



## The predictive role of attachment styles in marital disillusionment and attitudes toward infidelity among teachers

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### Abstract

Attachment styles are considered as an important predictor of marital issues. The purpose of this study was to investigate the role of attachment styles in marital disillusionment and attitude toward infidelity. The research method was correlation. 188 teachers were selected based on measurement scale and research hypothesis by multistage cluster sampling among married teachers. Measures of adult attachment styles (Hazan & Shaver), marital disillusionment scale (Niehuis & Bartell) and attitudes toward infidelity scale (Whatley) were used. The results showed that secure attachment style and ambivalent attachment predict significant effect on marital disillusionment, but avoidant attachment doesn't predict significant effect on marital disillusionment. Only avoidant attachment style have significant predictive effect on attitudes toward infidelity and also secure attachment and ambivalent doesn't have significant predictive effect attitudes toward infidelity. Attachment styles influence an important part of the marital relationships. Thus, the role of secure and ambivalent attachment styles in marital disillusionment and avoidant attachment roles in infidelity should be taken deeper consider by researchers.

**Keywords:** Attachment, Infidelity, Marriage, Teacher

### Introduction

Bowlby's attachment theory is one of the theories that have been very successful in explaining human behavior in social relationships was [1]. According to Bowlby [2], any situation in life which we are faced to them can be built as patterns of internal representation of the world that we have about ourselves and others. Individuals select the existed information in the environment through these internal patterns

then interpret and evaluate them. Thus, these internal patterns are related to their expectations, attitudes and beliefs about self and others and they were cause by the quality of their primary relations with their parents and caregivers in childhood. Their attitude toward self and others have two status; either they consider themselves valuable and others invaluable which leads to specific behaviors

such as avoidance, detachment from others and extreme efforts for self-reliance (avoidant attachment style), or they consider themselves invaluable and others valuable which leads to ongoing effort to gain approval of others, getting too close to others and fear of rejection (anxious-ambivalent attachment style) if know both themselves and others in value position, it is said that attachment is secure [3]. Based on studies, individuals' attachment style also predicts their method of control their emotions in stressful situations [4], their ability to empathy [5-7] and rate of their anger management [8]. So we can say that individuals' attachment style has important role in personal and interpersonal relationships. One of the important interpersonal relationships is marital relationships which can be affected by individuals' attachment style directly or indirectly and this can have positive or negative effect on life.

Infidelity relationships is one of those problems that have been always great concern in marriage , so that some studies suggest that about 37 percent of married men and 20 percent of married women have broken their marital covenant [9]. Weeks et al [10] stated one of the broadest definitions in which they consider marital infidelity as "breach of an assumed covenant between couples for romantic or sexual monopolization". In this regard, the attitude toward infidelity relationships is emerged as significant variable in the most studies. Individuals who have more permissive attitude toward infidelity relationships are more likely to be involved [11-13]. Bank and Baker [14] also found that individuals' attitude toward sexual infidelity relationships is an important indicator for predicting the willingness to sexual infidelity relationships because these beliefs and values encourage or prohibit the conflict in infidelity relationships.

Many studies have confirmed the significant relationship between attachment styles and marital infidelity [15-18]. Bogaert and Sadava [19] who viewed the infidelity relationships in attachment perspective found that the development of internal patterns from self and others is effective in the willingness of

individuals to such relationships and stated that there is a significant relationship between the insecure attachment and more conflict in infidelity relationships. Based on their studies, individuals especially women with anxious attachment style are more involved in sexual infidelity relationships. Miller and Fishkin [20] also reported that secure attachment has significant relationship with more stable relationships and less infidelity relationships. Allen and Baucom [21] also stated that men with avoidant attachment style and women with anxious attachment style have more love partners.

Marital disillusionment is another threatening factor of the marital relationship. Marital disillusionment is the gradual decrease of the emotional attachment that includes the decrease of attention to spouse, emotional alienation and increase of a sense of apathy and indifference to spouse. Disillusionment means the substitution of neutral emotions rather than positive emotions. Therefore, to occur of disillusionment, it is assumed that a set of positive emotions has been existed in the beginning of the relationship. The disillusioned couples have felt love but this feeling is dead in long time. In particular, concept of disillusionment refers to the emotional state of marriage (feeling of love, attention and affection toward spouse), not to actual behaviors spouse [22]. Recent studies have supported this issue that the marital disillusionment endangers the stability of marriage [23]. Houston et al [24] by using marital disillusionment model have reported four antecedents of divorce and marital confusion in the first two years of life are lack of love, affection loss, decreasing of love partner's perception as responding individual and increasing the infidelity emotions about marriage; therefore in perspective of these authors, set of changes in couples' emotions, behaviors and perceptions toward each other are the antecedents of marital disillusionment. There is no study which has investigated the effect of attachment styles on the marital disillusionment directly or indirectly, but

