to the results of this study, the mean ages of women and men were 28.00 ($SD = 6.66$) and 28.07 ($SD = 6.11$) years, respectively. In total, the mean age was 28.27 ($SD = 6.63$) years.

Among female participants, 65.7% of women were married for 1 to 10 years and 34.3% were married for 11 to 20 years. Among male subjects, 73.3% were married for 1 to 10 years, and 26.7% were married for 11 to 20 years. In total, 68% and 32% of the participants were married for 1 to 10 and 11 to 20 years, respectively.

Among female participants, 37.5%, 41.7%, 16.6%, and 4.2% had one, two, three, and four or more children, respectively. Also, the results showed that 37.5%, 50.0%, 12.5%, and 0.0% of men had one, two, three, and four or more children, respectively. In total, 37.5%, 43.8%, 15.6%, and 3.1% of the subjects had one, two, three, and four or more children, respectively.

The results indicated that 2.8% of women were analphabetic, 25% had less than secondary school education, 55.6% had high school education, and 16.6% had university degrees or higher. Also, 21.4% of men were analphabetic, 28.6% had less than secondary school education, 35.7% had high school education, and 14.3% had university degrees or higher. In total, 8% of subjects were analphabetic, 26% had less than secondary school education, 50% had high school education, and 16% had university degrees or higher. Among females, 41.2% and 58.8% were employed and housekeepers, respectively. Also, 97.8% of men were employed and 2.2% were unemployed.

Descriptive Data

According to the obtained results from RAAS scale, the mean scores of participants in secure, avoidant, and anxious attachment styles were 2.99 ($SD = 0.39$), 3.08 ($SD = 0.38$), and 3.25 ($SD = 0.66$), respectively. Therefore, the mean score of anxious attachment style was higher than other attachment styles. The results of CPQ subscales showed that the mean scores were

19.49 ($SD = 5.64$), 30.85 ($SD = 7.37$), and 20.29 ($SD = 4.56$) in mutual constructive communication, demand/withdraw, and mutual avoidance subscales, respectively. The mean of demand/withdraw pattern was higher than other communication patterns. In addition, the mean of participants' marital satisfaction was calculated as 138.35 ($SD = 10.33$).

Inferential Data

The results showed that the correlation coefficients between secure attachment style and communication patterns were –.05, .19, and .13 in mutual constructive communication, demand/withdraw, and mutual avoidance subscales, respectively. None of the communication patterns had a significant relationship with secure attachment. Also, the correlation coefficients between avoidant attachment style and communication patterns were –.16, .22, and .17 in mutual constructive communication, demand/withdraw, and mutual avoidance subscales, respectively. These results showed a significant relationship between avoidant attachment and demand/withdraw pattern ($p < .01$).

The correlation coefficients between anxious attachment styles and communication patterns were –.23, .16, and .14 in mutual constructive communication, demand/withdraw, and mutual avoidance subscales, respectively. There was a significant relationship between anxious attachment and mutual constructive communication ($p < .05$).

The correlation coefficients between marital satisfaction and attachment styles were –.03, .06, and .15 in secure, anxious, and avoidant attachment styles, respectively. None of the attachment styles had a significant relationship with marital satisfaction.

The correlation coefficients between marital satisfaction and communication patterns were reported as –.08, .27, and .09 in mutual constructive communication, demand/withdraw, and mutual avoidance subscales, respectively. These results indicated that none of the communication patterns had a significant relationship with marital satisfaction.

Multivariable regression with backward elimination was used to assess the predictive values of attachment styles and communication patterns in terms of marital satisfaction. The achieved results of multivariable regression and backward elimination are shown in Table 1. As demonstrated in Table 1, *F* rate was statistically significant at $p = .05$. The data collected from multivariable regression revealed that communication patterns could be considered predictors of marital satisfaction. Considering $\beta = 0.28$, the demand/withdraw pattern could be a predictor of marital satisfaction ($p < .05$). Based on the data, .08 of the variance in marital satisfaction can be predicted by demand/withdraw pattern. Also, other results showed that attachment styles could not be predictors of marital satisfaction.

