Relation of attachment styles and marital adjustment among young couples

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ABSTRACT

This research aimed at understanding the factors affecting couples' adjustment is concerned with examining the relation between attachment styles and marital adjustment among young couples. For this purpose, as many as 96 couples were selected through multi stage cluster sampling method. To measure the marital satisfaction, the "Enrich" marital satisfaction questionnaire was applied while for measuring attachment styles, the Besharat's adults' attachment styles questionnaire was used (2000) (AAI). Descriptive statistics methods (averages, standard deviation and correlation), and inferential statistics methods (step by step regression, multivariate variance analysis and t test for independent groups) were applied for analyzing the information collected. Results analysis indicated that there is a direct relationship between secure attachment styles and marital satisfaction and there is a negative and reverse relationship between avoidance attachment style and marital satisfaction. Step by step regression model indicated that the avoidance and secure attachment style generally explain 19.4% of the variance variations of couples' marital adjustment. Also, variance analysis indicated that secure attachment style is higher in men compared to woman (P < .05). However, the two sexes did not have a significant difference within the variable of marital satisfaction.
Keywords: Attachment styles; Secure style; Insecure style; Avoidance style; Marital adjustment

1. INTRODUCTION

The child's "Emotional attachment" to mother has been considered a clear and normal issue for hundreds of years (Belsky, 1999; translated by Rezazade et al, 2006). This attachment in the psychoanalysis school of thought was considered to be a secondary incliner based on the very primary need of nutrition. The sense of attachment being unparalleled and innovative within the Bowlby's system while relying on experimentation explains the hypothesis that the need for attachment is a primary issue. Hence, Bowlby distances from Freud for who needs are solely bodily needs (Mansoor and Dadsetan, 1990; quoted by Reza Zade et al, 2006). Although the Bowlby's theory was originally presented regarding the emotional bond between the child and the mother or her surrogate, but the researches done since the early 8th century onwards (e.g. 1985; Collins and Read 1990; Crowell and Feldman, 1988; Feeney and Noller 1990 quoted by Simpson et al, 1992; Hazan and Shaver 1987) have offered reasons for the very connection between child's attachment principles with close and intimate relations on the part of adults. These reasons have concentrated on an analysis of attachment relations reactions.

The emotional bond in particular includes "proximity setting", "secure base" and "separation protest". According to some of the researchers, these characteristics could be generalized to many of the adults' relations with intimate friends and relatives (Weiss, 1991, 1982; quoted by Feeney 1999; translated by Reza Zade et al, 2006). The attachment cognitive behavior theory which assumes the emotional bond of the child to a caregiver as an evolved response is a perspective which has found widespread acceptance. John Bowlby (1969) who for the first time applied this opinion concerning caregiver-child was inspired by Conrad Lorenz's researches regarding role accepting among baby goose. For Bowlby, the relation of the child with the parent is started in form of a string of some intrinsic signs which draw the patent towards the child. Overtime, the real emotional bond is formed and new emotional and cognitive abilities and a history of intimate and affectionate care will contribute to it. Attachment is formed in four stages: 1-pre-attachment stage (birth to 6 weeks), 2-ongoing attachment stage (6 weeks to 6-8 months), 3-evident attachment stage (6-8 months to 18 months to 2 years of age), 4-stage of formation of reciprocal relations (18 months to 2 years of age and later). For Bowlby (1980), children establish sustainable emotional links with the caregiver as a result of experiences they acquire during these four stages where they can make use of which as a support when their patents are absent.

This postulation assumes a duty of a real internal model or a string of expectations about attachment personalities being in access and the likelihood of throwing support for them on stressful event. The actual internal model becomes a major part of personality and the duty will assume a sign for all the intimate relations in future (Berther Noman Holland, 1999). When cognitive, emotional and social abilities of children become higher, they establish interactions with parents and hence they establish more intimate relations with the adults, sisters and brothers as well as friends. Meanwhile, they constantly review this internal actual model and seek to expand them. A major difference between child and adult attachment being that attachment relations in adulthood involve mutual qualities while childhood
asymmetrical attachment lacks such qualities (Colin, 1996; translated by Reza Zade et al, 2006). A major concept in the attachment theory which raises the bond and relationship between the child's attachment quality and that of the adults is the concept of "effective working model". In Bowlby's mind (1996; quoted by Brethren, 1987; Translated by Reza Zade et a, 2006), during the first years of growth, people create their own internal working models based on their experiences with attachment facets and interaction with the material world. It is through these models that the individual perceives and interprets facts, predicts the events and founds schemes (Collins and Read, 1994; Translated by Reza Zade et al, 2006). According to the attachment they, those aspects of adults' life which are directly affected by internal working model are intimate relations and personalities which include love affairs and marriage (Colin 1996; Translated by Reza Zade et al, 2006).