the results show that there is a significant relationship between the marital disillusionment and mental health in relation to the anxiety. Kayser's findings [22] in the comparison of disillusioned and not-disillusioned couples showed that disillusioned couples have probably lower degree of mental health. Snyder and Whisman [25] found that couples who one of them has anxiety disorders are more likely to be involved in confusion in their marital relationships. Him and Snyder [26] found that the marital disillusionment which was defined as emotional and alienation distance in marriage is an important predictor factor in the couple's depression.

Therefore by considering the negative consequences of marital disillusionment and the attitude toward infidelity relationships it is important to recognize its predictor factor for the individual, marital relationship and society because understanding these antecedents will be major step in the prevention and improvement of marital life. Attachment styles repeatedly demonstrated their power in explaining the communication components and the recognition of its role helps therapists in prediction the study's components to pay attention to the increase of the attachment secure through working with marital problems. So, the purpose of the current study is to investigate role of attachment styles in marital disillusionment and infidelity relationships in teachers. Based on this, it is assumed that; 1) secure attachment style has negative correlation with marital disillusionment and the attitude toward infidelity relationships; 2) insecure attachment styles (avoidant, ambivalent) have positive correlation with marital disillusionment and attitude toward infidelity relationships; 3) attachment styles can predict marital disillusionment and attitude toward infidelity relationships.

### **Method**

This research is descriptive and correlational study. The statistical population includes all married teachers of public high schools in Karaj city in 2013-2014 years. 250 teachers

were selected through multi-stages stratified-cluster sampling method. First, Karaj city was divided into 5 parts; north, south, east, and west and center. Then, one school was selected in each part, one of the education district (district 1,2,4,6 and 18) and in each district, by random and all the teachers who decided to participate in the study were investigated. After removing the incomplete questionnaires, the number of participants was reduced to 188 participants.

Since the measure scale was consistent and the research hypothesis was two-tailed, at 95% level of confidence, the sample size was at least 100 participants according to the following formula. The sample was selected among high schools of Karaj city by multistage sampling method;

*Hazan and Shaver attachment scale:* Hazan and Shaver's [27] Adult Attachment Styles Scale is a two-part scale which there are three descriptions in the first part. Each description shows one kind of attachment styles and the participant grades the level of truth of each description with its properties in a 7-point Likert spectrum. In the second part, there are also three descriptions that each of them shows one attachment style but its difference with the first part is that here the participant by studying each of them selects a description which is more similar to self. Pakdaman [28] reports that this scale has high reliability and the difference between the two parts' performance is not significant and this test is reliable on level of 0.95. Mentioned first part of scale has been performed in this survey.

*Marital disillusionment scale:* marital disillusionment scale was developed by Niehuis and Bartell [29]. It includes 16 items that each item grades on a 7-point Likert spectrum. Niehuis [30] reports that this scale has a high consistency. He reported that this scale has positive significant correlation with marital disaffection scales ( $r=0.72$ ) and marital instability scale ( $r=0.54$ ), also it has a negative significant correlation ( $r=-0.65$ ) with the individual measurement inventory of intimacy in relationships. Cronbach's alpha

for this scale has been reported 0.96 [30].

Attitudes toward infidelity scale: this scale is designed by Whatley [31] to investigate the attitude toward infidelity relationships. This tool is used by its manufacturer and 286 participants (150 male and 136 female) responded to its items. This scale is composed of 12 items that ranges from strongly agree (grade 7) to strongly disagree (grade 1) in the 7-point degree spectrum. Whatley's research findings [31] suggested the good validity of this attitude evaluator, so that the Cronbach's alpha from internal consistency coefficient is assessed 0.80. Cronbach's alpha coefficient of infidelity relationships attitude scale is estimated 0.71 in Iran and retest coefficient in this test is evaluated 0.87 [32].

Correlation and multiple regression method were used to investigate and analyze the data

by using SPSS-19.

## Results

The results showed that the minimum and maximum age of the participants were 25 and 57 years, respectively (mean=39.38 and variations range=55). Based on gender, 94 participants were female (50%) and 94 participants were male (50%) and based on education, 23 persons had Diploma (12.02%), 81 persons had Associate's degree (43.1%), 75 persons had Master's (39.9%) and 9 participants had Bachelor. (4.8%). Based on marital status, 170 participants were married (90.4%), 7 participants were single (3.7%) and 9 participants were divorced (4.8%). Also, 160 participants (85.1%) had children and 28 participants (14.9%) had no children.

