



Influence of Attachment Styles on Marital Satisfaction: Library research

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ABSTRACT

Achieving marital satisfaction (MS) is becoming difficult for many couples. In fact, MS of the first marriages has declined since the mid-1970s. Approximately, half of the marriages resolve their marital unhappiness through divorce. In order to achieve MS, abundant of research has been carried out to investigate what constitutes a successful marital experience. Recent researchers have attempted to investigate indicators of MS. Interestingly, many prominent marital researchers suggest that there is a relationship between preliminary attachment [early relationship between caregiver and infant] and marital quality. Moreover, scientific studies and contemporary psychologists have started to promote concept of preliminary attachment for better quality of marital life. The review of studies conducted in the west suggests that secure attachment has high predictive validity for concurrent marital relationship while avoidant and anxious attachment invalidate relationships particularly MS. Although studies conducted highlight significant role of attachment styles on MS, but there is a dire need to investigate the varied attachment by Islamic perception. The aim of this preliminary study is to investigate one of the indicators of MS which is attachment and proposing effect of its role in process leading to MS by highlighting Islamic perspective. This study can be useful for psychologists and counselors that educate attachment styles based on Islamic believe to couples, before transition to parenting.

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Introduction

A large number of researches indicated that marriage can organize personal and social life nearly in all societies (Coontz, 2005, Gottman, 1994 & Nettle, 2005). In holly book of Muslims, Quran, marriage has been described as love, mercy and harmony (Khan, 2006). Studies show that 90% of Americans get married at least once in their lifetime (Brubaker & Kimberly 1993). Some researchers have strived to uncover benefits of marriage. For instance, Coontz (2005) suggested that married people can benefit emotional well-being. Kim & Mc Kenry (2002) asserted that emotional health is not determined by marriage only, but by quality marriage. Moreover, Gibson-Davids *et al.* (2005) mentioned that Spouse's psychological well-being is influenced by level of marital satisfaction (MS). In other researches, Gonzaga *et al.* (2007) and Hogue (2009) uncovered benefits of a satisfactory marriage such as financial establishment, family structure, emotional support, physical health, and long life. Eventhough marriage may be a relationship delightful to many, but marital satisfaction (MS) is not easily acquired. Moreover, maintaining a happy marital relationship is difficult for many couples in all societies (Whiteman *et al.* 2007). Atta-Alla (2009) labeled MS as an assessment of each party in marriage from her or his marital relationship, seeing that inside values for high-quality relationship. Surprisingly, Bradbury *et al.* (2000) found out that in first marriages, MS has declined since the mid-1970s, and many couples, approximately half of the first time marriages, stated that their marital unhappiness was overcome through permanent separation. For example, in the United States, 20 out of every 1000 women over the age of 15 get divorced (Hughes & Fergusson, 2004). Divorce is a main life stressor and is comparable to traumatic life events such as death of loved ones and loss of employment. Divorce affects not

only the lives of each spouse but also the lives of children as well.

Interestingly, MS is a significant subject that has been largely studied over the past 20 years particularly in terms of its relation to divorce (Parker, 2009). Since low MS is correlated with divorce (Huston *et al.*, 2001) presents more detailed information about marriages including what contributes to successful marriages. The marital studies have been focused on understanding components of MS. Research has provided a big deal of concentration to many variables that lead to MS, including the correlation of MS with spousal view, demonstration of emotion, the influence of personality factors, the influence of coping strategies, attachment styles, interaction levels, gender roles, conflict management style, and problem solving style (Huston *et al.*, 2001). Table 1 summerizes the indicators of marital satisfaction, research done by researchers, and kinds of relationship.

