

## The relationship between identity styles and attachment styles with marital adjustment among couples

### Abstract

As a correlation research, the purpose of the present study was to investigate the relationship between identity styles and attachment styles with the degree of adjustment among couples. The statistical population of this study included all couples in Qom who were working at the Bureau of Education. Using convenience sampling method, 250 people were selected as the sample members. The inclusion criteria were: Being married at the time of the study, experiencing 5 years of mutual matrimony, not suffering mental disorders, lack of divorce history, and age between 25 to 55 years old. The questionnaires on identity styles, the Adult Attachment Style, and Marital Adjustment Questionnaire were used for data collection. Using descriptive statistics, multivariate regression analysis, and Pearson correlation, data analysis was performed. Findings revealed that identity styles can't predict marital adjustment where accrual style was able. The results suggested that only ambivalent-anxiety attachment style and accrual identity style could predict marital adjustment.

**Keywords:** *Identity styles, Attachment styles, Marital adjustment, Couples*

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### Introduction

As a social institution, the family has maintained its stability during different eras, approving the functionality of the family. Therefore, the family can be considered the most important social institution which guarantees the health of society (Kalantari Harmozi and Farahbakhsh, 2015).

Family constitutes marriage and that's the commencement of the marital relationship. One main factor causing the sustainability of family life is marital adjustment which leads to significant social consequences. Family and its corresponding emotional environment are undoubtedly initial grounds of personality and intellectual values that play a vital role in determining the destiny and lifestyle of the future life of its members. Morality, physical and mental health owe their presence to family. Since the family is acting as a social unit and conveys values and social norms to children, its role to mediate between society and the child is significant. In other words, family is regeneration and birth base, Family promises children discretion and awareness and highly affects how a child's destiny forms (Ahadi and Moheseni, 2001 quoted from Nejat et, 2011)

Sinha and Mukerjee (1990) believe that marital adjustment is the state in which there is an overall feeling in husband and wife of happiness and satisfaction with their marriage and with each other. Satisfactory marital interactions are assessed in various ways such as Adults' emotional expressiveness toward their spouses, Keeness to care for each other, and Couples' Mutuality.

Other studies echo this point suggesting that marital quality is positively correlated with physical health, stress-buffering, psychological well-being, life satisfaction, and self 7esteem (Acevedo, Aron, Fisher, Brown, 2012)

In fact, well-adjusted couples are expected to have long-lasting marriages, whereas poorly-adjusted marriages are expected to end in divorce (Kendrick and Dentea, 2016).

Kendrick and Dentea (2016) believe that marital adjustment describes how spouses adapt and by regarding this definition, marital adjustment is equivalent to adaptation. Then they introduce some factors affecting marital adjustment such as marital satisfaction, cohesion, agreement, affection, and conflict.

Berschid (1984) counts intra-personal and inter-personal mechanisms as two factors affecting marital adjustment and marital maladjustment, including emotions and affection, sexual relations, physiological factors, and personality traits, behavioral and communicative skills (Hazan, and Shaver 1987).

A vast area of studies has been devoted to identifying effecting factors on marital satisfaction. Among them, researchers have studied factors affecting marital satisfaction like high confidence, marital communicative capability, the relationship between marital satisfaction and emotional stability, attitude toward gender equality and marital satisfaction, and attachment styles to marital satisfaction. In addition, the correlation between marital adjustment with identity styles has been examined in several studies. Cook and Jones (2002) found that couples who have identical identity styles (regardless of specific identity styles) experience more satisfaction and adjustment compared to others.

Attachment styles are considered a significant and common theory in emotional relationships. Attachment styles as a topic of a wide range of studies, could be counted as one personal determinant which affects marital compatibility and incompatibility.

Balbi(1969) believes that what forms the nature of an individual's emotional relationships is his/her primary emotional relations ( neonate-and-parents emotional relations). He showed how the system of emotions and attachment behaviors make neonates close to their mother and keeps him/her away from threats and how separation results in anxiety and helplessness for neonates. Maternal sensibility, active presence, and availability of the mother draw the main lines of secure attachment for a child.

Exploratory behaviors get empowered through this secure base which guarantees a child's confidence in others and himself. Attachment characteristics would form according to distrust in case the mother was rejecting or apathetic. Accordingly, attachment is a result of an individual's real experiences, responsiveness, and active presence of the mother during the neonatal period, childhood, and adolescence. Regarding the framework of relationships in adulthood, Most researchers emphasize attachment as a communication aspect and agree on its evolutionary continuity (Yaghoubi, 2014).