**Table 1** Descriptive statistics of teachers separated as participants' gender

Gender	Statistics	Secure attachment	Avoidant attachment	Ambivalent attachment	Marital disillusionment	infidelity affairs
Men	Mean	6.32	4.15	4.18	38.81	28.78
	SD	2.20	2.52	2.85	2.09	1.30
Women	Mean	6.60	4.20	3.97	44.86	22.51
	SD	5.49	2.37	2.51	2.24	6.54

In Table 1, the mean and standard deviation of each of the attachment styles, marital

disillusionment and infidelity affairs variables are given based on gender.

**Table 2** The Correlation Matrix of research variables in teachers

	Secure attachment	Avoidant attachment	Ambivalent attachment	Marital disillusionment	Infidelity affairs
Secure attachment	1				
Avoidant attachment	-0.14*	1			
Ambivalent attachment	-0.06	0.37**	1		
Marital disillusionment	-0.11	0.17*	0.20**	1	
Extra-marital relationships	-0.08	0.24**	0.15*	0.30**	1

\*0.05

\*\*0.01

Correlation matrix was used to investigate the relationship between the attachment styles, disillusionment and infidelity affairs, and multi-variable regression method was used to determine the effects of variables on each other. As it can be seen in Table 2, secure attachment style has no significant relationships with the variables

( $p < 0.05$ ) except the negative correlation with avoidant attachment ( $p > 0.05$ ). Disillusionment and infidelity affairs had also a significant correlation with avoidant attachment and ambivalent attachment ( $p < 0.05$ ). Also, the disillusionment and the infidelity affairs had a significant relationship with each other ( $p < 0.01$ ).

**Table 3** The investigation of the attachment styles' predictability effect on marital disillusionment

	Beta	S.E.	Z-value	P-value	R <sup>2</sup>
Constant	42.39	1.57	27.00	0.00	
Secure attachment	-4.12	1.60	-2.57	0.01	0.08
Avoidant attachment	1.56	1.80	0.86	0.38	
Ambivalent attachment	3.90	1.77	2.19	0.02	

The results of Table 3 show analysis of regression for investigation predictability model of marital disillusionment's significance which has a significant predictability effect at least one of the attachment styles ( $p < 0.01$ ). Among the attachment styles, secure attachment style ( $B = -4.120$  and  $z = -2.57$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and

ambivalent attachment ( $B = 3.90$  and  $z = 2.19$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) have significant predictability effect on marital disillusionment. But, avoidant attachment ( $B = 1.56$  and  $z = 0.86$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ) has no significant predictability effect on marital disillusionment. This model justifies 8 percent of the Variance ( $R^2 = 0.08$ ).

**Table 4** The investigation of the attachment styles' predictability effect on infidelity relationships

	B	S.E.	Z-value	P-value	R <sup>2</sup>
Constant	25.62	0.76	33.37	0.00	
Secure attachment	-0.37	0.78	-0.47	0.63	0.06
Avoidant attachment	2.29	0.88	2.61	0.00	
Ambivalent attachment	0.62	0.86	0.72	0.47	

The results of Table 4 show the regression analysis for investigation the significance of predictor model of infidelity affairs that has a significant predictability effect at least one of the attachment styles ( $p < 0.01$ ). Among attachment styles, only the avoidant attachment style ( $B = -2.29$  and  $z = -2.61$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) has a significant predictability effect on infidelity affairs. Secure attachment ( $B = -0.37$  and  $z = -0.47$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ) and ambivalent attachment ( $B = 0.62$  and  $z = 0.72$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ) have no significant predictability effect on infidelity affairs. This model justifies 6 percent of the Variance ( $R^2 = 0.06$ ).

**Discussion**

Individuals' attachment style has important role in personal and interpersonal relationships. Marital relationship is one of the important interpersonal relationships that are influenced by the individuals' attachment style directly or indirectly and this can have positive or negative effect on life. The purpose of current study was to determine the role of attachment styles in marital disillusionment and infidelity relationships in teachers. The results showed

that although the secure attachment style has no significant relationship with marital disillusionment and infidelity, but avoidant and ambivalent attachment styles have significant positive correlation with marital disillusionment and infidelity. Another finding is that among all of the attachment styles, only the secure and ambivalent attachment styles can predict marital disillusionment and also only the avoidant attachment style can predict the infidelity relationships' attitude which is valuable finding. Considering the fact that in the ambivalent attachment style, the individual considers others as valuable and themselves as invaluable and always looks for others' confirmation and affection, we can expect that there is more marital disillusionment in individuals with this attachment style since marital disillusionment also occurs when individual makes an ideality from the love partner and finally facing with the realities of life [34]. Therefore, since the ambivalent attachment individuals consider others highly valuable we can expect them to become more disillusioned because they are prone to disillusionment and depression for