In this regards, Fricker (2006) believed that although it is difficult to claim whether there is any magic factor that guarantees marital happiness, attachment styles have exposed potency in predicting relationship satisfaction or dissatisfaction. In line with this finding, Banse (2004) found that MS can be accounted by individuals' own attachment to their romantic partners, the partner's attachment style, as well as the interaction between the attachment style of each member of the couple. Attachment security is a judgment or expectation that one has about the accessibility and openness of others during times of stress. This sense is developed from a style or model learned in childhood through dealings with caregivers. Bowlby (1980) as the founder of attachment theory considered the heritage of early relationships with initial caregivers for personal welfare and experiences in close relationships in later

relationship. Bowlby(1980) believes that attachment has 4 traits. These traits include secure haven, secure base, maintainan close, and separation distress. Table 2 illustrates the four traits.

Attachment and Marital satisfaction

Attachment perspective disputes when infants are parted from their initial caregiver for extensive lengths of time, they experience a series of emotional responses that reveal themselves in three different ways: protest, despair, and detachment. Hence children build up working styles or schemas about the nature of close relationships including how partners will respond to their requests and how they themselves should engage in relationships. These working styles are considered to be guides for the partners to select individuals to be their couples whom considered their working styles and beliefs for their close relationships (Frazier et al.,1996). Importantly, working styles commonly remain constant during life as first skills and knowleges that make expectations for marital relationships (Waters *et al.*, 2000). Thus, initial relationships with caregivers in childhood are thought to be enduring vulnerabilities of spouses to bring marriage to high or low level of MS. Ainsworth et al. (1978) instituted three types of attachments: secure, avoidant and anxious.

Secure Attachment: Infants whose caregivers are warm and quick to respond to their attempts to bring out physical protection, safety, and emotional support, develop working styles of their partners as dependable, trustworthy, and supportive and styles of themselves as capable and competent individuals who have the capacity to succeed in close relationships. This type of workings is commnoly viewed as "secure." couples with a secure working style thought to have been more positive attitude on themselves and the world around them, as well as a more positive lens through which they interpret spouses' actions. Couples with secure working styles may therefore interpret the actions and verbal cues of close friends, marital partners, and acquaintances more positively than individuals with an insecure working styles. This positive attribution bias is thought to result in more positive assessments of relationships and a low level of fear of deserting. Supportingly in this proposition, positive marital attributions have been consistently linked with MS. Furthermore, when dealing with conflict, spouses who express their relationships as highly secure are capable of displaying emotional regulation that results in more positive outcomes than couples who express their marriage as insecure (Kobak & Hazan, 1991). A study by Rholes et al. (1998) indicated that during conflict, female spouses with a secure attachment style exhibited better affect regulation and distress tolerance by displaying lower levels of anxiety and negative behaviors than female spouses with ambivalent attachment styles. Male spouses with a secure attachment style behaved toward their partners in a manner that was warmer and more supportive in contrast to men spouses with avoidant attachment styles (Simpson et al., 1992). According to previous research, couples who are securely attached are more willing to use a problem solving approach in relationships and are more willing to compromise (Corcoran & Mallinckrodt, 2000).

Avoidant attachment: Infants whose parents are cold and rejecting their physical and emotional needs develop working styles of partners as undependable, untrustworthy, and unsupportive and develop styles of themselves as incompetent individuals who are likely to fail in their relationships. These types of working styles are generally regarded as being

"insecure" or avoidant. Couples with an avoidant internal working style are thought to have a more negative outlook on themselves and the world around them, and a more pessimistic lens through which they interpret spouses' actions. Couples who are avoidant may therefore interpret partners' actions more negatively. Since they are uncomfortable with closeness, become more aloof or controlling in order to maintain distance when they perceive their partner drawing closer emotionally (Babcock et al., 2000). This negative attribution bias is thought to result in more negative evaluations of close relationships. Avoidant couples report lower levels of hurt, fear, and general distress because they have learned to focus their attention away from these events (Feeney, 2005). Of all attachment styles, these couples are most averse to feedback. They report more indifference, less positive reactions to feedback, less openness to feedback, and more estrangement from partners. Therefore, spouses with insecure working style may evaluate their marriage more negatively, resulting in less marital satisfaction. Couples with an avoidant attachment style are the least likely to compromise and withdraw from conflict resolution (Johnson, 2003). Besides, couples with avoidant attachment have more passive manner and do not exhibit a great deal of validation or support toward their partner or contribute constructively toward problem solving.

