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## A study of the relationship between identity styles and marital satisfaction among spouses in Tehran

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### Abstract

**Introduction:** The present study aimed at examining the relationship between identity styles and marital satisfaction of spouses in Tehran.

**Materials and Methods:** The descriptive-correlational method was used. The population included all spouses in Tehran in 2015. Form among the population, a sample of 150 individuals (75 men and 75 women) were selected through cluster sampling. To measure the variables under study, ENRICH marital satisfaction scale as well as Berzonsky's identity style scale were used.

**Results:** The results indicated that only the correlation coefficient of commitment in processed identity and marital satisfaction is significant at the 99% confidence level ( $r = 0.34$ ).

**Conclusion:** The results revealed that higher the commitment of the spouses in processed identity, the more they will be satisfied with their marriage.

**Keywords:** Identity styles, Marital satisfaction, Spouses

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### Introduction

In today's world, societies cannot claim health if they do not have healthy families, because none of the social harms can arise without the influence of the family. Healthy couples make healthy families and healthy families make a healthy society. Therefore, to have a healthy society, the health of the first unit of society, i.e., the health of the family, should be given importance. One of the determining factors of family health is marital satisfaction. The stability and strength of the

family depends on a stable and fundamental marriage and marital relationship, that is, any wavering and weakness in marital satisfaction or the absence of a successful marriage, in addition to disturbing the mental peace of couples, also affects the survival and durability of the family (1).

Marital satisfaction is the degree of couple's interest in each other and a positive attitude towards being married, which depends on factors such as personal issues, communication, conflict

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resolution, financial management, leisure activities, sex, parenting, egalitarian roles, and religious orientation (2). Marital satisfaction is also defined by Winch (3) as an objective feeling of contentment, satisfaction and pleasure experienced by husband and wife when they consider all aspects of their marriage. In other words, the process of marital satisfaction results from the adaptation between the situation that is expected and the existing situation of the person in the marital relationship, and in fact it is a positive and enjoyable attitude that the husband and wife have in different aspects of their marital relationship.

Researchers believe that various factors can affect it, and some of the most important factors can include personality traits, identity styles, communication, experiential, feedback, and motivational styles of a person, which are assumed to be constant over time (4). Among the mentioned factors, identity styles as an indicator of physical health based on what is accepted by the public, i.e. the two-way relationship between mental and physical health, can predict marital satisfaction. The formation of identity and achieving a coherent definition of oneself is the most important aspect of human psychological and social development. The choice of values, beliefs and life goals form the most important main characteristics of identity in the period of adolescence and youth. In the study of human personality, identity is a fundamental and internal aspect, with the help of which a person connects with his past and feels continuity and integrity in life. The formation of identity is also a combination of skills, worldview and childhood identifications, which becomes a more or less coherent, continuous and unique whole, and gives the individual a sense of the continuity of the past and orientation towards the future. Erikson (5) believes that the malleability and acceptance of a person's identity is a completely difficult and anxiety-provoking task. People who achieve a strong identity prepare to face adult issues, and people who cannot achieve such an identity experience an identity crisis; such people do not know who or what they are, where they belong or where they want to go; as a result, they may withdraw from the normal path of life, education, job and marriage.

The newest theory in the field of identity, which is the theoretical basis of this research, is the theory of identity styles of Berzonsky, which has a cognitive-social pattern. The social-cognitive processing model of identity studies the strategies and processes that people pay attention to or avoid in order to build and modify their identity, based on this point of view, identity is a cognitive structure and a personal reference framework that is used to interpret experiences and Self-related information and answers to questions about the concept of meaningfulness and goal setting are used. The social-cognitive model of identity is based on construction, that is, people play active roles in constructing who they are. When adaptive efforts are not successful, there is a need to revise and modify aspects of the identity structure. Accordingly, identity development is a dialectical exchange between the processes governed by the identity structure and the adaptive processes governed by the physical and social contexts in which the individual lives. These styles refer to strategies and processes facing identity conflicts; In other words, identity styles are the relative preference of people to use specific methods of identity issues and processing information about themselves (6-9). According to Berzonsky, identity styles include the following:

1- Informational style: People with an informational style actively and consciously search for information and evaluate it, and then use the appropriate information.