not satisfying in childhood needs in responding and availability of others by following any sign from not responding and not availability of their love partner. Huston et al [24] specifically have mentioned to this fact that marital disillusionment is the result of factors such as the decreasing love partner's perception as a responding person and the increasing ambivalent emotions about marriage, but individuals with secure attachment style consider both themselves and others valuable without any excess and negligence about their love partner's attention to self and do not exaggerate about others' positive characteristics [1]. Therefore, this intellectuality helps them to stay safe from marital disillusionment. The fact that avoidant attachment style has no significant relationship with marital disillusionment should be investigated, but it is enough to note that this finding may be because of the reason that individuals with this style often consider others invaluable and considering the love partner invaluable at the beginning of the marriage in contrast with the idealization. The current study is consistent with Davila and Bradbury's studies [34]; they found that the ambivalent attachment style has positive significant relationships with static but unhappy relationships. In fact, their research showed that couples with ambivalent attachment who continue their unhappy life are distinct from divorced couples or couples having happy life.

Despite the previous studies such as Bogaert and Sadava [19] and Allen and Baucom [21] found that individuals with anxious attachment are more involved in marital relationships, but the current studies showed that only the avoidant attachment style can predict positively the attitude toward infidelity. This issue can be because of participants' job in the research. Amato and Previti [33] believed that one of the factors of individuals' tendency to the infidelity relationships is the sense of eligibility. Individuals with avoidant attachment style consider them excessively valuable and important and avoid from with intimate relationship with important people

such as spouse. Along by considering themselves valuable and self-reliance efforts, they have learned to attribute the lack of respond and unavailability of important others to their inability and finally their worthlessness [3]. Thus, we can expect that these people have more concentration on the negative characteristics of their husband or wife, and to avoid from them to improve their non-attachment and independence and experience another relationship. Generally, the secure attachment has more communicative satisfaction and any insecure attachment endangers this satisfaction. Some studies showed that individuals with avoidant attachment style have less willingness to experience a fiery love and pay more attention to the sexual aspect of romantic relationships [35]. These people are less interested in romantic relationships especially long-term relationships requiring commitment in comparison of secure and anxious-ambivalent individuals, and have a more positive attitude toward sexual relationships outside of marriage [36]. In general secure attachment is more related to some positive features such as better relationships, problem solving skills [37], more adaptive social support [38] and communicative commitment [39] which can keep individuals safe from involving in infidelity relationships. In insecure attachment styles, spouses experience a lot of tension and anxiety through marital relationships. Constant waiting state which is observed in the anxious attachment style and inability to make intimacy which is observed in the avoidant attachment style cause any kind of anxiety in marital relationships. While marital life is full of different swings such as the child's birth, economical problems, mental tensions causing from increasing couples' age and different life's cycles and couples' insecure attachment might make double the pressures of these cases, individuals with secure attachment style control their emotions very well in stressful situations [4]. Moreover, they relieve each other because they have a high ability to understand and empathize

with others [5,6,7]. Anxiety will be continued in marital relationships in various forms until the couples' attachment is insecure. This is because the internal working models influence the individuals' view of themselves and others, the manner of judgment to environmental events and important others. They start to act with the making of new position, so that the individuals with anxious attachment focus on negative characteristics of themselves and spouse's positive characteristics with every pressure and tension. They lose realistic view of self and the opposite is also true about individuals with avoidant attachment [1]. These imbalance and emotional fluctuations hurt the marital relationships in various forms. It is necessary to mention that some limitations of the present study such as; using self-report tools, lack of attention to gender differences, lack of screening the sample's characteristics, lack of attention to the individuals' social class and lack of individuals' assessment in terms of their beliefs in marital life can limit the generalizability of these results. It is suggested to pay attention to the differences in sexual problems and personal characteristics of the participants in the future studies. Also, the individuals' social class and their beliefs about marital life should be investigated.

### Conclusion

The results from this study showed that the secure attachment styles and ambivalent attachment style can predict marital disillusionment significantly positive, whereas avoidant attachment style cannot predict it. It is opposite about the prediction of the attitude toward infidelity relationships it means only avoidant attachment style can predict it.

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### Contribution

Study design: AMN

Data collection and analysis: ZA, ZM, HA  
Manuscript preparation: HA, ZA

### Conflict of Interest

"The author declare that they have no competing interests."

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