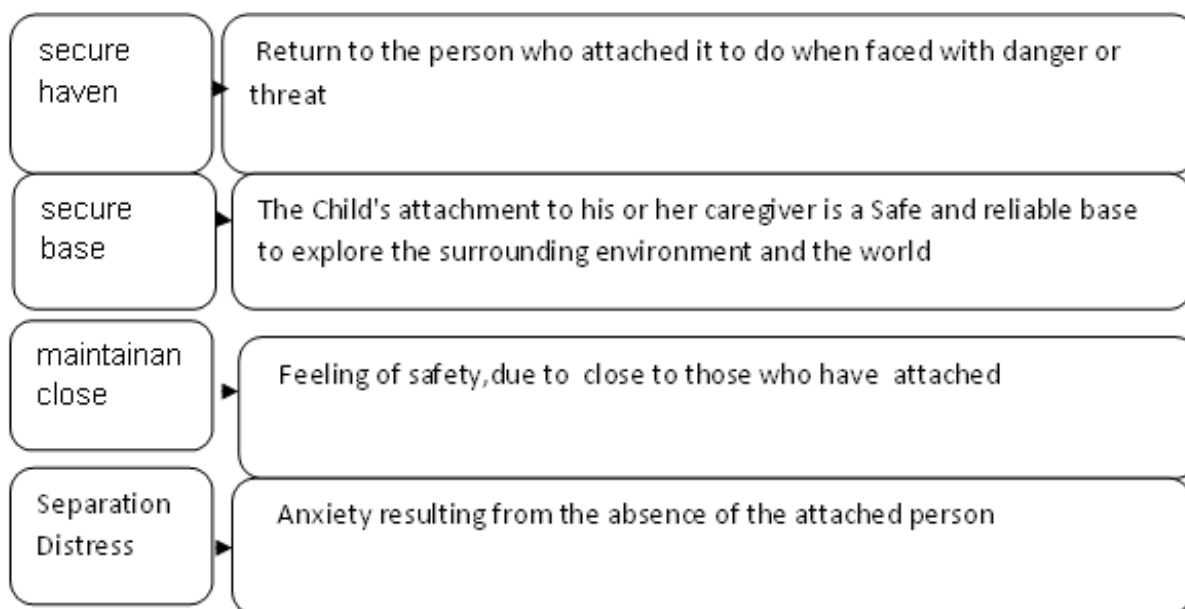
Anxious attachment: An anxious attachment resulted from a mother who was, for a variety of reasons, many of them unintentional, inconsistent with her responses and level of sensitivity to her infant's needs. Feeney (2005) pointed out that anxious attachment is also referred to as a preoccupied attachment. Individuals with this attachment style may be high in relationship anxiety, report more negative affect (hurt, general distress, shame and fear). Spouses with anoxious attachment are worried about love and abandonment of partners. They doubt whether they are valuable or supported by their spouses. This situation that is associated by threat and worried may result negative beliefs, furious protests and jealousy. Additionally, couples with this style become uncomfortable when they perceive being distance from their partner and therefore may react with angry or stubborn behavior in order to reengage them that leads to less MS. Studies note that anxious attachment cause outcomes such as behaviour of disorder, aggression, lack of relationship, negative picture of self, and antisocial attitude. In line with this , study by Davila and Bradbury (2001) acknowledged the couples concerned with abandonment and love worthiness are more likely to remain in dissatisfy marriages. Furthermore, couples who were anxiously attached were shown to dominate the conflict resolution process and to display hostility (O'Connell Corcoran & Mallinckrodt,2000). Additionally, Banse (2004) found that it is not attachment style of one's partner that impacts one's marital satisfaction, but their own attachment style. Individual's relationship satisfaction is negatively influenced by the anxious attachment of their partner or themselves or an interaction of both. According to above mentioned perspective, this study proposed Figur 1 to illustrate process of leading couples to MS in light of attachment perspective.

