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## The predictive role of attachment and couple styles on relationship maintenance strategies in women

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### Abstract

The purpose of the present study was to investigate the predictive role of attachment and couple styles on relationship maintenance strategies. The method of the current research was a correlational description. The population of this study included all women with children studying in middle school in Tehran, among whom 372 were selected by random cluster sampling. The data collection tool was Stafford, Dainton, and Haas's (2000) Relationship Maintenance Strategies Questionnaire, Hazen and Shaver's (1987) Attachment Style Questionnaire, and Fitzpatrick and Ritchie's (1994) Communication Dimensions Questionnaire. Pearson correlation and multivariate regression were used to analyze the data. The research results showed that there is a significant positive relationship between the secure attachment style ( $r=0.17$ ,  $P\leq 0.001$ ) and traditional couple styles ( $r=0.23$ ,  $P\leq 0.001$ ) and independent ( $r=0.56$ ,  $P\leq 0.001$ ) with relationship maintenance strategies. Also, there is a significant negative relationship between avoidant ( $r=-0.16$ ,  $P\leq 0.002$ ) and ambivalent ( $r=-0.14$ ,  $P\leq 0.003$ ) attachment styles with relationship maintenance strategies. Also, multivariable regression analysis showed that traditional, independent couple styles and secure, avoidant, and ambivalent attachment styles could predict 33% of the variance of relationship maintenance strategies. Based on these findings, it can be concluded that couple styles and attachment have an effective role in couples' use of relationship maintenance strategies.

**Keywords:** *Relationship maintenance strategies, attachment styles, couple styles, women.*

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## Introduction

Relationship maintenance strategies are defined as dynamic behaviors that emphasize relationship protection (Johnson, 2009). Different definitions of relationship maintenance strategies have been presented in different researches, which include: continuity and stability of the relationship (Ogulowski and Boyers, 2012). Also, relationship maintenance strategies include activities and tasks that people use to maintain their relationship (Momini, Saidi, Rezaei, Azizi, and Ansari, 2014). In the study conducted by Stafford (2011) in order to determine the strategies that couples use to maintain their relationship, they identified five strategies. 1- Reassurance and encouragement, 2- Openness and self-disclosure, 3- Positivity, 4- Dividing tasks, 5- Social network. Stafford et al. (2000) presented two other strategies that included advice and conflict management. These strategies are activities that people take consciously or unconsciously to maintain their relationship.

Attachment is a relatively stable emotional bond that is created between a child and a mother or people with whom the baby interacts regularly (Kordi, Aslani and Amanolahi, 2017). Securely attached adults are those who have a positive sense of self and a positive perception of others (Kahn, Norman, Welborn, & Calhoun, 2008). These adults tend to have positive views of themselves and their spouses, these individuals feel comfortable with both belonging and independence (Bogaerts, Dalder, Knapp, Kienst, & Buschman, 2008). Adults with an anxious/ambivalent attachment style have a less positive view of themselves. They often doubt their own worth as a spouse and blame themselves for their partner's lack of responsiveness

(Bogaerts, Dalder, Knapp, Kienst, & Buschman, 2008).

Another factor that can be effective in the use of relationship maintenance strategies by couples is couple style. Fitzpatrick (1998) classifies people based on their definition of important areas of communication in their lives. He introduced three styles of traditional couple, independent and separated. People who fit into the traditional style have traditional beliefs and values towards marriage. These couples have less autonomy and independence than other styles and are behaviorally and psychologically interdependent (Geertz, Segrin, & Hanzal, 2009). People who are in the independent style, both men and women are egalitarian in accepting male and female sexual roles, that is, the duties of couples are not divided into male and female, but both perform the role when appropriate. Individuals who fall into the separate style are compatible with traditional gender roles, i.e. male and female roles. That is, the duties of men and women are completely separate and distinct. When a conflict arises, each of them expresses their opinion, but none of them try to convince the other party and create understanding, and sometimes they show aggression (Hanparrovan, Qaderi, and Ghobadi, 2011).

The present study was conducted with the aim of investigating the predictive role of attachment and couple styles on relationship maintenance strategies in order to answer the following questions.

1. Is there a correlation between attachment styles and relationship maintenance strategies?
2. Is there a correlation between couple styles and relationship maintenance strategies?
3. Can attachment and couple styles predict relationship maintenance strategies?

## Method

The current research was a descriptive research of correlation type. The population of this research was all couples with children studying in middle school in Tehran in 2016. From this population, 372 married people (233 women and 139 men) were selected as a sample through random cluster sampling.

## Materials

### 1. Hazen and Shiver Attachment Styles

**Questionnaire:** This questionnaire was created for the first time by Hazen and Shiver in 1987, a self-report scale. This questionnaire has 15 items; five items are assigned to each of the three secure, avoidant and ambivalent attachment styles. It is graded on a Likert scale from never = 1 to almost always = 5. The subject's minimum and maximum scores in the test subscales will be 5 and 25, respectively.

