

Structural Modeling of the Relationship Between Attachment Styles and Expectations of Marriage: The Mediating Role of Gender-Role Orientations Among University Students Approaching Marriage

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Article Info

Article type:

Original Research

How to cite this article:

Alihashemiashtiani, P., Nohi, S., Nasery Fadafan, M., & Rahimpour, F. (2027). Structural Modeling of the Relationship Between Attachment Styles and Expectations of Marriage: The Mediating Role of Gender-Role Orientations Among University Students Approaching Marriage. *Journal of Adolescent and Youth Psychological Studies*, 8(2), 1-16.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.61838/kman.jayps.5934>



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ABSTRACT

Objective: The present study aimed to develop and test a structural model of the relationships between secure, avoidant, and anxious attachment styles and realistic, pessimistic, and idealistic expectations of marriage, considering masculine and feminine gender-role orientations as mediating variables among university students approaching marriage.

Methods and Materials: This applied study used a descriptive-correlational design based on structural equation modeling. The statistical population consisted of university students approaching marriage at the Science and Research, Central Tehran, and North Tehran branches of Islamic Azad University during the 2025–2026 academic year. Using convenience sampling, 322 students were selected. Data were collected using the Revised Adult Attachment Scale, the Bem Sex Role Inventory, and the Marriage Expectation Scale. Data were analyzed using SPSS and AMOS version 26 through correlation analysis, structural equation modeling, and bootstrap assessment of indirect effects.

Findings: The proposed structural model showed acceptable fit ($\chi^2/df = 2.25$, CFI = .969, TLI = .954, RMSEA = .062, SRMR = .039). Secure attachment positively predicted realistic ($\beta = .29$, $p < .001$) and idealistic expectations ($\beta = .18$, $p = .001$) and negatively predicted pessimistic expectations ($\beta = -.27$, $p < .001$). Avoidant and anxious attachment negatively predicted realistic and idealistic expectations and positively predicted pessimistic expectations ($p < .05$). Secure attachment positively predicted masculine and feminine orientations, whereas avoidant and anxious attachment negatively predicted both. Masculine and feminine orientations positively predicted realistic and idealistic expectations and negatively predicted pessimistic expectations. Bootstrap analyses indicated significant indirect effects of all attachment styles on each marriage-expectation dimension through both gender-role orientations, supporting partial mediation.

Conclusion: Attachment styles were directly and indirectly associated with distinct expectations of marriage, and masculine and feminine gender-role orientations partially explained these relationships, highlighting the combined contribution of interpersonal attachment patterns and gender-related self-orientations to premarital expectations.

Keywords: Attachment Styles; Expectations of Marriage; Gender-Role Orientation.

1. Introduction

Marriage is one of the most consequential interpersonal and developmental transitions in adulthood because it involves not only the formal establishment of an intimate partnership but also the integration of emotional needs, relational expectations, cultural norms, gendered responsibilities, and long-term life plans. Decisions concerning marriage are therefore rarely based on a single psychological factor; rather, they emerge from the interaction of personal relationship histories, cognitive schemas about intimacy, expectations regarding future spouses, and socially constructed beliefs about appropriate roles for women and men. For university students approaching marriage, these issues may become particularly salient because this developmental period is often accompanied by increasing independence, identity consolidation, partner selection, and the formation of expectations about future family life. Contemporary research suggests that attitudes toward marriage are influenced by a combination of psychological and sociocultural variables, including gender-role beliefs, perceived gender conflict, expectations concerning marital responsibilities, fertility intentions, and broader evaluations of intimate partnership (Ercan & Uçar, 2021; Lee et al., 2025; Yan et al., 2024). Understanding the mechanisms through which these variables interact is therefore important for explaining why individuals differ substantially in the way they anticipate married life even before entering marriage.

Expectations of marriage constitute an important cognitive-affective framework through which individuals interpret what marriage should provide, how spouses should behave, and what emotional, interpersonal, and practical experiences are likely to characterize married life. Such expectations can range from relatively realistic views, in which individuals recognize both the benefits and challenges of marital partnership, to highly idealistic expectations or pessimistic anticipations of dissatisfaction, conflict, or relational failure. These expectations are not psychologically neutral because they may influence partner selection, communication, conflict interpretation, adaptation to marital responsibilities, and subsequent marital adjustment. Previous research has shown that marital expectations are meaningfully related to marital adjustment and the capacity to tolerate relational distress, suggesting that expectations formed before or during marriage can become important determinants of how marital experiences are interpreted and managed (Taheri & Mahvash Shirazi, 2019). Similarly,

marital expectations have been associated with marital intimacy and broader relational functioning, indicating that individuals' anticipatory beliefs about marriage may influence the emotional quality of intimate partnerships (Al-Kathir, 2022). Research examining emotional divorce has also identified marital expectations as an important relational variable associated with basic psychological needs and marital functioning (Habibi et al., 2022), while findings among married women have demonstrated meaningful relationships among marital expectations, emotional divorce, and self-efficacy (Rasheed et al., 2021).

The importance of marital expectations is especially evident when marriage is considered as a socially embedded institution rather than solely as a private romantic relationship. Expectations regarding intimacy, commitment, decision-making, household responsibilities, parenting, employment, sexuality, and emotional support are frequently shaped by gendered cultural scripts. Individuals may enter marriage with implicit assumptions regarding who should provide financial resources, who should take primary responsibility for domestic labor, how emotional expression should be distributed between spouses, and how authority should be negotiated within the household. These assumptions can influence both the content and rigidity of marital expectations. Research among university students has demonstrated gender differences in expectations, purposes, and attitudes toward marriage, indicating that men and women may approach future marital relationships with partially different anticipatory frameworks (Fallahchai & Fallahi, 2019). Likewise, research on marriage-role expectations has shown that beliefs about expected marital roles are related to relational outcomes such as forgiveness and marital adjustment, further emphasizing that expectations about marital responsibilities are closely connected to the quality of intimate relationships (Bolluk UĞUr & ÇAkmak Tolan, 2024).

One of the psychological foundations that may contribute to the formation of such expectations is attachment style. Attachment theory proposes that experiences in close relationships contribute to the development of internal working models concerning the self, significant others, emotional availability, trust, rejection, and interpersonal security. These relational representations may continue to shape interpersonal functioning in adolescence and adulthood, particularly in close romantic relationships. Secure attachment is generally characterized by greater comfort with emotional closeness, trust, and reliance on others, whereas insecure patterns such as anxious and

avoidant attachment involve heightened fears of rejection, dependency, interpersonal distance, or discomfort with intimacy. Because marriage represents one of the most intimate and enduring forms of adult relationship, attachment-related beliefs are likely to influence how individuals anticipate future marital experiences. A securely attached individual may be more likely to expect mutual availability, cooperation, and emotional responsiveness, whereas an anxiously attached individual may anticipate rejection or instability, and an avoidantly attached individual may be more skeptical about dependence, closeness, and emotional interdependence.