Although this figure shows the process of leading couple to MS based on attachment perspective, but there is a dire need to emphasize role of religieuse attitudes upon attachment styles in the process of leading couples to MS.

Table 1. Factors of marital satisfaction

Factor	Kind of relationship	Study
Higher levels of openness to experience, agreeableness, conscientiousness	Associated with Higher level of MS	Botwin et al. (1997)
Low levels of neuroticism, high levels of agreeableness, conscientiousness, positive expressivity	Related to Higher level of MS	Gattis et al. (2004)
Accuracy of one's perceptions of the partner's qualities	Predictor level of MS	Neff and Karney (2005)
high level of spirituality	Predictor of MS	Fitzpatrick and Sollie (1999)
Contextual measures of disclosure and secrecy	Predictor of MS	Fitzpatrick and Sollie (1999)
Avoiding topics whose outcome is difficult to change	Associated with MS	Fitzpatrick and Sollie (1999)
Higher rates of self-disclosure, communication, expressions of love, support and affection	Associated with higher level of MS	Boland and Follindstad (1987)
Premarital interaction styles and levels of conflict	Predictors of MS	Clements et al. (2004)
Absence of major conflict and capacity to manage conflict	Predictor of MS	Mackey et al. (2000)
Additional children	Association with lower levels of MS	Twenge et al. (2003)
For older people, higher levels of support	Association with higher levels of MS	Vinick & Ekerdt (1992)
Depression	Predictor of decline in MS	Ulrich-Jakubowski et al. (1988)
For working parents, partners' perceptions of shared responsibility for tasks	Predictor of MS	Zimmerman et al. (2003)

Table 2. four traits of Attachment (Bowlby,1980)



This preliminary study stresses on religious views in process leading to MS from attachment perspective. It is obvious that first caregivers are determiners of later relationship. A research conducted by counseling centre of Tehran University (2010), offers alternative concept that children who are raised with religious parent will have secure attachment style and find initial reliance to Allah.

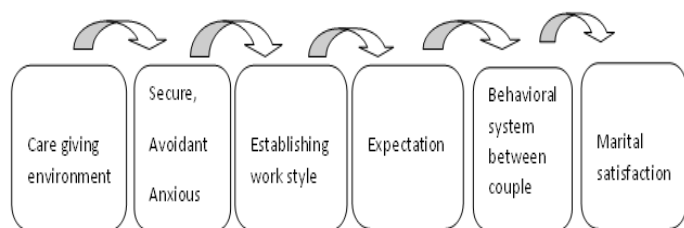


Figure 1. Process of leading couple to MS based on attachment perspective

These persons provide necessary conditions and readiness for relying to Allah even though they are in difficult situation. Consequently, low tension and high MS in their marital life is created. Related to important role of the first caregivers, there are many Islamic words. For example Ali, Cousin of the Prophet Mohammad says:

“Be careful with who will milk your children because your children will grow with the milk.” (Kolaini, 1650)

This words shows vital role of mothers and first caregiver that will have a remarkable impact on behavioral and emotional system of the children. Furthermore, Sadegh as one of grandsons of Prophet Mohammad says:

“An infant who is born in the family of believers and worshipers, steps in the direction of welfare.” (Kolaini, 1650)

Similarly, Heidari (2006) found that the mothers with high level of spirituality and religious beliefs, enable to establish a secure environment for their infants. Interestingly, Pazhoohandeh