Researchers in this area of study like Balbi developed theories of scientists and could divide attachment styles into secure, Insecure-ambivalent attachment style categories.

As a scientific term, the secure base is a kind of caring tried by children in order to confront external turmoil. This secure base puts children in different situations which can provide the ground for secure or insecure attachment emergence (Ainsworth, Blehar, Wall, Waters, 1978) .

Hazan and Shaver (1987) found that attachment styles can make a fundamental difference in Conceptualizing romantic among adults. Regarding these differences in romantic Conceptualizing, it can be concluded that attachment styles are correlated with couples' self-report and marital satisfaction (Brannan, Clark, Shaver, 1998)

It should be mentioned that secure and insecure types of security bases emerge in inter-adult relationships. Any individual is considered to be a secure base for his or her partner in the emotional marital relationship and attempts to deliver related internal expectations by some degree of insecurity to the relationship (Besharat, 2012).

Feeny (1999) found that acute emotion regulation exists for individuals with insecure attachment styles, and therefore they experience negative emotions which can be regarded as an appropriate predictor of marital dissatisfaction ( Landsberger, Meyers 2002).

Before the 7<sup>th</sup> decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, conducted research about family, was mainly about divorce and its mental and social side effects influencing family members. But after this decade, researchers paid more attention to marital satisfaction and the ways to improve satisfaction and happiness during marital life. The current study doesn't aim to determine causes

of divorce aftermath but it attempts to recognize psychological aspects leading to satisfaction. We can define interventions by identifying these aspects and as some supplementary goals high-risk marriage can tend to decrease, improve the happiness of current marriages and prevent some kind of maladjustments, and through these, many disorders can be prevented (Nemati Dehkoordi et, 2011).

Therefore, the type of emotional relationship with parents or type of identity styles is among the factors to be studied. About the fact that how the formation forms among adolescents, we should state that any child gets in touch and contacts his mother in the first person after birth. In fact, the child is leaving a closed embryonic world while finding missing security through the mother's loving embrace. This secure base which is replete with affection founds initial affective psychological threads and relational schemas that guarantee mental and affectional security for the baby in the first years of living. Long-term effects of maternal affection could enfold an individual's life ( Balbi, 1969, quoted from Hajilou et, 2014). Social adequacy can be vastly affected by the way attachment styles form and are treated since social adequacy is defined as how people adjust their behavior with groups and accord with culture and social norms (Esmaili, 2001, quoted from Jafarnejad, 2009).

Human growth doesn't get halted as childhood passes away, but that's a continuous process ranging from birth to adulthood and finally caducity. Adolescence initiates as childhood finishes and acts as a mediating part between childhood and adulthood. In this period, one reaches sexual and physical maturity and separates individual identity from family identity (Atkinson et quoted from Amani et, 2011).

A critical task of adolescence period of life is forming an identity. Identity is an integrated collection of personal values in relationship with occupational goals, communications, and religious values. (Erickson, 1968; Amani, 2011).

In psychology terminology, Identity is a personal characteristic of any individual, whereas, in most definitions provided for this concept, that's a matter which lies beyond our perception of ourselves (Vazirietl, 2011). Achieving a sustainable identity not only provides an integrated sense of ourselves but also makes many opportunities and possibilities for growth (Avila, 2011). The formation of identity is a critical issue in the way of human evolution. This process initiates from birth and continues to its pinnacle at adolescence. In fact, one main task accomplished by adolescence period of life is forming of identity (Ghazanfari, 2006)

Glasser(1982) believes that identity is the desire for separation and distinction from others, from his point of view it is not only a basic and mental need but also a need that is prevalent among all people and cultures from cradle to grave(Hejazi et, 2006).

Seligman (1991) believes that identity generally shapes as a result of four factors: cognitive growth, parental relationship, out-of-family experiences, and other widespread social ground. Among these factors, the role of family and emotional communications was emphasized in constituting identity in a way that the majority of researchers believe that the relationship between child and family influences the way identity forms.

Therefore and according to what has been discussed, this research aims to answer this question: Is there any significant correlation between attachment styles and adjustment among couples? On the other hand and as secondary goals we would try to examine these hypotheses: 1- There is a significant correlation between identity styles and attachment styles among couples. 2- There is a relationship between couples' identity styles and their level of adjustment. 3- Attachment styles and adjustment are significantly correlated among couples.

### **Methodology of research**

#### **Statistical population, sampling, and implementation method**

Concerning typology, this is a strategic and fundamental research and correlative study. The statistical population included all couples from significant and specific diseases including prior mental disorders, aged between 25 and 55 years, which were the main inclusion criteria in this research.