2- Normative style: in the normative style, the individual faces problems in a reactive manner and acts in harmony with the expectations of reference groups and others and internalizes values and beliefs by working independently and without self-evaluation. This style is related to characteristics such as excessive conscientiousness, seeking help, impatience and a strong desire to structure cases, stable self-concept and unwillingness to examine information inconsistent with values and beliefs.

3- Confused-avoidant style: people with confused-avoidant style are procrastinators and try to delay conflict situations that require decision-making as much as possible. When such a delay is not possible, they make more decisions based on requirements. And environmental consequences rely. When making decisions, they also have fear and anxiety, and in these situations

they often use inappropriate strategies such as avoiding, making excuses, and making excuses. Their behavior is situational and does not have a specific pattern. This identity style is related to emotion-oriented, unfavorable decision-making strategies, limited self-awareness, following others and using inefficient cognitive and documentary strategies.

Many researches have investigated the factors affecting marital satisfaction. In these studies, factors affecting marital satisfaction such as high self-confidence, high ability to communicate with spouse (10), relationship between marital satisfaction and emotional stability (11), egalitarian attitude towards gender role and marital satisfaction (12), Attachment styles and marital satisfaction (13) were studied. In many researches, the relationship between marital satisfaction and identity and styles has been investigated. In their research, Cook and Jones (14) concluded that couples with similar identity styles (regardless of the specific identity style) experience more satisfaction compared to other couples. Also, according to these researchers, women's report of marital satisfaction is more influenced by similarity in identity styles than men. The results of the research of Parsons and his colleagues (15) show that people with an informative identity have more marital satisfaction, and people with a confused-avoidant identity style have achieved less satisfaction in their marital relationships. In this regard, Karimian, Heydari and Salari (16) showed that there is a positive and significant correlation between the informational identity style and marital commitment directly and inversely related to confused identity style. The results of Alder's research (18) have also shown that social desirability and compatibility were more predictive of marital satisfaction than identity and intimacy. In their longitudinal study, Snead Withburn and Shi Huang (19) showed that midlife well-being can be predicted by identity and intimacy styles in early adulthood.

Based on what was said and considering the importance of identity styles in predicting marital satisfaction, the aim of the present study is to predict the marital satisfaction of married couples based on their identity processing styles. Based on this, the following research question is raised?

Can identity processing styles predict marital satisfaction in married couples? And how much is its contribution in forecasting?

### Materials and Methods

The present research method is a descriptive and correlational research.

The statistical population of this research was the married couples present in two restaurants near the center of Tehran in 2015-2016, from which a sample size of 150 people (75 men and 75 women) was selected by cluster random method.

### Research instruments

In this research, a questionnaire was used to measure the research variables. In this way, in order to measure identity styles, Berzonsky's identity processing styles questionnaire was used, and Enrich's Marital Satisfaction Questionnaire was used to measure marital satisfaction.

A) *Berzonsky Identity Processing Styles Questionnaire*: The Identity Styles Questionnaire was first designed by Berzonsky (20) to measure the social-cognitive processes used by adolescents in dealing with identity issues. According to Berzonsky's perspective, teenagers choose three different orientations or three different identity processing styles. This questionnaire evaluates three identity styles including informational, normative and confused/avoidant and contains 40 questions of which 11 questions (questions 2-5-6-16-18-25-26-30-33-35-37) Information identity, and 9 questions (questions 4-10-19-21-23-28-32-34-40) in the style of normative identity and 10 questions (questions 3-8-13-17-24-27-29-31 38-36) is assigned to the confused/avoidant identity style and 10 questions (questions 1-7-9-11-12-14-15-20-22-39) are also assigned to the commitment scale. The questions are scored on a five-point scale (completely disagree=1, disagree=2, somewhat agree=3, agree=4, completely agree=5). Questions 9-11-14-20 are reverse scored. Berzonski reported the internal reliability (alpha coefficient) of the information scale at 62%, the normative scale at 66%, and the confusion or avoidance scale at 73%. In the study of Berzonsky and Sullivan (21), alpha coefficients for the confusion or avoidance scale of the 6G ISI form were reported as 78% and for the original ISI form as 77%. The normative scale in the 6G ISI form was 64% and in the main form