TABLE 1 Summary of Regression Models, Regression Analysis, and Statistical Characteristics of Marital Satisfaction, Based on Attachment Styles and Communication Patterns in Divorcing Couples

Model	Variables	B	*SE* B	B	*t*	*p*	*F*	*R*	R^2	Adj. R^2
1	Secure attachment	−3.68	3.60	−0.16	−0.02	0.31				
	Anxious attachment	3.77	2.48	0.24	1.52	0.14				
	Mutual constructive communication	0.32	0.27	0.19	1.19	0.24	1.43	0.37	0.14	0.04
	Demand/withdraw	0.39	0.22	0.28	1.77	0.08				
	Mutual avoidance	0.05	0.39	0.02	0.13	0.90				
2	Secure attachment	−3.71	3.55	−0.16	−1.05	0.30				
	Anxious attachment	3.77	2.45	0.24	1.54	0.13	1.83	0.37	0.14	0.06
	Mutual constructive communication	0.31	0.25	0.18	1.26	0.22				
	Demand/withdraw	0.41	0.19	0.29	2.09	0.04				
3	Anxious attachment	2.89	2.31	0.18	1.25	0.22				
	Mutual constructive communication	0.28	0.24	0.17	1.16	0.25	2.07	0.35	0.12	0.06
	Demand/withdraw	0.37	0.19	0.27	1.95	0.06				
4	Anxious attachment	2.09	2.21	0.13	0.95	0.35	2.42	0.31	0.09	0.06
	Demand/withdraw	0.36	0.19	0.26	1.89	0.07				
5	Demand/withdraw	0.38	0.19	0.28	1.99	0.05	3.95	0.28	0.08	0.06

TABLE 2 Standardized Coefficients of Direct, Indirect, and Total Effects of Marital Satisfaction Predictors

	Effects		
Directions	Direct	Indirect	Total
To mutual constructive pattern			
Avoidant attachment	0.13	—	0.13
Anxious attachment	−0.40		−0.04
To demand/withdraw pattern			
Avoidant attachment	0.11	—	0.11
Anxious attachment	0.07		0.07
To marital satisfaction			
Secure attachment	—	0.03	0.03
Avoidant attachment	—	0.04	0.04
Anxious attachment	0.11	−0.05	−0.05
Mutual constructive communication	0.28	—	0.11
Demand/withdraw		—	0.28

Best-Fit Line

As shown in Table 2 (considering γ = 0.04), anxious attachment style had the most significant and direct effect on mutual constructive communication pattern ($p < .01$). The direct effect of avoidant attachment style on mutual constructive communication pattern was notable, although insignificant (γ = 0.13). Also, there was no significant difference between attachment styles and demand/withdraw pattern.

Mutual constructive communication pattern had a direct effect on marital satisfaction, but this effect was not statistically significant ($\beta = 0.11$). Furthermore, demand/withdraw pattern had a direct and significant effect on marital satisfaction ($\beta = 0.28$, $p > .01$). As mentioned earlier, the indirect effects of attachment styles on marital satisfaction were not significant.

Finally, as shown in Table 3, fitness indexes (adjusted goodness-of-fit index [AGFI],goodness-of-fit index [GFI], root mean square residual [RMR], root mean square error of approximation [RMSEA], *p, df,* χ^2, and χ^2/df) had acceptable values. A chi-square test showed that GFI was not significant in our model; therefore, the model had adequate fit ($p = .81$).

The path diagram and estimated parameters are shown in Figure 1, which shows 10% of variance of mutual constructive pattern could be explained by avoidant and anxious attachment styles. Also, 10% of variance in marital satisfaction was explained by communication patterns and attachment styles. However, only 0.03 of variance of demand/withdraw pattern was explained by secure and avoidant attachment patterns.