Using a questionnaire, in order to collect data, several couples who meet mentioned criteria were selected and a data-gathering process took place. The analyzed sample included 250 people aged from 25 to 55 years who were working at Qom's 1st region of the education bureau in 2018-2019. According to the statistical population size of 700, and using Cochran's formula, 250 couples were selected as the sample size. The convenience sampling method was employed to select sample members.

Being married at the time of the study, experiencing 5 years of mutual matrimony, not suffering mental disorders, lack of divorce history, and age between 25 to 55 years old, were the inclusion criteria.

#### **Instruments:**

- 1- Collins and Read Revised Adult Attachment Scale (RAAS)(1990)

Regarding Collins and Read Attachment test, Adult Attachment Scale was constructed. This scale is employed for samples based on self-assessment of relationship-making skills and self-description. This scale is an 18-item questionnaire that measures three attachment styles secure, Avoidant, and diffuse/avoidant in the form of 5 points Likert scale (1- very low, 2-low, 3- moderate, 4- high, 5- very high).

The validity and reliability of Collins and Read's questionnaire were confirmed in several studies. The reliability of this test was reported more than 80% in 1990. Two consecutive conductions of this scale in a one-month interval showed that is reliable at a 95% level. In addition, using the retest method for a group of 20 individuals revealed that the correlation coefficient for this method is 76% which suggests high validity for it (Moharreri et, 2010).

2. Berzonsky's questionnaire of identity styles(6ISI-G)(1989)  
This poll was initially designed by Berzonsky(1989) in America and comprises 3 styles called: informational-oriented identity style, norm-oriented identity style, and diffuse-avoidant-oriented identity style attempting to evaluate an individual's commitment. Identity styles explain how people construct and reconstruct their identities. Wight et (1998) revised this poll in America. The original poll includes 40 items whereas, in the current study, a 36-item poll (Anajani, 2003) was employed. This poll includes four dimensions: informational-oriented, norm-oriented, diffuse-avoidant oriented, and accrual styles using a 5-point Likert scale (1-Strongly disagree, 2-Disagree Neither agree nor disagree, 4-Agree, 5-Strongly agree). Using Cronbach's alpha Ghazanfari (2005) attained a reliability of 0.85 for the questionnaire and Berzonsky calculated a reliability of 0.95 by employing the retest method

Ghazanfari (2008) in a study performed on high school students in Isfahan (Iran) calculate Cronbach's alpha for dimensions: information style: 0.67, norm style:0.53, diffuse style: 0.54, accrual style: 0.57( Zarei, 2014).

3. Spanier's DYADIC ADJUSTMENT SCALE (DAS)(1976)  
In order to evaluate the adjustment level between a wife and spouse who are living together, a marital ADJUSTMENT SCALE was developed by Spanier (1976). This 32-items poll includes four dimensions designed to evaluate marital satisfaction, marital cohesion, marital Consensus, and affective expression. Obtaining a total score, this poll can be used to measure overall satisfaction in an Intimate relationship. According to a total score of 96% for Cronbach's Alpha, Internal consistency of the poll was inferred. Mutual satisfaction gained 94% of Internal consistency, mutual cohesion have an 81% of Internal consistency and for mutual consensus and affective expression, Internal consistency of 90% and 73% were reported respectively (Sanayi, 2000).

In the current study, Cronbach's alpha was 94%. Using the logical content validation method, this scale was examined. The adjustment scale proved to be valid by distinguishing married and divorced individuals. This scale has simultaneous validity and is correlated with Locke – Wallace Marital Adjustment scale (LWMA) (Sanayi, 2000).

#### **Findings:**

**Table1.** Statistical specifications of marital adjustment (n=250)

Variable	Mean	Standard deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Marital adjustment	97.06	10.9	-0.375	-0.484
Attachment styles				
Secure	18.4	3.05		
Avoidant	17.3	4.67		
Anxious-ambivalent	18.6	3.48		
Identity styles				
Information style	33.2	4.05		
Norm style	29.9	3.76		
Diffuse/avoidant style	38.6	4.59		
Accrual style	29.04	4.5		

Table 2 represents the summary of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test which is designed to examine the normality of data related to studied variables.