Hazan and Shave (1987; translated by Reza Zade et al, 2006) have expanded the attachment style theory to areas of love and loneliness. For these authors, "romantic love" is more stable among "secure" people; in addition, this group is less pessimistic about love and their relations will be less likely facing with failures compared to "insecure" people. In other words, different attachment styles will determine duration and constancy and the quality of the adults' love relations. This means that secure people enjoy more positive intimacy and emotion and trust involve affairs compared to insecure groups. "Adulthood avoidance" fear intimacy and cannot have trust in the other parties, however ambivalent-anxious people are obsessed with their relations and are concerned about them. Colin (1996; translated by Reza Zade et al, 2006) in an overview on researches done in this regard concluded that "despite a variety of researches about many of the attachment theory dimensions, few researches have been conducted about marriage from this perspective".

These researches are mostly about adjustment of married and unmarried couples within the type of attachment style (For instance, Simpson, 1990; Simpson et al, 1992; Senchack and Leonard, 1992; all quoted by Feeney, 1999). In this respect, few researches are mentioned to have directly (Cohen et al, 1992; quoted by Colin, 1996; Mazaheri 20000) and indirectly (Kobek and Hazan, 1991) addressed the issue of the relationship between attachment styles and "Marital adjustment" without leading to concerted findings. With respect to the issue of marital adjustment, the first issue is the explanation of marriage and choosing a spouse. In this respect, various explanations have been offered. An explanation is based on the "Symbiosis" theory and emphasizes on the existence of significant bonds between adulthood tendency for having intimate and kind spouses along with childish symbiosis with mother for acquiring security (Caro and Rightly, 2000; Translated by Reza Zade et al 2006). For Gold (1978 quoted by Wrightman, 1994; Translated by Reza Zade et al 2006) the reason for marriage is to some extent a recreation of relationship between "child-patent" which is no longer available to the individual in adulthood.

Psychoanalysis perspective states people are consciously or unconsciously seeking spouses who satisfy their "self-ego" (Schutz 1985, Dicks, 1967; Winch, 1958; all quoted by Ollery and Smith, 1991; Translated by Reza Zade et al 2006). Regarding causes of adjustment and mal-adjustment, important theories have been offered where each of which have attempted to explain some dimensions of it. Sternberg (1986; quoted by Eysnk, 2000; Translated by Reza Zade et al 2006) has offered a three faceted theory which includes "intima", "love passion" and "decision or commitment". Most love affairs only include one or two components while three dimensions are critical for adjustment. Social exchange theory (Levinger, 1976; quoted by Eysnk 2000; Translated by Reza Zade et al 2006) has concerned
himself with the signification or social factors concerning the issue of couples' adjustment and mal-adjustment. The "Counteraction theory" (Leder and Jackson, 1968; Quoted by Gottman, 1998; Translated by Reza Zade et al 2006) addresses positive and negative roles in successful and unsuccessful marriages. Cognitive approach attributes satisfaction or dissatisfaction of the couples to their different thinking manners towards their spouses' behaviors and conducts (Gottman, 1998; Translated by Reza Zade et al 2006).

New findings of "Psychological physiology" places emphasis on physiological "arousal" sizes in predicting reduced marital satisfaction (Luncen and Gottman, 1983; Translated by Reza Zade et al 2006).

Other researchers while enumerating functioning components attempt to offer more detailed theoretical and practical models so that they can encompass all families including healthy and unhealthy (Minuchi, 1984; Translated by Sanaee, 1995; Epstein, Bishop, Lewin, 1978; Olsson, 1996; Snyder 1997 Translated by Reza Zade et al 2006). As a takeaway of the overview of some of the perspectives, it appears that one has to be aligned with the mind of Caro and Rightly (2000, Translated by Reza Zade et al 2006) who maintain there is not yet a simple and clear psychological theory which ever can explains all emotional and cognitive factors existing in marital adjustment and mal-adjustment; thus, this research has been aimed at establishing a relationship between attachment styles and marital adjustment among couples with marriage duration less than 10 years in the province of Ghazvin and the following hypotheses will be tested:

1. Main hypothesis: there is a relationship between couples' attachment styles and marital adjustment.
2. Secondary hypothesis:
   a) There is a relationship between couples' avoidance attachment styles and marital adjustment
   b) There is a relationship between couples' secure attachment styles and marital adjustment
   c) There is a relationship between couples' ambivalent attachment styles and marital adjustment
   d) There is a significant difference between women and men regarding attachment style
   e) There is a significant difference between women and men in the variable of marital satisfaction

2. METHODOLOGY

The research methodology is descriptive and is of a correlation type. The statistical universe of this research includes all thee couples of Ghazvin cities whose marriage duration has been less than 10 years.