TABLE 3 Fitness Indicators of Regression Model of Marital Satisfaction in Divorcing Couples

χ^2	*df*	χ^2/df	*p* value	RMSEA	RMR	GFI	AGFI
3.01	6	0.50	.81	.001	.04	.98	.93

Note. RMSEA = root mean square error of approximation; RMR = root mean square residual; GFI = goodness-of-fit index; AGFI = adjusted goodness-of-fit index.
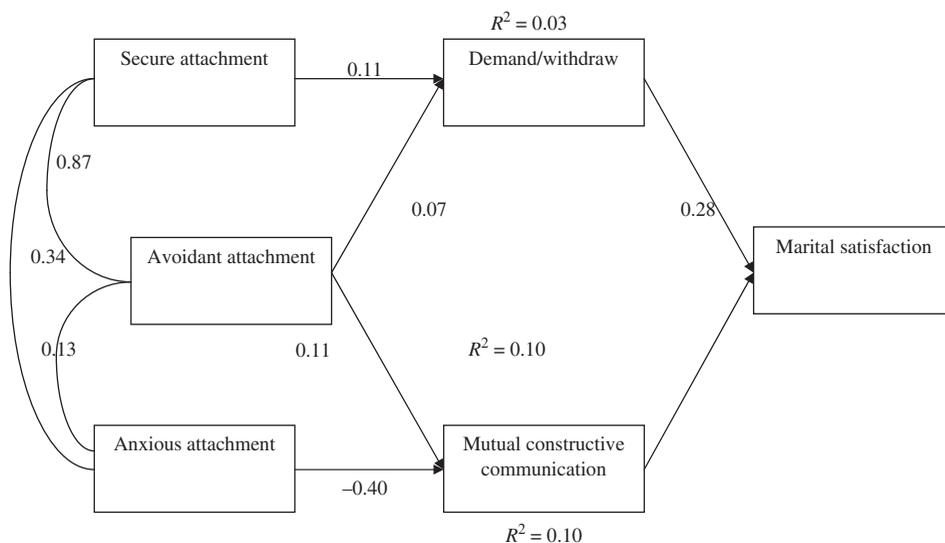

FIGURE 1 The relationship between marital satisfaction, attachment styles, and communication patterns.

DISCUSSION

According to the first hypothesis of this study, there is a significant relationship between attachment styles and communication patterns in divorcing couples. This hypothesis was confirmed by calculating correlation coefficients. In addition, the results showed that anxious attachment style was associated with mutual constructive communication in divorcing couples; moreover, avoidant attachment style was associated with demand/withdraw pattern.

Based on attachment theory, people's relationship expectations are affected by their childhood relationships. Several studies have indicated that people with avoidant and anxious attachment styles are unsuccessful in decoding emotional states (particularly negative emotions; Azadi & Tehrani, 2010). Irrational thoughts are common among divorcing couples and these thoughts are in association with insecure attachment. Also, people with insecure attachments blame themselves, which leads to conflicts and disagreements in their communications (Momenzade, Mazaheri, & Heydari, 2005).

Another hypothesis of this study was concerned with the correlation between attachment styles and marital satisfaction in divorcing couples; according to the obtained results, this hypothesis was rejected. In other words, a specific attachment style does not lead to marital satisfaction in divorcing couples. In addition, other results of this study showed that attachment styles and communication patterns are not predictors of marital satisfaction in divorcing couples.

However, the results reported here are not consistent with those of previous studies (Bond & Bond, 2004; Chi, Epstein, Fang, Lam, & Li, 2013; Madahi, Samadzadeh, & Javidi, 2013). For instance, the results of a study by Ponizovsky and Drannikov (2013) showed the significant effect of insecure attachment style on life satisfaction scores. According to that study, life satisfaction was lower in subjects with anxious-ambivalent and avoidant attachments.