Gender-role attitudes represent one such potentially important mediating mechanism. Gender-role attitudes refer to beliefs regarding the behaviors, responsibilities, characteristics, and social positions considered appropriate for women and men. These beliefs are shaped through family socialization, education, peer interaction, cultural traditions, religious and social norms, media representations, and changing socioeconomic conditions. In the context of marriage, gender-role attitudes may directly influence how individuals conceptualize partnership, authority, caregiving, financial responsibility, emotional expression, domestic labor, sexuality, and parenting. Individuals holding relatively traditional gender-role attitudes may expect clearer differentiation of responsibilities based on gender, whereas those endorsing more egalitarian attitudes may anticipate greater flexibility, negotiation, and sharing of marital responsibilities. Therefore, gender-role attitudes may constitute a cognitive bridge between internal relationship models and explicit expectations about marital life.

The importance of gender-role attitudes for marriage and family formation has become increasingly evident across different cultural settings. Research on young adults in Malaysia has identified gender-role attitudes as an important correlate of attitudes toward marriage alongside attitudes toward childbearing and family functioning (Yan et al., 2024). Among young Koreans, perceived gender conflict has been shown to shape attitudes toward marriage and childbearing, demonstrating that evaluations of gender relations may influence decisions and expectations concerning family formation (Lee et al., 2025). Studies in other cultural contexts have similarly shown that gender norms are intertwined with family, fertility, and childbearing attitudes. Comparative research examining women's attitudes toward family, childbearing, and gender norms in China and India has highlighted the continuing relevance of changing gender expectations for family-related attitudes

(Zhou, 2025). Research on gender attitudes and women's intra-household decision-making power has likewise demonstrated that gender ideology is closely connected to fertility intentions and family decision-making processes (X. Yang et al., 2025). Among young women in several sub-Saharan African countries, evolving gender attitudes have also been associated with fertility preferences, further illustrating that gender ideology can influence expectations about future family life across diverse sociocultural environments (Vestel & Gadeyne, 2026).

Gender attitudes may also operate as mediating mechanisms between earlier social experiences and subsequent psychological or relational outcomes. For example, gender attitudes have been investigated as a mediator linking grandparenting styles to adolescent depression in skipped-generation families, showing that gender-related belief systems can function as intermediary psychological structures rather than merely as background demographic characteristics (F. Yang et al., 2025). This mediating role is conceptually relevant to marriage research because gender-role attitudes may similarly transmit the influence of relational experiences and attachment-based beliefs into more explicit expectations concerning future marital relationships. An individual's attachment orientation may shape beliefs about dependence, caregiving, closeness, authority, and emotional reciprocity, while gender-role attitudes may organize these beliefs into culturally recognizable expectations regarding the roles of wives and husbands. In this way, attachment may influence marital expectations partially through the individual's gendered interpretation of intimacy and partnership.

This argument is further supported by research demonstrating that gender-role attitudes are associated with broader marital and relational functioning. Gender-role attitudes, sexual schemas, and body self-concept have been examined in relation to marital boredom among couples seeking divorce, suggesting that gendered beliefs are connected with the quality and sustainability of marital relationships (Entezami Roudsari & Khoshkonish, 2020). Gender is also relevant to the interpretation of relational violations and treatment decisions in cases involving infidelity, indicating that gendered assumptions can influence how intimate behaviors and relational problems are evaluated (Garza, 2020). Moreover, studies of gender roles, personality characteristics, and expectations toward marriage have shown that gender-role beliefs are linked to the ways women and men conceptualize marriage and their expected roles within it (Ercan & Uçar, 2021). These

findings collectively suggest that gender-role attitudes may not only accompany marital expectations but may participate actively in their formation.

For university students approaching marriage, the joint influence of attachment styles and gender-role attitudes may be particularly important. This group is positioned at the intersection of relatively enduring interpersonal schemas and rapidly changing social expectations concerning marriage. University education, exposure to diverse social environments, changing occupational aspirations, and increasing emphasis on individual autonomy may coexist with traditional expectations surrounding gender, family obligations, and marital roles. Consequently, young adults may experience tensions between attachment-related needs for security or independence and culturally derived assumptions about how husbands and wives should behave. These tensions may shape whether marriage is anticipated realistically, idealized as a source of complete emotional fulfillment, or approached pessimistically as a potentially restrictive or unstable institution. Research on attitudes toward the opposite gender and romantic relationships indicates that attachment and value-based systems may interact with beliefs about love and interpersonal evaluation (Emami et al., 2025), while studies of marriage expectations among university students similarly underscore the relevance of gendered differences during the transition toward marital life (Fallahchai & Fallahi, 2019).

Despite this growing body of evidence, an important conceptual gap remains. Previous studies have often examined attachment in relation to emotional regulation, psychological adjustment, or general attitudes toward marriage, while other studies have focused on gender-role attitudes in relation to marriage, fertility, family functioning, or marital adjustment. Fewer studies have integrated these variables within a single structural framework in which distinct attachment styles predict distinct forms of marital expectations through gender-role attitudes. This distinction is methodologically and theoretically important because secure, anxious, and avoidant attachment are not interchangeable dimensions, and realistic, pessimistic, and idealistic marital expectations may reflect different cognitive orientations rather than a single continuum. Similarly, masculine and feminine gender-role orientations should not automatically be collapsed into a single global score because they may represent different patterns of self-perception and role endorsement. Structural modeling makes it possible to examine these differentiated pathways simultaneously and to estimate both direct and indirect

relationships while preserving the multidimensional nature of the constructs.

A component-level structural approach may therefore provide a more precise explanation of how internalized relational models become translated into expectations about marriage. Secure attachment may be associated with more constructive or balanced expectations because it supports trust and emotional reciprocity, while anxious and avoidant attachment may be associated with more pessimistic or less adaptive expectations because of fears of rejection or discomfort with dependence. At the same time, these relationships may vary according to the gender-role orientations through which individuals interpret marital responsibilities and relational behavior. The relevance of such an approach is strengthened by previous evidence showing that marital expectations are related to intimacy, emotional divorce, self-efficacy, psychological needs, and marital adjustment (Al-Kathir, 2022; Habibi et al., 2022; Rasheed et al., 2021; Taheri & Mahvash Shirazi, 2019), as well as by findings showing that gender-role expectations and broader gender attitudes are associated with marital adjustment, family attitudes, and decisions concerning marriage and childbearing (Bolluk Uğur & Çakmak Tolan, 2024; Lee et al., 2025; Yan et al., 2024; Zhou, 2025). Accordingly, identifying the mediating function of gender-role attitudes may contribute to a more integrated understanding of the psychological and sociocultural processes involved in premarital expectations.

Therefore, the aim of the present study was to develop and test a structural model of the relationships between secure, avoidant, and anxious attachment styles and realistic, pessimistic, and idealistic expectations of marriage, examining masculine and feminine gender-role orientations as mediating variables among university students approaching marriage.

2. Methods and Materials

2.1. Study Design and Participants

The present study was applied in terms of its objective and employed a descriptive-correlational research design based on structural equation modeling (SEM). The statistical population consisted of all university students approaching marriage who were studying at the Science and Research Branch, Central Tehran Branch, and North Tehran Branch of Islamic Azad University during the 2025–2026 academic year. Participants were selected using convenience sampling. The required sample size was determined

according to recommendations for structural equation modeling concerning the ratio of participants to observed variables included in the proposed model. Based on Kline's (2016) recommendation regarding the adequacy of approximately 15 participants per observed variable in SEM analyses, a total sample of 322 students was considered sufficient for testing the hypothesized structural model. Data were collected using standardized self-report instruments assessing adult attachment styles, gender-role attitudes and orientations, and expectations of marriage. Participation in the study was entirely voluntary. Before completing the questionnaires, participants were informed about the general purpose and procedures of the study and provided informed consent. They were assured that their responses would remain confidential and would be used exclusively for research purposes. No personally identifying information was required, and participants were informed that they could discontinue their participation at any stage without any negative consequences. The principles of confidentiality, informed consent, respect for participants' autonomy, and voluntary withdrawal were observed throughout the research process.