The sampling method in this research was made through multistage cluster method, meaning from among 36 marriage notaries public of this city, the number of 5 notaries public was randomly selected. Thereafter, from among the existing names, the number of 100 couples was selected and from this number (100 couples) 94 couples responded to the questionnaire.
2. 1. Measurement tools

1. Test of adults attachment scale (AAI): Subjects' attachment style in this research was determined by using adults' attachment scale. This questionnaire which was originally developed and standardized by Besharat by using the Hazan and Shaver's test material (1987) about university of Tehran's students is a bifurcate questionnaire. In the first part, three attachment styles of secure, avoidance and ambivalence are distinguished based on 21 questions on a 5-value Likert scale (None = 1; little = 2; average = 3; high = 4 and so high = 5). The Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the questions relating to each of the secure, avoidance and ambivalence subscales about a student sample (N = 240, Besharat, 2000) for all the subjects were 0.74, 0.72; for female students, the coefficients were 0.74, 0.71 and 0.69 and 0.73, 0.71, 0.72 for male students respectively. This indicated an internal constancy sign for the adults' attachment scale. In the second part, the subject, by choosing an option from the three options which describes three types of attachment will determine his own attachment style. Correlation coefficients between subject's scores in the two parts of the questionnaire for the female and male subjects were 0.85 and 0.87 respectively. The retest reliability coefficient of the adults' attachment scale for a 30 people sample in two turns with an interval of two weeks was estimated for all the subjects was r = 92%; male subjects, r = 93% and female subjects, r = 90%. Content validity of the adults' attachment scale was examined with measurement of correlation coefficients from scores of four psychology experts. According to the results, correlation coefficients were estimated from 73% to 76% for the secure attachment style, from 0/60 to 0/76 for the avoidance attachment style and from 0/63 to 0/87 for the ambivalence attachment style, all being significant at the α = 0/05 and α = 0/01. The concurrent validity of the adults' attachment scale was examined via comparing the Cooper Smith's self-esteem test results (1967). Correlation coefficients between the overall score of the subjects in the Self-esteem test with the attachment style indicated some significant positive correlation of secure attachment style with general self-esteem (r = 0/39 and p = 0/002), educational self-esteem (r = 0/39 and p = 0/002), familial self-esteem (r = 0/39 and p = 0/002) and social self-esteem (r = 0/41 and p = 0/001). These coefficients were significant at α = 0/01 for female and male subjects separately. Correlation coefficients between the subjects' scores in all subscales of self-esteem with avoidance and ambivalence attachment styles for all the subjects were negative but not significant statistically.

2. Enrich marital satisfaction test: Olsson applied this questionnaire for examining marital satisfaction. This questionnaire contains 47 questions and is comprised of 12 scales as following:

   a) Conventional response: this scale measures the person's tendency to offer some unconventional or unreal responses to questionnaire's questions. This subscale has been deleted in the 47 question form.

   b) Marital satisfaction: This scale measures peoples' satisfaction and adaptation with ten facets of marital relations which come next.

   c) Personality matters: this scale evaluates personal perception of behaviors and characters of one's spouse and satisfaction or dissatisfaction level of the matters. Lower score indicates low level of acceptance or lack of convenience with the
conducts and personality of the spouse while the higher grade illustrates satisfaction and adjustment with the character of the spouse.

d) Marital relation: this scale measures personal feelings, trust and attitudes towards the quality of marital relations. Higher scores indicate woman and man's awareness of the levels and types of relations between them whereas lower grades indicate an absence of satisfaction of the relations.

e) Conflict resolution: this scale measures the spouse's feelings, attitudes and beliefs in creating or resolving conflicts and other manners and styles by couples in ending conflicts and disagreements. A higher score indicates realist attitudes about existing conflicts in marital relations and a lower score indicates lack of satisfaction with the way conflicts are resolved.