Also, in another study, couple attachment was directly correlated with self-reported and observed marital quality (Alexandrov, Cowan, & Cowan, 2005). Jarnecke and South (2013) showed that there was a significant relationship between parent–child attachment orientations and romantic relationship attachment orientations as mediators in the intergenerational transmission of marital satisfaction.

Furthermore, a study by Besharat (2003) revealed that there was a significant relationship between attachment styles and marital conflicts. According to Besharat's study, university couples considered themselves more securely attached to their partners compared to other married couples. In addition, anxious and avoidant styles were associated with greater problems in marital

relationships. Moreover, as to the aforementioned study, attachment styles were associated with the quality of marital relationship. Although these data are not consistent with our study, it seems that divorcing couples have a different pattern of communication and marital satisfaction. It is possible that the small sample size of this study is responsible for differences in the obtained results.

A comprehensive methodological review assessed the relationship between marital satisfaction and communication. As this review emphasizes, despite the obtained results regarding the relationship between both content and process of communication and marital satisfaction, replication with better designs seems necessary (Boland & Follingstad, 2008). According to the fourth hypothesis, attachment styles and communication patterns are predictors of marital satisfaction in divorcing couples. This hypothesis was not fully confirmed by the obtained results. However, part of the hypothesis, which confirms the prediction of marital satisfaction by communication patterns, was acknowledged.

Consistent with our study, Litzinger and Gordon (2005) examined the relationship among couple communication, sexual satisfaction, and marital satisfaction in 387 married couples. According to their study, there was a significant difference between couple communication and marital satisfaction. Also, regression analyses demonstrated that communication patterns are independent predictors of marital satisfaction. These results are consistent with the findings of Kline and Stafford (2004), Shayeste, Sahebi, and Alipour (2006), and Rehman and Hotzworrth (2008).

In this study, path analysis was used to examine the fifth hypothesis (attachment styles have an indirect but significant relationship with marital satisfaction and communication patterns in divorcing couples). The results showed that among attachment styles, anxious attachment style had the most significant and direct effect on mutual constructive communication. Additionally, demand/withdraw pattern had a direct and significant effect on marital satisfaction. In total, attachment styles and communication patterns explained 10% of marital satisfaction; therefore, this hypothesis was rejected. However, this finding was not consistent with those of Feeney (2005). Feeney concluded that communication patterns play a mediating role between attachment styles and marital satisfaction.

In addition, the results of this study were different from those of other studies. This could be due to fundamental differences in communication patterns and other variables of this study.

In fact, personal characteristics such as cynicism and lack of accountability are observed more in divorcing couples compared to others (Seyf, 2004); these couples also have irrational expectations of their spouses and insecure attachment styles (Adibzade, Mahdavi, Adibzade, & Dehshiri, 2005).

CONCLUSION

As shown in this study, an anxious attachment style is associated with mutual constructive communication in divorcing couples. Also, an avoidant attachment style is correlated with demand/withdraw pattern. However, attachment styles and communication patterns are not predictors of marital satisfaction in divorcing couples. Irrational thoughts are common in divorcing couples and these thoughts are related to insecure attachments. It seems that divorcing couples have a different pattern of communication and marital satisfaction. In total, attachment styles and communication patterns explain 10% of marital satisfaction.

Limitations

This study was conducted on a small sample size due to lack of access to large populations. Furthermore, emotional characteristics of divorcing couples such as frustration, helplessness, irritability, lack of concentration, and legal uncertainty led to uncertain results.

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فرم خودارزیابی مقاله ژورنالی

(توسط متقاضی)

تاریخ: ....

همکار ارجمند

با توجه به اهمیت داوری صحیح مقاله ها، خواهشمند است به پرسش های زیر با دقت پاسخ دهید. همچنین، گزارش طرح های پژوهشی، پایان نامه کارشناسی ارشد و رساله دکتری خود را به ضمیمه مدارک تسلیم دارید. درخواست می شود لطفا به همپوشانی آثار، توجه ویژه ای مبذول فرمایید.

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سید علی کیمیایی

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