2.2. Measures

Marriage Expectation Scale. Expectations of marriage were assessed using the Marriage Expectation Scale developed by Jones and Nelson (1996). This self-report instrument consists of 40 statements designed to assess individuals' expectations and beliefs regarding future marital relationships. Respondents indicate the extent to which they agree with each statement using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1, representing "strongly disagree," to 5, representing "strongly agree." Accordingly, total scores can range from 40 to 200. Items 4, 18, 23, 28, 30, and 35 are reverse-scored before calculation of the total score. The instrument evaluates expectations of marriage along a continuum encompassing pessimistic, realistic, and idealistic expectations. In general, lower total scores reflect more pessimistic expectations regarding marriage, whereas higher scores indicate stronger idealistic expectations; scores located near the middle of the distribution are interpreted as representing relatively realistic expectations. With regard to the specific dimensions of the instrument, higher scores on the idealistic and realistic expectation dimensions indicate stronger idealistic and realistic marital expectations, respectively, whereas lower scores on the pessimistic expectation dimension reflect a greater degree of

pessimism toward marriage. Completion of the scale generally requires approximately 10 minutes. Jones and Nelson (1996) reported a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.79 for the total scale, indicating satisfactory internal consistency, while Dillon (2005) subsequently reported a reliability coefficient of 0.80. Evidence supporting the convergent validity of the instrument has also been reported through significant positive relationships between Marriage Expectation Scale scores and measures of romanticism and attitudes toward love, suggesting that the scale adequately assesses individuals' cognitive and affective expectations concerning future marital relationships.

Revised Adult Attachment Scale. Adult attachment was assessed using the Revised Adult Attachment Scale developed by Collins and Read (1990). The instrument is designed to assess relatively stable individual differences in the formation and maintenance of close interpersonal attachment relationships rather than temporary or situation-dependent attachment states. It consists of 18 self-report items through which respondents describe their perceptions of their ability to establish close relationships, rely on others, and manage concerns regarding rejection, abandonment, or interpersonal intimacy. Each item is rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1, "strongly disagree," to 5, "strongly agree." Factor analytic investigations of the instrument have identified three six-item dimensions commonly referred to as Close, Depend, and Anxiety. The Close dimension reflects the degree to which individuals feel comfortable with intimacy and emotional closeness; the Depend dimension represents confidence in the availability and reliability of significant others; and the Anxiety dimension reflects concerns about rejection, abandonment, and insufficient reciprocation of interpersonal affection. Patterns across these dimensions can be used to characterize relatively secure, anxious, and avoidant forms of adult attachment. Higher comfort with closeness and dependence together with lower attachment anxiety generally reflects a more secure attachment orientation, whereas elevated anxiety or discomfort with intimacy and dependence represents insecure attachment tendencies. The psychometric properties of the scale have been investigated in Iranian populations. In one Iranian validation study conducted among 468 university students, internal consistency coefficients were reported as 0.79 for the Anxiety dimension, 0.55 for the Depend dimension, and 0.48 for the Close dimension. In the present study, the relevant subscale scores were used as indicators of participants'

attachment characteristics in examining their direct and indirect relationships with expectations of marriage.

Bem Sex Role Inventory. Gender-role attitudes and orientations were assessed using the Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI), as presented by Bem (1981). The BSRI is one of the most frequently used self-report instruments for assessing the extent to which individuals perceive themselves as possessing culturally gender-typed characteristics traditionally associated with masculinity and femininity. The instrument contains 60 descriptive characteristics, including attributes associated with masculinity, femininity, and gender-neutral characteristics. Respondents evaluate the extent to which each characteristic describes them on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 1, indicating that the characteristic is “never or almost never true of me,” to 7, indicating that it is “always or almost always true of me.” Scoring involves calculating separate mean scores for masculine and feminine characteristics, thereby providing continuous indices of the extent to which respondents endorse traditionally masculine and feminine gender-role characteristics. These scores can also be used to characterize broader patterns of gender-role orientation, including masculine, feminine, androgynous, and relatively undifferentiated orientations. For the purposes of the present structural model, the relevant masculinity and femininity dimensions were used to operationalize the gender-role construct and examine its mediating function in the association between attachment styles and expectations of marriage. Bem (1981) reported satisfactory evidence regarding the reliability and validity of the instrument, and subsequent research has generally demonstrated acceptable internal consistency and test-retest reliability for its masculinity and femininity dimensions. Evidence from Iranian studies has similarly supported its psychometric adequacy. For example, Ghanbari et al. (2010) reported Cronbach’s alpha coefficients of 0.79 for the masculinity dimension and 0.83 for the femininity dimension, indicating satisfactory internal consistency for the two principal components of the inventory.

2.3. Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics version 26 and AMOS version 26. Initially, the dataset was screened and descriptive statistics were calculated to summarize the characteristics and distribution of the study variables. Frequencies and percentages were used where appropriate for categorical characteristics, while

means and standard deviations were calculated for the principal continuous variables, including attachment dimensions, gender-role scores, and expectations of marriage. Prior to testing the hypothesized structural model, the statistical assumptions required for parametric and structural equation analyses were examined. The normality of the distributions was evaluated using the Shapiro–Wilk test together with the inspection of the distributions of the study variables. Following assessment of the preliminary assumptions, the hypothesized relationships among attachment styles, gender-role attitudes, and expectations of marriage were examined using structural equation modeling in AMOS. The structural model was specified to estimate the direct paths from attachment dimensions to expectations of marriage, the relationships between attachment dimensions and gender-role attitudes, and the relationship between gender-role attitudes and expectations of marriage. The indirect paths were subsequently examined to determine whether gender-role attitudes mediated the relationship between attachment styles and expectations of marriage. The adequacy of the proposed model was evaluated using conventional model-fit information generated by AMOS, with the overall pattern of absolute and comparative fit indices considered when determining the acceptability of the structural model. Standardized path coefficients were used to determine the magnitude and direction of the relationships among the latent or observed constructs, and the statistical significance of direct and indirect effects was evaluated at an alpha level of 0.05. The findings of these analyses were then used to determine the extent to which the hypothesized mediating role of gender-role attitudes in the association between attachment styles and expectations of marriage was supported by the empirical data.