(2011) as an Islamic counselor found that persons with secure attachment style are connected to Allah and faith. Additionally, Pazhoohandeh (2011) emphasizes that couples with secure attachment are subsequently religious and faithful. They will be able to resolve their marital conflict by the belief to Allah. In fact, unconsciously, they seek secure havens that rely on it. Indeed, blessing is result of the belief to Allah that manifests function of Proximity-seeking in attachment. Interestingly, Tabrizi (2008) acknowledged that ablution of mothers during breastfeeding result secure feeling. Also, he pointed out that reading Quran, praying, contemplation and remembrance of Allah (Zikr) by parents besides children will be associated to personal well-being and a healthy life. Furthermore, attachment style has an impact on an individual's ability and willingness to forgive their partner. According to Kachadourian et al., (2004) an individual with a secure attachment style is more likely to forgive someone. For instance, Kane (2006) believes that secure attachment involves couples to appear more confident in relationships and show the most steadiness in self-esteem over time. They perceive their partners as more forgiving (Vuncannon, 2007). In contrast, couples with anxious attachment are often seen as being less forgiving by their partners and calmer to them (Vuncannon, 2007). In contrast, Pazhoohandeh (2011) mentions that in *insecure* attachment styles, mothers are lack of stability of behavior and have failure in three qualities: available, acceptor and accountable. Generally their children will be abstained from Allah when they have misgivings in their relation with Allah. On other words, they are pessimistic to their creator that results lack of trust to other and feeling of aggression. Therefore, couples with anxiety attachment, have doubt to each other and high level of unresolved marital conflict that leads to decreasing MS. As to above mentioned, this study proposed Figure 2 below to illustrate process of leading couplesto MS from attachment perspective combined with religious view.

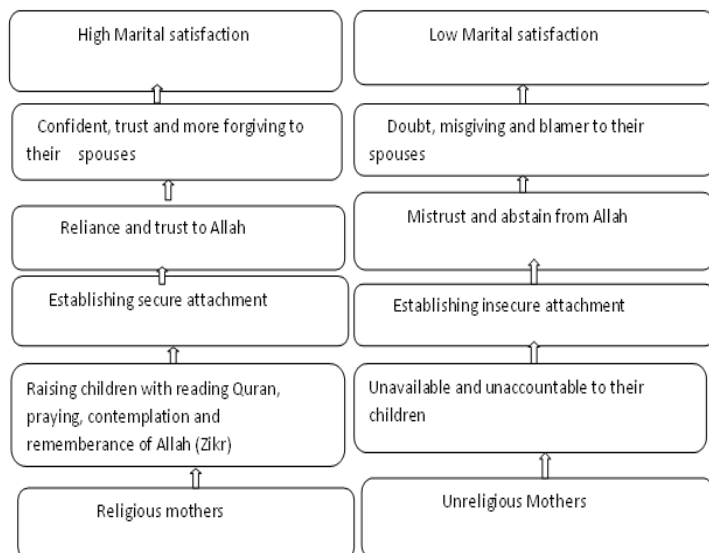


Figure 2. Process leading to MS from role of attachment with highlighting religious belief

Regarding to the importance of Islamic believes on attachment styles leading to MS, it can be educated by psychologists and counselors to couples before transition to parenting in religious contexts. Besides, educating attachment styles can be a teaching for people who want to raise children.

Conclusion

There are many factors that influence MS. Contemporary reserachers brought to light of attachment styles as indicators of MS. This introductory study tries to illustrate significant effect of attachment styles in marital relationship and highlighting religious believes on attachment styles in the process of leading couple to MS.

Suggestions

Due to the importance of the concept of MS, many suggestions are addressed. Exploratory work is needed in many important areas of marriage, especially in Muslim context. It is time for reserachers to seek deeper understanding of the role of attachment in marriage by religious viewpoint. This insight can be gained by integrating attachment theory with other religious theories. In particular, it is necessary to develop indigenous measures of attachment and study its role in Muslim societies that is quite different from western countries. Furthermore, majority of studies focus on correlation between attachment styles and marital satisfaction. There is dire need that counsellors and psychologists educate couples styles of attachment before transition to parenting based on religious view. Also, the experimental studies could be designed to see whether educating styles of attachment based on religious perspective, changes lead in positive influence on MS.

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