f) Financial management: in this scale, wife and husband's interests and attitudes in the area of handling and managing economic issues are measured. A higher score indicates satisfaction with the way family financial affairs are handled and it shows a realist attitude to family pecuniary issues while a low score indicates the existence of various worries in the area of family pecuniary issues.

g) Leisure time activities: this scale evaluates personal preferences of each of the couples as to how to spend their leisure times. A higher score indicates adaptation, resilience and agreement regarding the way leisure time is spent while a lower score indicates dissatisfaction with the way leisure time in couples' affairs is spent.

h) Sexual affairs: this scale assesses person's feelings and worries regarding sexual affairs as well as emotional intimacy with the spouse. The material of this scale reflects satisfaction level of expressing intimacy and feeling comfort regarding discussions relating to sexual affairs. A higher score indicates satisfaction with expression of intimacy and positive attitude about sexual issues within marital relations or agreement concerning decisions relating to pregnancy.

i) Marriage and children: This scale evaluates attitude's and feelings of the individual regarding having a child, agreement over the number of children and the way children need to be educated and raised. A higher score indicates agreement over bearing babies and number of children and also a realist perception towards the impacts the children will feel through marital satisfaction as well as satisfaction with the ay parental roles and responsibilities become specified. A lower score indicates dissatisfaction with the decisions relating to bearing babies and number of children as well as the child rearing process.

j) Relatives and friends: this scale measures feelings and interest relating to relatives and friends of the spouse. The questions of this scale indicate the attitude of friends and relatives towards marriage and expectations relating to the way time is spent with friends and relatives. A low rate indicates mal-adjustment in familial and friends ties and implies conflicts.

k) Roles relating to equality of men and women: this scale assesses attitudes and beliefs of the individual regarding various roles in marital relations. This scale has been deleted in the 47 question form.

l) Religious orientation: This scale evaluates personal interests and attitudes about religious conducts and beliefs in the marital life. A higher score indicates the perspective that religion constitutes a major part of marriage and the agreement of
man and woman in the area of religious affairs is of spiritual kind while a lower rate indicates insignificance of the religion in marriage and marital life.

2.2. Reliability and validity of the questionnaire

Olsson et al (1998; Soleimanian 1993) reported the validity of the latter form by using the Alpha coefficient method 92%. In our country, Soleimanian and Navabi Nejad estimated the internal correlation of the test for the longer form as 93% and 95% for the shorter form. In a research by Mahdavian (1996; Soleimanian as quoted 1993) while working on the validity of the test by using the Pearson correlation coefficient and via retest method in an interval of one week obtained 937% for men and 944% for women and an overall rate of 94% for both. These coefficients for the subscales of goal-setting, marital satisfaction, personality matters, communication, conflicts resolution, financial management, leisure time, sexual affairs, children and child rearing, family and friends, egalitarianism roles and religious orientations of men and women groups were 72%, 85%, 76%, 76%, 76%, 81%, 63%, 69%, 87%, 69%, 62% and 73% respectively and the 48 question alpha coefficient of the questionnaire was obtained to be 92% in the research by MirKheshti.

3. FINDINGS

Table 1. Correlation matrix of research variables for men.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Avoidance attachment styles</th>
<th>Secure attachment style</th>
<th>Ambivalence attachment style</th>
<th>Marital adjustment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Avoidance attachment styles</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secure attachment style</td>
<td><strong>-0.86</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ambivalence attachment style</td>
<td>-0.18</td>
<td>-0.13</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital adjustment</td>
<td>-0.10</td>
<td><strong>0.31</strong></td>
<td>-0.05</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**p < 0.05 and *p < 0.005

Table 2. Correlation matrix of research variables for women.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Avoidance attachment styles</th>
<th>Secure attachment style</th>
<th>Ambivalence attachment style</th>
<th>Marital adjustment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Avoidance attachment styles</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secure attachment style</td>
<td><strong>0.79</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Table 3. Step by step regression analysis results pertaining to predicting variables.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Steps</th>
<th>Attachment style</th>
<th>Standard error</th>
<th>Beta</th>
<th>T</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
<th>R = 0/38</th>
<th>R² = 0/144</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First step</td>
<td>Secure</td>
<td>0/93</td>
<td>0/38</td>
<td>4/30</td>
<td>0/01</td>
<td></td>
<td>(Adjusted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>r² = 0/165</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Sig = 0/01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>F = 24/31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second step</td>
<td>Secure</td>
<td>0/204</td>
<td>0/38</td>
<td>4/13</td>
<td>0/01</td>
<td></td>
<td>(Adjusted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>r² = 0/194</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Sig = 0/01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>F = 20/31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Avoidance</td>
<td>-0/132</td>
<td>-0/31</td>
<td>-3/24</td>
<td>0/01</td>
<td></td>
<td>(Adjusted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>r² = 0/194</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Sig = 0/01</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>F = 20/31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**p < 0/05 and *p < 0/05