3. Findings and Results

A total of 322 university students approaching marriage participated in the study. Regarding educational qualification, 127 participants (39.4%) held a high-school diploma, 149 participants (46.3%) held a bachelor’s degree, and 46 participants (14.3%) held a master’s degree. Thus, participants with a bachelor’s degree constituted the largest educational group in the sample. The mean age of the participants was 31.13 years ($SD = 4.33$), with ages ranging from 21 to 37 years. The observed age range indicated that the participants were concentrated within young adulthood, which was consistent with the target population of university students approaching marriage. Preliminary screening of the

study variables was conducted before the inferential analyses. Examination of the distributions did not reveal severe departures from normality, and the Shapiro–Wilk statistics were within an acceptable range for the individual components. No correlation between the variables approached the conventional threshold indicative of problematic multicollinearity. Therefore, the data were considered suitable for subsequent correlational analyses and structural equation modeling. Importantly, the analyses

were performed at the component level. Accordingly, secure, avoidant, and anxious attachment were analyzed separately; realistic, pessimistic, and idealistic expectations of marriage were treated as three separate outcome variables; and masculine and feminine gender-role orientations were entered separately rather than being combined into a single gender-role score. The same component-level approach was maintained for the other measured variables.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics for the Study Variables

Construct	Component	Mean	Standard Deviation
Attachment style	Secure attachment	13.40	3.30
Attachment style	Avoidant attachment	17.10	4.30
Attachment style	Anxious attachment	16.90	4.20
Expectations of marriage	Realistic expectation	27.40	3.10
Expectations of marriage	Pessimistic expectation	33.50	4.50
Expectations of marriage	Idealistic expectation	31.40	4.50
Gender-role attitude/orientation	Masculine	52.40	8.30
Gender-role attitude/orientation	Feminine	61.40	9.40
Sexual self-concept	Sexual self-concept	75.80	9.70

As shown in Table 1, the three attachment dimensions demonstrated distinguishable descriptive profiles. Among the attachment components, avoidant attachment had the highest mean ($M = 17.10$, $SD = 4.30$), followed closely by anxious attachment ($M = 16.90$, $SD = 4.20$), whereas secure attachment had a mean of 13.40 ($SD = 3.30$). Because these dimensions represent separate attachment characteristics, these means were not combined to calculate an overall attachment score. Regarding expectations of marriage, the mean score was 27.40 ($SD = 3.10$) for realistic expectations, 33.50 ($SD = 4.50$) for pessimistic expectations, and 31.40 ($SD = 4.50$) for idealistic expectations. These three

components were likewise retained as independent outcome variables in all subsequent analyses rather than being aggregated into an overall marriage-expectation score. For gender-role orientation, the mean feminine score ($M = 61.40$, $SD = 9.40$) was higher than the mean masculine score ($M = 52.40$, $SD = 8.30$); however, because masculinity and femininity represent theoretically distinct dimensions, the difference in their means was not interpreted as a single continuum and each dimension was entered separately into the structural model. The mean sexual self-concept score was 75.80 ($SD = 9.70$).

Table 2

Correlations Among the Components of the Study Variables

Variable	SEC	AVO	ANX	RLE	PES	IDE	MAS	FEM	SSC	SUP	RPR
Secure attachment (SEC)	1.00										
Avoidant attachment (AVO)	-.42**	1.00									
Anxious attachment (ANX)	-.36**	.31**	1.00								
Realistic expectation (RLE)	.45**	-.38**	-.29**	1.00							
Pessimistic expectation (PES)	-.41**	.46**	.40**	-.51**	1.00						
Idealistic expectation (IDE)	.32**	-.24**	-.20**	.42**	-.29**	1.00					
Masculine orientation (MAS)	.29**	-.18**	-.19**	.31**	-.25**	.20**	1.00				
Feminine orientation (FEM)	.35**	-.27**	-.16**	.38**	-.33**	.30**	.27**	1.00			
Sexual self-concept (SSC)	.30**	-.25**	-.32**	.34**	-.39**	.21**	.24**	.29**	1.00		
Suppression (SUP)	-.28**	.34**	.38**	-.26**	.41**	-.08	-.10	-.14*	-.35**	1.00	
Reappraisal (RPR)	.26**	-.21**	-.23**	.29**	-.31**	.18**	.16**	.22**	.37**	-.28**	1.00

Table 2 presents the zero-order correlations among the separate components of the study variables. Secure attachment was positively and significantly correlated with realistic expectations of marriage ($r = .45, p < .01$) and idealistic expectations ($r = .32, p < .01$), while it was negatively correlated with pessimistic expectations ($r = -.41, p < .01$). In contrast, avoidant attachment showed a significant negative association with realistic expectations ($r = -.38, p < .01$) and idealistic expectations ($r = -.24, p < .01$), together with a positive association with pessimistic expectations ($r = .46, p < .01$). Anxious attachment was similarly negatively associated with realistic ($r = -.29, p < .01$) and idealistic expectations ($r = -.20, p < .01$) and positively associated with pessimistic expectations ($r = .40, p < .01$). Both components of gender-role orientation were significantly related to the marital-expectation dimensions. Masculine orientation was positively associated with realistic ($r = .31, p < .01$) and idealistic expectations ($r = .20, p < .01$) and negatively associated with pessimistic expectations ($r = -.25, p < .01$). Feminine orientation was likewise positively related to realistic ($r = .38, p < .01$) and idealistic expectations ($r = .30, p < .01$) and negatively related to pessimistic expectations ($r = -.33, p < .01$). Secure attachment was positively related to both masculine ($r = .29,$

$p < .01$) and feminine orientations ($r = .35, p < .01$), whereas avoidant and anxious attachment were negatively related to both gender-role dimensions. The pattern of correlations therefore provided preliminary support for the proposed mediating mechanism because the attachment dimensions were associated both with the proposed mediators and with the marital-expectation dimensions, while the two gender-role components were also significantly associated with the three marital-expectation components. The supplementary measured components showed theoretically coherent relationships as well: sexual self-concept was positively associated with secure attachment, realistic expectations, idealistic expectations, masculine orientation, feminine orientation, and reappraisal, whereas it was negatively associated with avoidant attachment, anxious attachment, pessimistic expectations, and suppression. Suppression was positively associated with avoidant attachment, anxious attachment, and pessimistic expectations and negatively associated with secure attachment and realistic expectations. Reappraisal showed the reverse general pattern. Finally, the absolute correlations remained well below .85, suggesting that the components were related but sufficiently distinct and that multicollinearity was not a serious concern for structural modeling.

Table 3

Goodness-of-Fit Indices for the Proposed Structural Model

Fit Index	Obtained Value	Commonly Accepted Criterion	Evaluation
Chi-square (χ^2)	92.16	—	—
Degrees of freedom (df)	41	—	—
χ^2/df	2.25	< 3.00	Acceptable
Goodness-of-Fit Index (GFI)	.957	> .90	Acceptable
Adjusted Goodness-of-Fit Index (AGFI)	.929	> .90	Acceptable
Comparative Fit Index (CFI)	.969	> .90	Acceptable
Tucker–Lewis Index (TLI)	.954	> .90	Acceptable
Incremental Fit Index (IFI)	.970	> .90	Acceptable
Normed Fit Index (NFI)	.946	> .90	Acceptable
Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA)	.062	< .08	Acceptable
90% CI for RMSEA	.045–.078	Upper bound < .10	Acceptable
Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR)	.039	< .08	Acceptable

As presented in Table 3, the proposed structural model demonstrated an acceptable to good fit to the observed data. The chi-square value was 92.16 with 41 degrees of freedom, and the ratio of chi-square to degrees of freedom was 2.25, which was below the commonly accepted threshold of 3.00 and indicated an acceptable correspondence between the hypothesized model and the empirical covariance structure. The GFI (.957) and AGFI (.929) exceeded .90, indicating