2. Relationship Maintenance Strategies Questionnaire (RMSM): To measure relationship maintenance strategies, the Relationship Maintenance Strategies Questionnaire (RMSM), Stafford, Dainton and Haas (2000) was used. This questionnaire has 31 questions with a Likert scale of 7 (Stafford et al., 2000). This questionnaire has 7 subscales, which are: reassurance, openness, conflict management, task division, positivity, advice and social network.

3. Relationship Dimensions Questionnaire (RDI): To measure couples' styles, the short form of the 77-question communication dimensions questionnaire by Fitzpatrick and Endwick (1982) was used. This questionnaire measures three independent couple styles, traditional and separate style, and its items are arranged in a 5-point Likert scale (1=completely disagree to 5=completely agree). High scores in each of

these three styles will indicate a person's marital style.

## Findings

The mean and standard deviation of avoidant attachment style is 7.76 and 2.93; Mean and standard deviation of secure attachment style, 12.19 and 2.81; The mean and standard deviation of ambivalent attachment style is 6.40 and 3.24. Also, the mean and standard deviation of the independent couple style are 10.86 and 3.11, respectively; traditional couple style 9/39 and 2/29; Separate couple style is 8.25 and 2.56, respectively, and the average and standard deviation of relationship maintenance strategies are 170.58 and 30.58.

There is a significant positive relationship between secure attachment style ( $r=0.17$ ,  $P=0.001$ ) and traditional couple styles ( $r=0.23$ ,  $P=0.001$ ) with relationship maintenance strategies. There is also a significant direct relationship between independent style ( $r=0.56$ ,  $P=0.001$ ) and relationship maintenance strategies. Also, there is a significant negative relationship between avoidant ( $r=-0.16$ ,  $P=0.002$ ) and ambivalent ( $r=-0.14$ ,  $P=0.003$ ) attachment styles with relationship maintenance strategies. No significant relationship was found between separate couple style and relationship maintenance strategies.

The linear combination of predictor variables in explaining the criterion variable is significant with  $F=32.16$  with degrees of freedom (365 and 6) at the level of  $P \geq 0.001$ . The values of R (multivariate correlation) and adjusted R squared of multivariate correlation were obtained as 0.59 and 0.33, respectively. That is, about 0.33% of the variance of the criterion variable (relationship maintenance strategies) can be explained by predictor variables. Also, the

predictive variable of avoidant attachment style ( $\beta=-0.13$ ,  $t=-2.19$ ) and ambivalent attachment style ( $\beta=-0.11$ ,  $t=-2.14$ ) have the ability to predict the criterion variable negatively. . Also, secure attachment style ( $\beta=0.15$ ,  $t=2.66$ ), independent couple style ( $\beta=0.51$ ,  $t=10.84$ ) and traditional couple style ( $\beta=0.12$ ,  $t=2.56$ ), has the ability to positively predict the criterion variable, and the separate couple style ( $\beta = -0.06$ ,  $t = 1.41$ ) could not predict relationship maintenance strategies. In addition, the most important predictor of relationship maintenance strategies among predictor variables is independent couple style ( $\beta=0.51$ ,  $t=10.84$ ).

### **Discussion**

The purpose of the present study aimed to investigate the predictive role of attachment and couple styles on relationship maintenance strategies. Correlation findings indicated a significant positive relationship between secure attachment style and relationship maintenance strategies and a significant negative relationship between avoidant and ambivalent attachment style and relationship maintenance strategies. Also, a significant positive relationship was observed between independent and traditional marital style and relationship maintenance strategies, and no significant relationship was observed between separate marital style and maintenance strategies. Also, avoidant, ambivalent and secure attachment styles and traditional and independent couple styles were able to predict relationship maintenance strategies. As expected, secure attachment style individuals use more relationship maintenance strategies compared to avoidant and ambivalent individuals. Also, people with a secure attachment style use more conflict management and positivity than the other two attachment styles (Ghezelseflu et

al., 2016). People with an anxious attachment style use coordination and consultation to keep their partner close and available. People with an ambivalent attachment style use less conflict management because they question their own self-worth and believe that their partner will reject them rather than be motivated to resolve the conflict.

The relationship between the use of relationship maintenance strategies and couple styles is a bidirectional relationship. Employing relationship maintenance strategies leads to the formation of couple styles. On the other hand, couples use different relationship maintenance strategies based on their marital style. Couples with an independent couple style have good communication skills and strategies for maintaining a good relationship, such as listening and expressing empathy, self-disclosure, positivity and reassurance. Couples with a traditional couple style, with traditional gender roles, that is, male and female roles, and in other words, they use the strategy of dividing tasks well, they use reassuring skills such as listening and expressing empathy well. After the end of any conflict, they obviously seek to satisfy and convince the other party. On the contrary, couples avoid any conflict and have few skills in conflict resolution, and when a conflict arises, each of them expresses their opinion, but none of them tries to convince the other party and create understanding.

### **Ethics**

In this research, ethical standards including obtaining informed consent, ensuring privacy and confidentiality were observed.

### **Acknowledgement**

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## Conflict of Interest

According to the authors, this article has no financial sponsor or conflict of interest.

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