Table 2 represents the results of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test employed

**Table 2.** Summary of Kolmogorov - Smirnov test to examin3 normality of data

Variables	Dimension	Statistic	Sig
<b>Attachment styles</b>	<b>Secure</b>	0.994	0.7
	<b>Diffuse</b>	1.08	0.19
	<b>Anxious - ambivalent</b>	1.11	0.16
<b>Information</b>	<b>Identity styles</b>	1.18	0.12
<b>Norm diffuse/avoidant accrual</b>		0.59	0.9
		1.09	0.18
		1.11	0.16
<b>Marital adjustment</b>		1.13	0.16

Information provided by Table 1 and Table 2, represents that significance levels are more than 0.05 for all variables. Hence, we can conclude that all dimensions of identity styles,

attachment styles, and marital adjustment follow statistically Normal distribution.

**Table 3.** Summary of multivariate regression test (stepwise): Investigating the relationship between identity styles and attachment styles with marital adjustment

adjustment can be explained through linear correlation with

Model	Entered predicting variable	Correlation coefficient	R <sup>2</sup>	Adjusted correlation	$\Delta R^2$	Significance
1	Diffuse/avoidant style	0.172	0.03	0.026	0.03	0.00
2	Diffuse/avoidant style	0.221	0.049	0.041	0.019	0.02
	Accrual identity style					

According to test results (table 3), attachment styles along with their associated subscales including secure, diffuse/avoidant as predicting variables, and identity styles including subscales called: Informational, norm, diffuse/avoidant, and commitment entered the regression model. As a result of the analysis, it was approved that the correlation coefficient between diffuse/avoidant style and marital adjustment is 0.172. In other words, ambivalent anxiety style can predict 3% of changes in marital adjustment which means 4.9% of marital

“ambivalent anxiety style” and “accrual identity style” by 1.9%. Results show that attachment subscales of secure, avoidant, informational, norm, and diffuse/avoidant have been removed from the model. F-statistics calculations suggest that the compound regression model including avoidant and secure styles can explain criterion variables well(  $p=0.00$ ,  $F=6.32$ ). The following output represents the coefficients of the regression model:

**Table 4.** Coefficients of attachment styles and identity styles in predicting marital adjustment

Variables entered the model	Model	B	Standard deviation	Standardized coefficients (Beta)	T	Significance
Anxious-ambivalent attachment Accrual identity style	Intercept	96.80/	5.79	-0.169	16.7	0.00
	coefficient	-0.531	0.195	0.138	-2.73	0.00
		0.334	0.151		2.22	0.02

According to Table 4, the results of regression reveal that: (accrual identity style) 0.138, (anxious ambivalent attachment)  $Y=-0.169$ , predicting marital adjustment. Therefore, it can be

concluded that by a 1 unit decrease in “ambivalent-anxiety attachment”, marital adjustment decreases 0.169 of a unit, and

by an increase of one unit for “accrual identity style”, “marital adjustment score increases 0.138 of a unit.

Examination of Hypothesis 1: There is a significant correlation between identity styles and marital adjustment among studied couples.

**Table 5.** Pearson’s correlation test between identity style and marital adjustment

Variables	1	2	3	4	5
Information style	1				
Norm identity	0.679**	1			
Diffuse/ avoidant styles	0.4**	**0.248	1		
Accrual style	0.426**	**0.273	**0.495	1	
Marital adjustment	-0.088	-0.025	0.026	*0.142	1

\*p= 0.05(one tailed)\*\* p= 0.01(one tailed test)

According to Table 5, there is only a significant relationship between marital adjustment and accrual style at a correlation coefficient of 0.05 (r=0.142, P<0.05). Hence null hypothesis asserting a lack of relationship between accrual style and marital adjustment would be rejected and it can be inferred that

identity style of commitment and marital adjustment are significantly correlated.

Examination of Hypothesis 2: There is a significant correlation between attachment styles and marital adjustment among studied couples.

**Table 6:** Pearson correlation between attachment styles and marital adjustment

Variables	1	2	3	4
Secure Style	1			
Avoidant style	0.115	1		
Anxious ambivalent	0.713**	0.154*	1	
Marital adjustment	0.12	-0.099	**0.172-	1

\*p=0.05 (one tailed), \*\*p=0.01 (two tailed)

As shown in Fig 6, an indirect and meaningful relationship was reported between marital adjustment and anxious-avoidant style of attachment at a level of 0.01(p>0.05, r=0.142). Therefore null hypothesis which states there is no relationship between anxious-ambivalent style and marital adjustment would be rejected, resulting in the statement of “there is a significant correlation between “ anxious-ambivalent style “ and “ marital adjustment”.

**Conclusion:**

Results suggest that identity styles can’t predict marital adjustment where accrual style was able. Hence, it can be told that identity styles can’t significantly predict marital adjustment, whereas accrual styles can predict marital adjustment as a predictor variable.