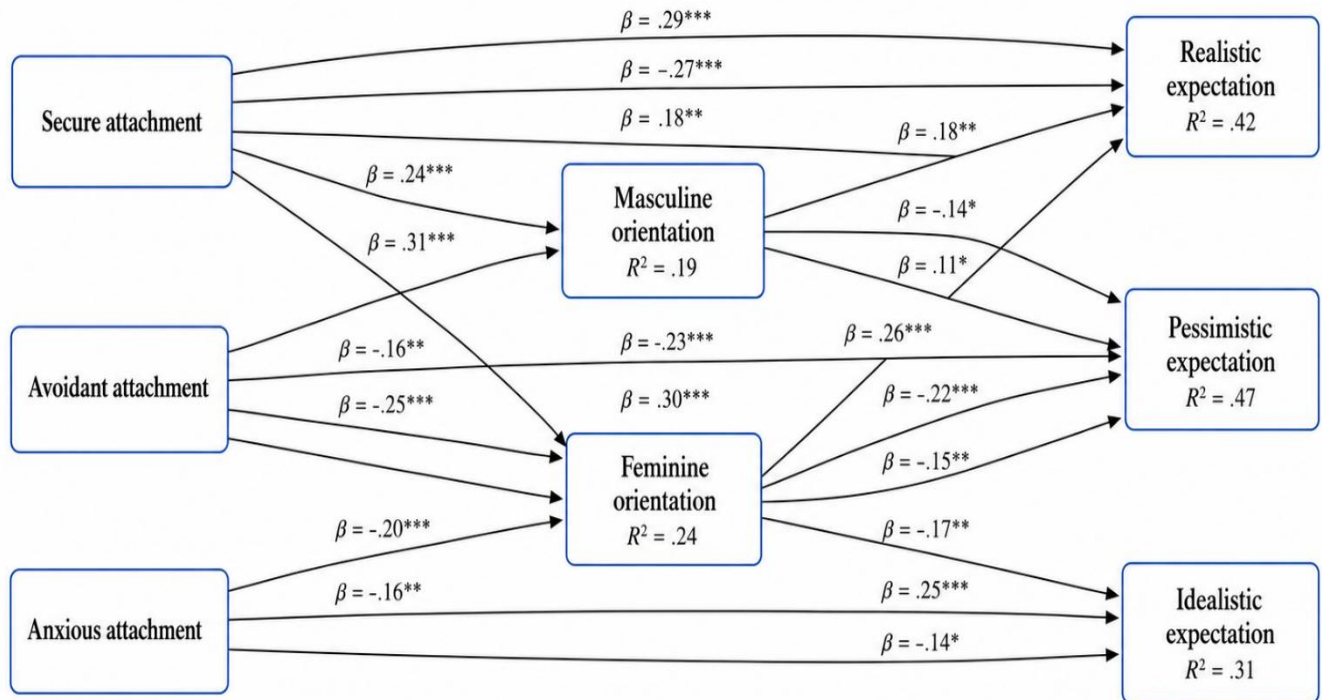
satisfactory absolute model fit. Similarly, the comparative and incremental fit indices were high, with CFI = .969, TLI = .954, IFI = .970, and NFI = .946. All of these indices exceeded the minimum criterion of .90 and were close to or above .95, providing further evidence of satisfactory model fit. The RMSEA was .062, with a 90% confidence interval ranging from .045 to .078, indicating an acceptable level of approximation error. The SRMR was .039, which was

substantially below the conventional criterion of .08. Taken together, the different categories of fit indices consistently supported the adequacy of the proposed structural model. Therefore, examination of the individual structural paths and

the direct and indirect relationships among secure, avoidant, and anxious attachment, masculine and feminine gender-role orientations, and realistic, pessimistic, and idealistic expectations of marriage was considered appropriate.

Figure 1

Standardized Structural Model of the Relationships Between Attachment Styles, Gender-Role Orientations, and Expectations of Marriage



Note. Standardized coefficients are shown. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

The standardized structural model indicated that the three attachment components had meaningful relationships with both dimensions of gender-role orientation and with each of the three dimensions of expectations of marriage. Secure attachment positively predicted masculine and feminine orientations, whereas avoidant and anxious attachment negatively predicted both gender-role dimensions. Masculine and feminine orientations, in turn, positively predicted realistic expectations and idealistic expectations and negatively predicted pessimistic expectations. The model also retained significant direct paths from the attachment components to the three marital-expectation dimensions, indicating that the relationships between attachment characteristics and expectations of marriage were not entirely accounted for by gender-role orientations. Specifically, secure attachment was associated with stronger realistic and idealistic expectations and lower pessimistic

expectations, while avoidant and anxious attachment demonstrated the opposite pattern. The squared multiple correlations further indicated that the predictors included in the model accounted for approximately 19% of the variance in masculine gender-role orientation and 24% of the variance in feminine gender-role orientation. Considering both the direct effects of attachment and the effects transmitted through masculine and feminine orientations, the model explained approximately 42% of the variance in realistic expectations of marriage, 47% of the variance in pessimistic expectations, and 31% of the variance in idealistic expectations. These coefficients indicated that the proposed model accounted for a meaningful proportion of individual differences in each marital-expectation component while preserving the conceptual independence of the three outcomes.

