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Relationships between Married Adults' Attachment Styles and "Sexual and Relationship Satisfaction"

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ABSTRACT: The purpose of this study was to examine relationships between married adults' attachment styles and their levels of sexual and relationship satisfaction. The research design was a descriptive correlation, and the study sample included 480 married people (240 men and 240 women) with at least 6 months from the time they were living together. Employing the Experiences in Close Relationships (ECR) scales, The Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS), Physical Satisfaction Scale (PSS), the current study yielded statistically significant results and supported all of the research hypotheses .Results indicated that sexual and relationship satisfaction was predicted by attachment styles. Specifically, insecure individuals are more likely to feel significantly less satisfaction from their sexual and relationships than their secure counterparts.
Key words: Married adult, Attachment styles, Sexual and relationships.

INTRODUCTION

The family is generally considered to be among the most important environmental influences on personality development (Zarei et al. 2010). In all societies, marriage is a human institution which can be found in all cultures [2]. This popularity of marriage in all communities, suggests that marriage is a social foundation that usually result in a number of important individual and social benefits (Madanian et al. 2011).

Research now has begun to shift toward examining the specific interpersonal mechanisms that link marriage to better health outcomes (August 2010). Marriage, in particular, is one relationship that consistently has been found to have protective health effects, evidenced by many studies that have demonstrated that married individuals have longer survival times and lower incidence of health problems compared to unmarried individuals. Marriage in Islam is the only institution where it allows sexual relationships (Saroukhani, 1991).

Attachment has been defined as any behavior that keeps an infant close to and elicits responses from the caretaker (Bowlby, 1997). Attachment theory proposes that experiences with the primary caregivers are an important basis for the development of close social relationships outside the parent–child relationship (Zimmermann, 2004). According to Bowlby (1969), infants develop internal working models of attachment that consist of cognitions and expectations based on their attachment experiences with their primary caregiver, usually the mother[7,8]. Ainsworth (1978) identified three types of attachment based on infants' behaviors in the strange situation task. Secure, avoidant and anxious (Bowlby, 1978). Based on Bowlby's theory (1958) and Ainsworth (1978) work on childhood attachment, marital researchers began to investigate attachment process in adult intimate relationships. Hazan and Shaver (1987) were the first to recommend that the major concepts and assumptions proposed and developed by Bowlby and other attachment theorists (Hazan, 1987) could be readily applied to romantic relationships. Hazan and Shaver 91987) suggested that the three attachment styles, or patterns of relating, introduced by Ainsworth et al. (1978), secure, anxious/ ambivalent, and avoidant could be assessed in adults (Hazan, 1987).

Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991) clarified and expanded Bowlby's theory of working models and identified two dimensions of adult attachment. They propose four different adult attachment patterns based on an individual's level of avoidance and anxiety (Bartholomew, 1991). The first style, secure, refers to a sense of worthiness as well as a perception of others being generally responsive and accepting. The remaining three styles, preoccupied, fearful-avoidant, and dismissive avoidant, are insecure styles of attachment (Welch, 2010).

Attachment theory is one of the best theories that aid in the investigation of close relationships and relational processes. Attachment style is an individual difference variable that predicts satisfaction in romantic relationships. For instance, securely attached individuals tended to experience their most important relationship as trusting, loving and friendly and had longer-lasting relationships on average than insecurely attached individuals (Steuber, 2005). Also, Researches have shown that secure attachment has a positive association with relationship satisfaction while insecure attachment is negatively correlated with relationship satisfaction.

Marital satisfaction has long been a special issue in studies of the family, probably because the concept is believed to be closely related to the stability of a given marriage (Birnbaum, 2007). Some researchers stated that satisfaction is a major factor that anchors spouses to be in marital life. A growing body of empirical research have shown that, there are close relation between secure attachment and interpersonal satisfaction, sexual functioning, marital satisfaction. The results of the study of Banse (2004) also show that relationship satisfaction in married couples can be accounted for by the individuals' own attachment to romantic partners, the partner's attachment style(Banse, 2004).

Relationship satisfaction refers to the level of contentment individuals feel toward their primary romantic relationship (Lewandowski, 2010). Relationship satisfaction is defined "positive versus negative affect experienced in a relationship and is influenced by the extent to which a partner fulfills the individual's most important needs". Many of studies have indicated that quality of couples' relationship is the strongest predictor of marital satisfaction. Relationship satisfaction is a salient contributor to the moods and emotional well-being of individuals (Creasey, 2001). Findings of research Patrick, et al., (2007) indicated that intimacy was most predictive of relationship satisfaction (Patrick, 2007). Couples with more stable and satisfying relationships appear to enjoy better health and well-being (Baumeister, 1995). Sprecher (2002) measured sexual satisfaction and relationship satisfaction among 101 undergraduate college couples from a large Midwestern University. Sexual satisfaction and relationship satisfaction was found to be correlated positively with relationship satisfaction, love for partner, and commitment to the relationship (Sprecher, 2002). Relationship satisfaction of securely attached individuals (low on anxiety and avoidance) is the highest and satisfaction of anxiously attached individuals is the lowest (Celenka,O, 2011). For instance, Simpson (1990) found that unlike insecure attachment, secure attachment is strongly and positively related to relationship interdependence, commitment, trust, and satisfaction. Furthermore, it has been argued that differences in attachment styles lead to differences in relationship stability (Simpson, 1990). In accordance, Kirkpatrick and Hazan (1994), examining couples' relationships over a four-year period, found that secure participants reported fewer break ups during this period compared to insecure participants (Kirkpatrick, 1994).