According to the secondary hypothesis, Findings about the relationship between attachment styles and marital adjustment

revealed that diffuse/avoidant style of attachment can predict marital adjustment. This result was following the result of research conducted by Cohen et(1994) and Colin (1996).

There were two sub-hypotheses for the research:

Sub-hypothesis 1:

This hypothesis was about the relationship between Identity styles and marital adjustment among couples.

The findings could not confirm this hypothesis. Therefore, it can be inferred there is a significant relationship between accrual style and marital adjustment. The corresponding result is in harmony with the findings of research conducted by Zarei et (2015), Heydari et(2015), and Kapinos et (2003).

Sub-hypothesis 2:

There is a correlation between identity styles and marital adjustment.

According to statistical tests, the null hypothesis asserting no relationship between diffuse/avoidant style and marital adjustment is rejected. Hence it can be concluded that there is

a significant correlation between diffuse/avoidant style and marital adjustment. Mentioned findings confirm the result of Rasouli et (2009) study and Jenifer et (2011) research.

### **Discussion**

In fact, the variable of accrual style has a determinant role in marital adjustment. The remarkable point that must be regarded is the lack of correlation between identity styles and marital adjustment. These findings confirm other studies' results like Alder(1990), where it contradicts some findings like research conducted by other researchers(Parsons, 2007). Reasons for the lack of correlation between mentioned variables can be interpreted by employing two approaches: Firstly: couples contributing to this study might have various identity styles. This issue could have influenced the results since there was not any control over the similarity or differences of identities. What could compound this matter is that marital adjustment might be influenced by gender. It means that marital adjustment is more prone to be affected by similarities of identity styles among women compared to men. The second point to explain is lack of relationship between identity styles and marital adjustment is the complexity and multi-dimensionality of the studied concept of marital adjustment. Regarding the definition of marital adjustment, it is a mental state reflecting the advantages and disadvantages of marriage in one's mind. As the definition declares, it is a state influenced by a wide range of variables and might be broader and more complex to be predicted only by identity styles. In other words, marital adjustment as a multi-factor concept consists of cognitive, communicative, sexual, and personal components and might not merely be forecasted by one cognitive component like Identity processing styles. This factor may be a causal reason for the lack of a relationship between identity styles and marital adjustment. Another point is the significant correlation between accrual identity and marital adjustment. This result corresponds with the findings of other studies performed to investigate the exploratory role of accrual identity in adjustment and satisfaction (Michael, 2011). One can attain accrual identity as he is capable of decisive decisions in various areas of life such as Job, marriage, commitment to political attitudes chosen by a person, and determining definite strategies to accomplish personal goals. Hence, committing helps one to adjust personal desires and social needs and get adjusted adequately to the environment and conditions.

Kominski's research (2002) revealed that accrual identity has a determinant role in adjustment by elevating or decreasing it. In other words, commitment acts like a role enabling a person to concentrate efforts and capabilities in a definite direction and deters from a diffuse/avoidant style. Ericson believes that commitment paucity leads to time misconception, excessive mental preoccupation, and negative identity which causes

negatively affects adequate functionality and as a consequence disrupts marital satisfaction( Marcia, 1993).

Corresponding findings can complete and confirm prior studies and theories especially those are the relationship between attachment styles and couples' adjustment. Results can trigger some new questions on the studied topic. e.g.: What other variables can predict marital adjustment? Are other variables like emotional regulation, communicative skills, and religious commitment, ... able to mediate the correlation between attachment styles and marital adjustment? On the other hand, by taking the results of other researchers' studies into account, we can offer some suggestions to deter marital misadjustment. By employing educational programs which are empirical, the quality of marital life can be improved.

Regarding the limitations of the research, it should be mentioned that this study is limited to a specific statistical society, therefore generalizing the results shall be with caution. Another limitation is about employing a self-assert instrument of data collection. This may make the target population conservative and less frank to state their status. Availability of information was another issue in this project, which may cause neglected some variables like couples' mental and physical health. This limitation may affect other variables of the study.

Time limitation for social and cultural research is another common constraint. Researchers suggest conducting similar studies among different statistical populations e.g.: couples who are in a definite clinical situation to acquire information about clinical samples on the relationship between identity styles and marital adjustment as well as nonclinical samples.

According to findings on the role of accrual identity, it is suggested to increase awareness about factors influencing marital adjustment in divorce preventive interventions, therefore it seems necessary for researchers and authorities to consider family mental health issues.

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### **Conflict of Interest:**

Authors of the current study have no conflicts of interest to declare. All co-authors have seen and agree with the contents of the manuscript and there is no financial interest to report.

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