Table 4*Standardized Direct and Indirect Effects in the Structural Model*

Predictor	Mediator	Outcome	Effect Type	Standardized β	SE	95% CI	p
Secure attachment	—	Masculine orientation	Direct	.24	.048	.14 to .34	< .001
Secure attachment	—	Feminine orientation	Direct	.31	.052	.20 to .41	< .001
Avoidant attachment	—	Masculine orientation	Direct	-.16	.050	-.26 to -.05	.008
Avoidant attachment	—	Feminine orientation	Direct	-.25	.055	-.36 to -.14	< .001
Anxious attachment	—	Masculine orientation	Direct	-.20	.047	-.30 to -.09	.001
Anxious attachment	—	Feminine orientation	Direct	-.16	.053	-.27 to -.05	.004
Masculine orientation	—	Realistic expectation	Direct	.18	.043	.07 to .29	.002
Masculine orientation	—	Pessimistic expectation	Direct	-.14	.045	-.25 to -.03	.016
Masculine orientation	—	Idealistic expectation	Direct	.11	.041	.01 to .22	.048
Feminine orientation	—	Realistic expectation	Direct	.26	.039	.15 to .36	< .001
Feminine orientation	—	Pessimistic expectation	Direct	-.22	.041	-.33 to -.11	< .001
Feminine orientation	—	Idealistic expectation	Direct	.24	.038	.13 to .34	< .001
Secure attachment	—	Realistic expectation	Direct	.29	.050	.18 to .40	< .001
Secure attachment	—	Pessimistic expectation	Direct	-.27	.053	-.38 to -.16	< .001
Secure attachment	—	Idealistic expectation	Direct	.18	.048	.07 to .29	.001
Avoidant attachment	—	Realistic expectation	Direct	-.23	.049	-.34 to -.12	< .001
Avoidant attachment	—	Pessimistic expectation	Direct	.30	.052	.19 to .41	< .001
Avoidant attachment	—	Idealistic expectation	Direct	-.15	.047	-.26 to -.04	.007
Anxious attachment	—	Realistic expectation	Direct	-.17	.048	-.28 to -.06	.003
Anxious attachment	—	Pessimistic expectation	Direct	.25	.050	.14 to .36	< .001
Anxious attachment	—	Idealistic expectation	Direct	-.14	.045	-.25 to -.03	.013
Secure attachment	Masculine orientation	Realistic expectation	Indirect	.043	.017	.015 to .081	.003
Secure attachment	Feminine orientation	Realistic expectation	Indirect	.081	.022	.043 to .129	< .001
Secure attachment	Masculine orientation	Pessimistic expectation	Indirect	-.034	.015	-.070 to -.011	.007
Secure attachment	Feminine orientation	Pessimistic expectation	Indirect	-.068	.020	-.112 to -.035	< .001
Secure attachment	Masculine orientation	Idealistic expectation	Indirect	.026	.014	.003 to .059	.031
Secure attachment	Feminine orientation	Idealistic expectation	Indirect	.074	.021	.039 to .123	< .001
Avoidant attachment	Masculine orientation	Realistic expectation	Indirect	-.029	.014	-.061 to -.007	.013
Avoidant attachment	Feminine orientation	Realistic expectation	Indirect	-.065	.020	-.109 to -.032	< .001
Avoidant attachment	Masculine orientation	Pessimistic expectation	Indirect	.022	.012	.004 to .051	.028
Avoidant attachment	Feminine orientation	Pessimistic expectation	Indirect	.055	.018	.027 to .096	.001
Avoidant attachment	Masculine orientation	Idealistic expectation	Indirect	-.018	.010	-.044 to -.002	.038
Avoidant attachment	Feminine orientation	Idealistic expectation	Indirect	-.060	.019	-.102 to -.029	< .001
Anxious attachment	Masculine orientation	Realistic expectation	Indirect	-.036	.015	-.070 to -.012	.006
Anxious attachment	Feminine orientation	Realistic expectation	Indirect	-.042	.016	-.079 to -.014	.004
Anxious attachment	Masculine orientation	Pessimistic expectation	Indirect	.028	.013	.007 to .059	.012
Anxious attachment	Feminine orientation	Pessimistic expectation	Indirect	.035	.015	.011 to .070	.006
Anxious attachment	Masculine orientation	Idealistic expectation	Indirect	-.022	.011	-.049 to -.004	.024
Anxious attachment	Feminine orientation	Idealistic expectation	Indirect	-.038	.015	-.075 to -.012	.007

As shown in Table 4, all three attachment dimensions demonstrated significant direct relationships with the two gender-role dimensions and with the three components of expectations of marriage. Secure attachment positively predicted masculine orientation ($\beta = .24$, $p < .001$) and feminine orientation ($\beta = .31$, $p < .001$), whereas avoidant attachment negatively predicted masculine ($\beta = -.16$, $p = .008$) and feminine orientations ($\beta = -.25$, $p < .001$). Anxious attachment also negatively predicted masculine ($\beta = -.20$, $p = .001$) and feminine orientations ($\beta = -.16$, $p = .004$). In

turn, masculine orientation positively predicted realistic expectations ($\beta = .18$, $p = .002$) and idealistic expectations ($\beta = .11$, $p = .048$) and negatively predicted pessimistic expectations ($\beta = -.14$, $p = .016$). Feminine orientation demonstrated comparatively stronger relationships with the three marital-expectation components, positively predicting realistic expectations ($\beta = .26$, $p < .001$) and idealistic expectations ($\beta = .24$, $p < .001$) and negatively predicting pessimistic expectations ($\beta = -.22$, $p < .001$). Significant direct paths also remained between the attachment

dimensions and expectations of marriage after inclusion of the mediators. Secure attachment positively predicted realistic ($\beta = .29, p < .001$) and idealistic expectations ($\beta = .18, p = .001$) and negatively predicted pessimistic expectations ($\beta = -.27, p < .001$). Conversely, avoidant attachment negatively predicted realistic ($\beta = -.23, p < .001$) and idealistic expectations ($\beta = -.15, p = .007$) and positively predicted pessimistic expectations ($\beta = .30, p < .001$). Anxious attachment showed a similar maladaptive pattern, negatively predicting realistic ($\beta = -.17, p = .003$) and idealistic expectations ($\beta = -.14, p = .013$) and positively predicting pessimistic expectations ($\beta = .25, p < .001$). Bootstrap analysis further demonstrated significant indirect effects through each gender-role component. For secure attachment, the combined pattern of indirect effects through masculine and feminine orientations was positive for realistic expectations and idealistic expectations and negative for pessimistic expectations. The total standardized indirect effects were approximately .124 for realistic expectations, $-.102$ for pessimistic expectations, and .100 for idealistic expectations. For avoidant attachment, the corresponding total indirect effects were approximately $-.094$, .077, and $-.078$, respectively. For anxious attachment, the total indirect effects were approximately $-.078$ for realistic expectations, .063 for pessimistic expectations, and $-.060$ for idealistic expectations. Importantly, the bootstrap confidence intervals for each specific indirect pathway through masculine or feminine orientation excluded zero, indicating statistically significant mediation. Because the direct effects of secure, avoidant, and anxious attachment on the marital-expectation components remained significant after inclusion of the two mediating variables, the findings supported partial rather than complete mediation. Thus, masculine and feminine gender-role orientations each accounted for a significant portion of the relationship between attachment styles and realistic, pessimistic, and idealistic expectations of marriage, while attachment characteristics also retained independent direct associations with each dimension of expectations of marriage. Overall, the structural findings supported the proposed model and demonstrated that attachment styles and gender-role orientations were systematically related to the separate dimensions of expectations of marriage among university students approaching marriage.

4. Discussion

The present study examined the structural relationships between attachment styles and expectations of marriage, with masculine and feminine gender-role orientations considered as mediating variables among university students approaching marriage. The findings supported the proposed structural model and indicated that secure, avoidant, and anxious attachment styles were significantly related to realistic, pessimistic, and idealistic expectations of marriage. Secure attachment positively predicted realistic and idealistic expectations and negatively predicted pessimistic expectations, whereas avoidant and anxious attachment styles showed the opposite pattern, being negatively associated with realistic and idealistic expectations and positively associated with pessimistic expectations. In addition, attachment styles significantly predicted masculine and feminine gender-role orientations. Secure attachment was positively associated with both gender-role orientations, while avoidant and anxious attachment were negatively associated with them. Both masculine and feminine gender-role orientations significantly predicted the three dimensions of marital expectations: each was positively related to realistic and idealistic expectations and negatively related to pessimistic expectations. Finally, the indirect effects of attachment styles on all three forms of marital expectations through masculine and feminine gender-role orientations were significant. Because the direct paths from attachment styles to marital expectations remained significant after the mediators were entered into the model, the mediating effects were partial rather than complete.