Lawrance and Byers (1995) defined sexual satisfaction as "an effective response arising from one's subjective evaluation of the positive and negative dimensions associated with one's sexual relationship". Many researches have shown that relationship satisfaction and sexual satisfaction are related.

Byers (2005) examined the relationship between sexual satisfaction and relationship satisfaction in a longitudinal study of 53 men and 90 women who were involved in romantic relationships. Their results indicated that sexual satisfaction was higher for individuals with high relationship satisfaction, and vice versa. In addition, high levels of sexual rewards were significantly related to sexual satisfaction and high levels of sexual costs were related to low levels of sexual satisfaction (Byers, 1999). A similar longitudinal study by was conducted by Sprecher (2002) in which data were collected in 1988, 1989, 1990, 1991, and 1992. One hundred-one couples participated in this study in which the relationship between sexual satisfaction and relationship satisfaction was investigated in dating relationships. Her results indicated that a significant positive relationship existed between sexual satisfaction and relationships satisfaction over these 5 waves. There was also a significant positive relationship between sexual satisfaction and commitment and love across each wave. Additionally, over time, increases in sexual satisfaction were associated with increases in relationship satisfaction, love and commitment and vice versa (Sprecher, 2004).

In this research the purpose of study identify the relation between Adults' attachment styles and sexual and relationship satisfaction. This study will therefore attempt to address this problem and answer the following question:

1. Will there be a significant relationship between participant's attachment styles and sexual and relationship satisfaction?

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The plan of this study has an applied goal and a descriptive methodology. Sample size of this study includes married men and women in Bandar-Abbas Harbor between January and June, 2012. Whereas there is not the possibility for random sampling, 480 people(240 men and 240 women) were selected by means of available sampling method and by referring to public places such as parks and promenades.

Measures

1) Demographic Questionnaire. Demographic data about subjects were obtained through completion of a questionnaire. Participants were requested to provide the following information: gender, age, marital status (including length of marriages, number of marriages, number of children and if other than first marriage, number of stepchildren), and level of education.

2) Experiences in Close Relationships Questionnaire (ECRQ). In answer to concerns about the number of attachment measures, Brennan et al. (1998) developed a measure that combined typically assessed components of adult attachment on two dimensions, anxiety and avoidance. The 36-item measure calculates a cut-off score, 72, for the two scales, anxiety and avoidance, to determine attachment security. Questions are answered using a 7 point Likert-type scale (1 = disagree strongly, 4 = neutral/mixed, 7 = agree strongly). The reported reliability was .91 for the avoidance subscale and .94 for the anxiety subscale (Cronbachs alpha)(Brennan, 1998). Moreover, convergent validity has been established through the correlation of the ECRQ with other similar measures (Collins, 1990). Test-retest correlations between the Dependent, Close, and Anxiety Scales were reported to be 0.71, 0.62, and 0.58 respectively (Collins, 1990). The reliability for the current study was .866 for male avoidance, .708 for male anxiety, .642 for female avoidance, and .914 for female anxiety. Also, we found the internal consistency to be 0.69 and split-half reliability coefficient as 0.63.

3) Relationship Satisfaction

The Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS) is a seven-item measure of romantic relationship satisfaction (Hendrick, 1998). The RAS measures general satisfaction, how well a partner meets one's needs, how well the relationship compares to others, and one's regrets about the relationship (Hendrick, 1998). Previous studies found that the RAS had high internal consistency (i.e. α = .86; Fischer & Corcoran, 1994) and adequate validity [35,36,37]. This scale was chosen because it is brief in comparison with other relational satisfaction scales and measures general relationship satisfaction rather than marriages [35,36]. In the current study it is found the internal consistency to be 0.84 and split-half reliability coefficient as 0.81.

4) Physical Satisfaction Scale (Davis, et al., 2006) was used to measure sexual satisfaction. Cronbach's alpha was α=.83 and participants rated the degree to which they agreed with 11 statements presented in the scale such as "I am usually able to satisfy my sexual needs in my relationship," and "I would like to be able to get more physical satisfaction out of sex." The sexual satisfaction questions used a Likert-type scale and measured level of sexual desirability of partner, sexual compatibility with partner and sexual satisfaction[38].

RESULTS

Demographic information including that age, level of education, length of marriage and number of children. The majority of participants had diploma and higher with a mean age of the respondents being 35.6 years (S.D. = 8.66). The respondents reported an average length of marriage of 14.2 years (S.D. = 8.9), an average age of time at marriage of 24.1 years of age (S.D. = 4.1) and the average number of children reported was 2.3 (S.D. = 1.2).

