

Testing a Causal Model of Avoidant Insecure Attachment and Marital Conflict Through Self-Differentiation and Cognitive Emotion Regulation: The Moderating Role of Emotional Intelligence in Married Students

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1. Round 1

1.1. Reviewer 1

Reviewer:

In the paragraph stating that “individuals with avoidant insecure attachment, due to avoidance of intimacy and inability to trust others, usually experience more maladaptive interactions,” the authors should provide a more nuanced theoretical explanation of avoidant attachment mechanisms. Avoidant attachment is not simply “inability to trust”; it involves deactivation of attachment needs, discomfort with dependency, suppression of emotional expression, and defensive self-reliance. The authors should revise this section to distinguish avoidant attachment from anxious/ambivalent attachment and explain why avoidant attachment specifically is expected to predict marital conflict through withdrawal, reduced emotional disclosure, and impaired repair attempts.

In the introduction sentence, “the effect of attachment style on marital conflict is probably not direct and operates through mediating psychological mechanisms,” the manuscript introduces mediation but does not clearly justify why self-differentiation and cognitive emotion regulation were chosen over other possible mediators such as marital intimacy, communication patterns,

empathy, perceived partner responsiveness, or conflict-resolution style. The authors should add a more explicit theoretical bridge showing how avoidant attachment undermines self-differentiation and emotion regulation, and how these two mechanisms subsequently increase marital conflict. This will make the proposed model less descriptive and more theoretically driven.

In the paragraph introducing self-differentiation, the sentence “self-differentiation refers to the ability to maintain balance between cognition and emotion” is accurate but incomplete. The construct also includes the ability to maintain emotional connectedness while preserving autonomy in close relationships. Since the study concerns marital conflict, the authors should emphasize the relational dimensions of self-differentiation, including emotional reactivity, I-position, emotional cutoff, and fusion with others. This would make the link between self-differentiation and marital conflict clearer and would align the theoretical explanation with the subscales of the instrument used in the study.

In the Adult Attachment Scale section, the reliability coefficients for avoidant insecure attachment and ambivalent insecure attachment in the present study are reported as 0.66. Although this may be considered marginally acceptable in exploratory work, it is relatively low for a structural model using latent or observed constructs. The authors should acknowledge this limitation and explain whether the attachment subscales were treated as observed composite scores or latent variables. If latent variables were used, the authors should provide factor loadings and composite reliability; if observed scores were used, the possible attenuation of relationships due to measurement error should be discussed.

In the description of the Differentiation of Self Inventory–Short Form, the manuscript reports that one prior subscale reliability was 0.48 for emotional reactivity. This low coefficient should not be presented without interpretation. The authors should explain whether the total score or subscale scores were used in the main analysis. If only the total self-differentiation score was used, this should be stated explicitly. If subscales were included in the measurement model, the authors should report factor loadings, reliability, and model fit indices for the measurement model to demonstrate that the construct was measured adequately in the present sample.

In the data analysis section, the authors state that “descriptive and inferential statistics were used,” but the analytical sequence is not sufficiently detailed. The authors should specify the exact steps of the analysis: screening for missing data, outliers, normality, descriptive statistics, correlations, MANOVA for gender differences, confirmatory factor analysis, structural model testing, and conditional process analysis. The manuscript should also state the estimation method used in AMOS, the number of bootstrap samples used for indirect effects, and the criteria used to evaluate model fit, such as CFI, TLI, RMSEA, SRMR, and χ^2/df .

Response: Revised and uploaded the manuscript.

1.2. Reviewer 2

Reviewer:

In the paragraph on cognitive emotion regulation, the manuscript states that “adaptive strategies are associated with greater mental health and marital satisfaction, whereas maladaptive strategies can intensify conflicts.” This point is important, but the current version would benefit from separating adaptive and maladaptive strategies conceptually from the beginning. Since the final model treats adaptive and maladaptive strategies as separate variables, the introduction should also present them as distinct theoretical pathways. The authors should explain why adaptive strategies are expected to reduce marital conflict and why maladaptive strategies are expected to increase it, instead of describing cognitive emotion regulation as a single general construct.

In the paragraph introducing emotional intelligence, the statement “emotional intelligence can play a determining role in how couples interact” requires deeper integration with the moderation hypothesis. The manuscript should clarify why emotional intelligence is expected to moderate the paths from self-differentiation and cognitive emotion regulation to marital conflict. For example, emotional intelligence may strengthen the protective effect of self-differentiation by enabling more accurate emotion

perception, empathic communication, and regulation of conflict-related arousal. Without this explanation, the moderation hypothesis appears statistically motivated rather than theoretically grounded.

In the methods section sentence, “The present study was descriptive-correlational and was conducted in the framework of structural equation modeling, or a mediation–moderation model,” the design needs more precise methodological language. Structural equation modeling is an analytic approach, not a research design. The authors should revise the sentence to state that the study used a descriptive-correlational cross-sectional design and analyzed the proposed moderated mediation model using structural equation modeling and PROCESS. This distinction is important for methodological accuracy and for preventing overstatement of causal interpretation.

In the sampling paragraph, the authors write that “720 married students, including 360 women and 360 men, were selected.” The manuscript should clarify whether gender balance was intentionally imposed through stratified sampling or occurred naturally after random selection. If equal gender representation was planned, the sampling method should be described as multistage stratified random sampling rather than simply multistage random sampling. The authors should also report inclusion and exclusion criteria, such as marital duration, age range, current enrollment status, willingness to participate, and whether participants with incomplete questionnaires were excluded.

In the instruments section, the Marital Conflict Questionnaire is described as being scored from “1 = always to 5 = never,” while higher scores are said to indicate greater marital conflict. This scoring direction may create ambiguity because if “never” receives the highest score, some items may require reverse scoring depending on their wording. The authors should clearly state whether any items were reverse-coded and how the total score was computed. This is essential because interpretation of the marital conflict score depends directly on scoring direction and item polarity.

Response: Revised and uploaded the manuscript.

2. Revised

Editor’s decision after revisions: Accepted.

Editor in Chief’s decision: Accepted.