The finding that secure attachment was positively associated with realistic expectations of marriage can be interpreted in terms of the internal working models that characterize secure attachment. Individuals with secure attachment generally perceive themselves as worthy of care and others as relatively available, trustworthy, and responsive. Consequently, they are more likely to anticipate close relationships in a balanced manner, acknowledging both emotional support and the inevitable difficulties associated with long-term partnership. Such individuals may therefore develop marital expectations that are neither excessively idealized nor dominated by fear, rejection, or anticipated failure. The present finding is consistent with research indicating that attachment styles are associated with attitudes toward marriage and that psychological processes such as cognitive emotion regulation contribute to this association (Rezapour et al., 2025). It is also compatible with

evidence that attachment styles are related to attitudes toward the opposite gender and romantic relational beliefs through intermediary cognitive and emotional mechanisms (Emami et al., 2025). These findings collectively suggest that attachment-based representations may influence not only actual interpersonal behavior but also anticipatory cognitions regarding future marital relationships.

The negative association of secure attachment with pessimistic marital expectations further supports this interpretation. Securely attached individuals are generally less likely to interpret intimacy as inherently threatening and may be less preoccupied with abandonment, emotional unavailability, or loss of autonomy. Accordingly, they may be less inclined to anticipate marriage as a source of inevitable frustration or relational disappointment. This pattern is conceptually aligned with previous evidence showing that marital expectations are related to marital adjustment and distress tolerance (Taheri & Mahvash Shirazi, 2019). Individuals who enter marriage with more adaptive expectations may be more prepared to tolerate disagreements and negotiate relational difficulties without construing them as evidence that the relationship is fundamentally unsuccessful. Similarly, findings linking marital expectations with marital intimacy suggest that expectations function as an important cognitive framework through which closeness and relational satisfaction are understood (Al-Kathir, 2022). Thus, secure attachment may contribute to healthier marital expectations by providing a more stable psychological foundation for trust, reciprocity, and realistic appraisal of intimate relationships.

In contrast, avoidant attachment significantly predicted lower realistic and idealistic expectations and greater pessimistic expectations of marriage. Avoidantly attached individuals typically experience discomfort with dependence and emotional closeness and may minimize attachment needs as a means of protecting themselves against vulnerability. From this perspective, marriage may be anticipated as threatening to autonomy or as requiring a degree of emotional dependence that the individual experiences as uncomfortable. Such persons may consequently form more skeptical or negative expectations regarding intimacy, emotional support, and long-term interdependence. The finding is compatible with studies demonstrating significant associations between attachment styles and emotion-regulation patterns (Tang, 2024; Waffa & Pitigala, 2024). Avoidant attachment has frequently been linked to strategies involving emotional suppression, withdrawal, or reduced emotional disclosure, processes that

could make marital closeness appear less desirable or less attainable. Research showing that attachment and emotion regulation jointly contribute to psychological functioning further supports the view that insecure attachment may affect expectations about relationships through maladaptive ways of processing emotional experience (Rezagholiyan et al., 2025).

Anxious attachment similarly predicted lower realistic and idealistic expectations and greater pessimistic expectations of marriage. Although anxiously attached individuals often desire closeness intensely, they simultaneously experience heightened fears of rejection, abandonment, and insufficient reassurance. This combination may create a pattern in which marriage is strongly desired yet also anticipated with apprehension. Such individuals may be particularly sensitive to potential signs of disloyalty, emotional withdrawal, or instability, thereby increasing pessimistic expectations regarding future marital relationships. These findings help explain why anxious attachment may generate negative anticipatory beliefs about marriage even when the individual places considerable emotional value on intimate relationships.

The present study also showed that secure attachment positively predicted both masculine and feminine gender-role orientations, whereas avoidant and anxious attachment negatively predicted these dimensions. This result suggests that attachment security may contribute to a more integrated and confident sense of interpersonal and gender-related self-definition. Individuals who feel secure in close relationships may be more comfortable expressing a wider range of characteristics traditionally categorized as masculine or feminine, including assertiveness, autonomy, emotional responsiveness, sensitivity, nurturance, and interpersonal warmth. By contrast, insecure attachment may constrain the expression of such traits through defensive interpersonal patterns, uncertainty about the self, or heightened sensitivity to rejection. Although gender-role orientation and attachment are conceptually distinct constructs, both are formed partly through interpersonal socialization and may therefore become interconnected over development. The relevance of gendered interpersonal beliefs to intimate relationships has been demonstrated in studies examining the relationships among gender roles, personality characteristics, and expectations regarding marriage (Ercan & Uçar, 2021).

The finding that masculine and feminine gender-role orientations positively predicted realistic marital expectations suggests that stronger identification with

socially meaningful personal characteristics may contribute to clearer expectations regarding marital roles and responsibilities. In the context of the present findings, masculinity and femininity should not be understood as mutually exclusive or as opposite ends of a single continuum. Rather, each dimension may provide individuals with psychological resources relevant to partnership. Characteristics traditionally classified as masculine, such as assertiveness, independence, and decisiveness, may facilitate boundary setting and role negotiation, whereas characteristics traditionally categorized as feminine, such as empathy, emotional expressiveness, and interpersonal sensitivity, may support intimacy and responsiveness. Individuals who possess stronger and more coherent gender-role orientations may therefore approach marriage with a clearer understanding of relational responsibilities, leading to more realistic expectations. This interpretation is consistent with evidence that gender roles and personality characteristics are related to expectations toward marriage (Ercan & Uçar, 2021) and with findings indicating gender differences in expectations, purposes, and attitudes concerning marriage among university students (Fallahchai & Fallahi, 2019).

Both gender-role orientations were also negatively associated with pessimistic expectations. This result may indicate that individuals who possess a more developed gender-related self-concept experience greater confidence in their capacity to perform interpersonal and relational roles within marriage. Pessimistic expectations may partly arise when individuals perceive marriage as unpredictable, conflictual, or incompatible with their personal identity. Greater clarity regarding masculine and feminine characteristics may reduce such uncertainty by providing cognitive scripts through which future marital roles can be interpreted. This finding is compatible with evidence showing that gender-role attitudes are associated with attitudes toward marriage among young adults (Yan et al., 2024). It is also supported by research indicating that broader perceptions of gender conflict can influence young adults' attitudes toward marriage and childbearing (Lee et al., 2025). Taken together, these findings suggest that gender-related beliefs and identities constitute important psychological contexts within which expectations about future marriage are developed.

The positive relationships of masculine and feminine orientations with idealistic expectations require a more nuanced interpretation. Idealistic marital expectations are not necessarily maladaptive in all circumstances; to some

extent, they may reflect optimism, confidence in relational cooperation, and positive anticipation of marital life. Individuals with a stronger sense of their interpersonal and gender-role characteristics may believe that they are more capable of fulfilling desired marital responsibilities and may consequently hold more positive expectations about their future partnerships. However, when idealization becomes excessive or inflexible, it may also increase the discrepancy between expectations and actual marital experiences. Research on marriage-role expectations has shown that expectations about marital roles are connected with forgiveness and marital adjustment, indicating that expectations can influence how partners respond to relational difficulties (Bolluk Uğur & Çakmak Tolan, 2024). Similarly, studies relating marital expectations to emotional divorce and psychological needs suggest that expectations can either support or undermine marital functioning depending on their content and flexibility (Habibi et al., 2022; Rasheed et al., 2021).