Table1. Table of means and standard deviation for Attachment style, Sexual Satisfaction and Relationship Satisfaction

Scale	N	Mean	SD
Attachment Style	480		
• **Secure**	29.7%	9.47	2.60
• **Fearful**	23.7%	17.78	11.73
• **Preoccupied**	18.7%	11.13	6.22
• **Dismissive**	27.9%	15.67	5.69
Sexual Satisfaction	480	5.44	4.15
Relationship Satisfaction	480	5.67	3.33

Table 2. Pearson Correlation Coefficients for Attachment (secure, fearful, preoccupied and dismissive), Sexual Satisfaction (PSS), and Relationship Satisfaction (QMI) (N=480)

	Secure	Fearful	Preoccupied	Dismissive	PSS	QMI
Secure	1.00				0.306***	0.230***
Fearful		1.00			-0.201***	-0.105**
Preoccupied			1.00		-0.279***	-0.158***
Dismissive				1.00	-0.228***	-0.169***
PSS	.306***	- .201***	-.279***	-.228***	1.00	0.53***
QMI	.230***	-.105***	-.158***	-.169**	.53***	1.00

***p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001**

Pearson correlations were conducted to determine the direction and strength of the relationship between sexual satisfaction, relationship satisfaction and the four attachment styles. Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficients reveal that sexual satisfaction and relationship satisfaction are positively correlated with secure attachment style while negatively correlated with fearful, preoccupied and dismissive styles. This analysis revealed significant relationships (see Table 2), the strongest of which were between secure and sexual satisfaction (r= .306, p<.001), and relationship satisfaction (r=.230, p<.001); fearful and sexual satisfaction (r=-.201, p<.001), and relationship satisfaction (r=-.105, p<.01); preoccupied and sexual satisfaction (r=-.279, p<.001), and relationship satisfaction (r=-.158, p<.001); dismissive and sexual satisfaction (r=-.228, p<.001), and relationship satisfaction (r=-.169, p<.001); and sexual satisfaction and relationship satisfaction (r= .53, p<.001).

Table 3. Simple Regressions for Attachment Style and Sexual and Relationship Satisfaction

Predictor	Criterion	β	R^2
Attachment Style	Sexual Satisfaction	-.56***	.31
Attachment Style	Relationship Satisfaction	-.43***	0 .18.5

*p = .05,**p = .01, *** = .001

Results testing main Hypothesis are presented in Table 3. For the entire sample, results from the first two simple regressions indicate a significant relationship between attachment styles and sexual satisfaction. Also, in the next set of simple regressions, attachment style F(1, 478) = 59.28, p = .001, significantly predicted sexual satisfaction; and attachment style F(1, 478) = 43.84, p < .001, significantly predicted relationship satisfaction. Specifically, attachment style was a significant negative predictor of sexual satisfaction, explaining 31% of the variance. Attachment avoidance was also a significant negative predictor of relationship satisfaction, explaining 18.5% of the variance.

DISCUSSION

The present study was to explore the relationships among attachment style, and sexual and relationship satisfaction among heterosexual couples. As with main Hypothesis," Attachment will be related to sexual satisfaction and relationship satisfaction. Secure attachment will be related to high levels of sexual and relationship satisfaction whereas fearful, preoccupied, and dismissive attachment will be related to low levels of sexual and relationship satisfaction", was partially supported depending on which style of attachment was being examined. In this sample, secure attachment had positive association with sexual and relationship satisfaction, whereas, fearful, preoccupied, and dismissive attachment had negative relationship. This finding is consistent with previous findings from research examining the relationship between these variables.

The explanation for why relationship was found, Gottman and Levenson (1992) discovered a protective factor within high functioning marriages. Their research indicated that in marriages with secure style partners, the wife typically took responsibility for maintaining the emotional homeostasis of the relationship through raising issues affecting the relationship (Gottman, 1992). Given this, it is conceivable that the congruence between the marital and sexual satisfaction scores among the secure style wives included in the present study. Also, according to Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991), dismissive-avoidant individuals «protect themselves against disappointment by avoiding close relationships and maintaining a sense of independence and invulnerability" (p. 230). Those exhibiting any of the three insecure styles are likely to report feeling distrust in their partners, low levels of interdependence, problems with commitment and an overall low level of relationship satisfaction (Bartholomew, 1991). Additionally, relationship satisfaction, sexual satisfaction scores were consistently lower for wives than for husbands. When differentiated by attachment style, both wives and husbands with secure styles had consistently higher satisfaction scores than those with insecure styles. These findings are consistent with research indicating that individuals with insecure attachment styles are uncomfortable with sex and averse toward intimacy.

Limitations

Self-report questionnaires analyzing beliefs or attitudes may be problematic because participants may be reporting what they believe to be the socially desirable answer rather than their truthful response.

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