Given the determination coefficient modified in the table No. 3 (Adjusted R = 2) we observe that in the first step, in spite of the existence of the independent variable, the secure attachment style in the determination coefficient modified model equals 0/165 where in the next stage, as the independent variable enters, the avoidance attachment style reaches 0/194; This it can be stated that the two variables of secure attachment styles and avoidance attachment styles will explain in general 19/4% of the variance of the dependent variables (marital adjustment).

Table 4. Multivariate variance analysis results of sex and attachment styles.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Dependent variable</th>
<th>Squared sum</th>
<th>Freedom degree</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td>Secure attachment style</td>
<td>26/42</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6/13</td>
<td>0/034</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Based on multivariate variance analysis results, we observe that F is only significant in the variable of secure attachment style at the $p < 0.01$ level and this means that the average men's scores in the secure attachment style is greater than that of the women in the same style. In fact, this indicates that the secure attachment style in men is higher than women.

Table 5. T test results and difference of two sexes in the variables of marital satisfaction.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Index</th>
<th>Groups</th>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Average</th>
<th>Standard deviation</th>
<th>T value</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Marital satisfaction</td>
<td>Women</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>36/42</td>
<td>7/5</td>
<td>0/85</td>
<td>0/39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Men</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>38/23</td>
<td>9/6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Given the results in Table 5, we see that the difference estimated and the t value obtained are not significant and this means that there is no significant difference between the two sexes in ten variable of marital satisfaction.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Results demonstrated that there is a relationship between attachment styles and marital adjustments such that secure attachment style has positive relationship and avoidance attachment style has reverse relationship with marital adjustment. In regards to getting aligned with this hypothesis, one can state that if people are found to be securely attached to their relatives will experience more positive emotions, trust and intimacy in love affairs and are less likely to be pessimistic concerning their future. Meanwhile, people with avoidance attachment styles fear intimacy and cannot put faith in the other parties and the same issue results in emergence of tensions in the marital life that could hence affect the marital satisfaction. On the other hand, people with ambivalence attachment styles are obsessed with their relations and are concerned about them and the same concerns could be carried over to intimate relations that could thus lead to reduced marital satisfaction. The findings of this research are in line with those of Reza zade et al (2006), Brethren and Shaver (Trans. By Ahadi and Naghshbandi, 2010) respecting the existence of relationship between attachment styles and marital satisfaction. Also, findings by Rajae, Nayeri and Sedaghati (2008), Sayadpour (2005), Cramer (1992), Jacob and Fincham (1998), Feeney a d Navaro (all translated by Tabe' Jama'at, 2008) demonstrating that secure attachment style could predict marital satisfaction are in conformity with the results of this research. Another main point in
this paper is that results indicated that avoidance insecure attachment style is reversely related with the marital satisfaction, while ambivalent styles have no relationship with marital satisfaction and this could result from this issue that avoidance people fear intimacy and do not allow their spouses to have intimate relations together whereas ambivalent people are more likely to be obsessed with this issue but allow to have intimate relations with their spouses. Also, findings indicated that there is a significant difference between couples' attachment styles among the two sexes such that secure attachment styles in men are greater than those of women.

This could be due to the fact that greater attachment style is formed based on the mother's interaction with the child and in accordance with the Freud's theory, the tendency of boys to mothers is greater than that of girls to their mothers. In fact, this finding corresponds with results by Mazaheri's study (2000), Feeney and Navaro (1996), Davila and et al, (1993), Hazan and Shaver (1996), Jacob (1999), Marcus (1997), Rivera (1999), Fincham (1998) all quoted by Abdi and Khanjani (2006). On the other hand, results of a comparison of men's marital satisfaction with that of women indicated that there is no significant difference between the two sexes in terms of marital satisfaction. This finding could be due to the fact as Levinger stated (1976) social factors affect the marital adjustment and later as Leder and Jackson pointed out (1996) peoples' thinking ways are contributing to marital satisfaction that could be modifying the role of gender.

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