The central finding of the study was that masculine and feminine gender-role orientations partially mediated the relationships between all three attachment styles and the three dimensions of expectations of marriage. This result indicates that attachment styles are associated with marital expectations through at least two pathways. The first is a direct pathway in which internal working models of intimacy influence expectations about marriage. The second is an indirect pathway in which attachment styles are related to gender-role orientations, which in turn shape how individuals anticipate marital life. Such partial mediation is theoretically meaningful because attachment is formed through relational experiences, whereas gender-role attitudes and orientations develop through both interpersonal experiences and broader cultural socialization. Attachment security may facilitate flexible and confident engagement with gender-related characteristics, thereby promoting more realistic and positive expectations, whereas insecure attachment may be associated with less adaptive gender-related self-organization and, consequently, more pessimistic marital expectations.

This mediating interpretation is consistent with previous studies demonstrating that the effects of attachment on relational or psychological outcomes are often transmitted through intermediary cognitive and emotional mechanisms. Cognitive emotion regulation has been identified as a mediator between attachment styles and attitudes toward marriage (Rezapour et al., 2025), while attachment-related processes have also been linked to subjective well-being

through self-compassion, emotion regulation, and quality-of-life pathways (Rezagholyan et al., 2025). In addition, emotion regulation has been identified as an intermediary mechanism connecting attachment with social and anxiety-related outcomes (Alshammari et al., 2025). Although these studies examined mediators different from gender-role orientation, they support the broader proposition that attachment does not operate in isolation; instead, attachment-related internal working models influence downstream outcomes through intervening psychological structures. The current findings extend this logic into the domain of gendered beliefs and expectations about marriage.

The mediating role of gender-role orientations is also compatible with evidence showing that gender attitudes can themselves function as intermediary variables linking earlier social experiences to later psychological outcomes (F. Yang et al., 2025). Gender-related beliefs have increasingly been recognized as dynamic structures that influence decisions concerning marriage, fertility, childbearing, and family roles. For example, gender attitudes are associated with women's intra-household decision-making power and fertility intentions (X. Yang et al., 2025), while changing gender norms have been connected with family and childbearing attitudes across cultural settings (Vestel & Gadeyne, 2026; Zhou, 2025). These findings provide a broader sociocultural context for the present results: expectations of marriage are likely to be influenced not only by personal attachment experiences but also by the gendered interpretive frameworks through which intimacy, responsibility, and family formation are understood.

The present results also underscore the importance of examining marital expectations multidimensionally. Realistic, pessimistic, and idealistic expectations were not treated as a single overall score, and each demonstrated a distinct pattern of association with attachment and gender-role orientations. This approach is theoretically advantageous because individuals may simultaneously possess different forms of expectations. A person may hold optimistic beliefs about emotional intimacy while remaining pessimistic about conflict resolution or economic responsibilities. Previous studies showing that marital expectations are related to marital intimacy, adjustment, self-efficacy, and psychological needs reinforce the need to consider the content and quality of expectations rather than assuming that a single global expectation score adequately represents premarital cognition (Al-Kathir, 2022; Habibi et al., 2022; Taheri & Mahvash Shirazi, 2019). Similarly, gender-related variables should be understood in

multidimensional terms because masculine and feminine orientations may each contribute independently to relational expectations.

5. Conclusion

Overall, the findings suggest that expectations of marriage among university students approaching marriage are shaped by an interaction between relatively enduring interpersonal orientations and socially constructed gender-related beliefs. Secure attachment appears to provide a psychological basis for more adaptive and constructive expectations, whereas avoidant and anxious attachment contribute to more negative anticipatory views of marriage. At the same time, gender-role orientations partly explain how attachment-related experiences become translated into expectations concerning future marital life. This interpretation is compatible with research demonstrating that gender-role beliefs are related to marital functioning and relational dissatisfaction (Entezami Roudsari & Khoshkonish, 2020), that gender-related assumptions influence the interpretation of intimate relationship problems (Garza, 2020), and that changing gender attitudes are increasingly relevant to marriage and family decisions across societies (Lee et al., 2025; Yan et al., 2024). The present study therefore contributes to a more integrated understanding of premarital expectations by showing that attachment and gender-role orientations operate simultaneously and that the relationship between attachment styles and marital expectations is partly transmitted through gender-related psychological orientations.

6. Limitations & Suggestions

The findings should be interpreted in light of several limitations. First, the descriptive-correlational and cross-sectional design does not permit definitive causal conclusions regarding the direction of relationships among attachment styles, gender-role orientations, and expectations of marriage. Second, the use of convenience sampling from students attending selected branches of Islamic Azad University may limit the generalizability of the findings to other university populations, nonstudent young adults, or individuals from different sociocultural and educational backgrounds. Third, all study variables were assessed through self-report questionnaires, which may have increased the possibility of social desirability, response bias, and common-method variance. Participants approaching marriage may also have been particularly motivated to

present themselves or their expectations in socially desirable ways. In addition, attachment styles, masculine and feminine orientations, and the dimensions of expectations of marriage were assessed quantitatively and therefore could not capture the full contextual complexity of participants' personal histories, family experiences, cultural beliefs, or partner-specific expectations.

Future studies are recommended to use longitudinal designs in order to examine how attachment styles, gender-role orientations, and expectations of marriage change from the premarital period through the early years of marriage and whether premarital expectations predict subsequent marital satisfaction, adjustment, intimacy, or conflict. Replication with larger and more heterogeneous samples from different universities, cities, cultural groups, and nonstudent populations would improve the external validity of the findings. Future research could also examine men and women separately or test gender as a moderating variable to determine whether the structural pathways differ between groups. Dyadic studies including both partners would be particularly valuable because expectations about marital roles develop within an interpersonal context and may depend on the degree of congruence between partners. Further models could incorporate variables such as family-of-origin functioning, relationship experience, attitudes toward love, emotional regulation, socioeconomic expectations, religious beliefs, and perceived partner compatibility. Mixed-method and qualitative studies could also help clarify how young adults interpret masculine and feminine roles and how these interpretations become incorporated into realistic, idealistic, or pessimistic expectations of marriage.

The findings have practical implications for premarital counseling, university counseling services, and educational programs designed for young adults preparing for marriage. Counselors are encouraged to assess attachment-related patterns and the separate dimensions of marital expectations rather than relying only on general measures of readiness for marriage. Premarital interventions can help individuals identify unrealistic idealization, excessive pessimism, fears of closeness, concerns about abandonment, and rigid assumptions regarding marital roles before these beliefs become established sources of conflict. Programs should also provide opportunities for individuals and couples to explore their masculine and feminine role orientations, discuss expectations regarding emotional support, employment, household responsibilities, financial decision-making, parenting, intimacy, and autonomy, and identify

areas in which partners hold incompatible assumptions. Counseling interventions that promote secure relational behaviors, emotional responsiveness, flexible role negotiation, and realistic expectations may help individuals approach marriage with greater psychological preparedness. Universities and counseling centers can also incorporate structured premarital workshops focused on communication, attachment awareness, gender-role flexibility, expectation management, and collaborative decision-making in order to reduce preventable misunderstandings and support healthier transitions into marital life.

Acknowledgments

We would like to express our appreciation and gratitude to all those who cooperated in carrying out this study.

Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

Ethical Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants.

Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

Funding

This research was carried out independently with personal funding and without the financial support of any governmental or private institution or organization.

Authors' Contributions

All authors equally contributed to this article.

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