was 67%. The information scale in the 6G ISI form is reported as 59% and in the main form as 64%. These coefficients were similar to those reported by Berzonsky and White and Jones. Berzonsky and Sullivan (21) found that the information scale was divided into two separate factors, indicating high and low levels of commitment. It also shows that the information identity style score is a complex variable. Therefore, the lower reliability of the information scale is not surprising. To evaluate and measure the internal consistency of the identity style questionnaire, in Ghazanfari's research (22), Cronbach's alpha coefficient was calculated on the original sample data. It was observed that the coefficients obtained are very close to the coefficients calculated by Berzonski-White and his colleagues.

*B) Enrich Marital Satisfaction Questionnaire:* This questionnaire has been used as a reliable research tool in many researches for marital satisfaction. Foers and Olson (23), used this questionnaire to check marital satisfaction and believes that this scale is related to the changes that occur during a person's life, and in this research, it is sensitive to the changes that occur in the family. One of the subjects of this questionnaire is related to one of the important fields. The evaluation of these fields within a marital relationship can describe the potential problems of couples or can identify areas of strength and strengthening. This tool can also be a diagnosis tool for couples who are looking for and they are looking for marital counseling and looking to strengthen their marital relationship. This scale has 12 components of contractual response (a person's tendency to conventionally answer the questions of the questionnaire), marital satisfaction (satisfaction and compliance with 10 aspects of the marital relationship); Personality issues (a person's understanding of his spouse according to his behaviors and characteristics and the level of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with personality issues with questions: 2-4-12-22-40), marital relationship (a person's feelings, beliefs and attitudes towards the role of communication in continuity Marital relations with questions: 6-13-23-32-41), conflict resolution (spouse's personal attitudes, feelings and beliefs in creating or resolving conflict with questions: 7-14-24-33-42), financial supervision

(Interests and attitudes related to the economic method and issues that are managed in husband and wife relationships, with questions: 8-15-16-25-34), leisure time activities (personal preferences of each couple to spend their free time with questions -9 17-26-35-43), sexual relations (personal feelings and concerns about sexual and emotional relations with spouse with questions: 10-17-27-36-44); Marriage and children (personal attitudes and feelings about having children and agreement on the number of children with questions: 11-19-28-37-45); Relatives and friends (evaluation of feelings and interests related to relations with relatives, relatives, spouse and friends), roles related to equality between men and women (attitudes, feelings and beliefs of a person about different marital roles), ideological orientation (attitudes, feelings and interests about It examines religious beliefs and practices in married life with questions: 5-21-30-39-47). This questionnaire consists of 115 closed questions and 12 scales, except for the first scale which has 5 questions, the rest of the scales contain 10 questions. The answer to the questions is in the form of 5 options (completely agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, completely disagree). Olson et al. have reported the validity of this questionnaire with alpha coefficient method of 0.92. Soleimaniyan (24) also reported the alpha coefficient of this questionnaire equal to 95% and Furqani (25) mentioned the reliability of this questionnaire as 86%. In this questionnaire, scores less than 30 indicate severe dissatisfaction, scores between 30 and 40 indicate dissatisfaction, scores between 40 and 60 indicate relative and moderate satisfaction, scores between 60 and 70 indicate high satisfaction, and finally, scores above 70 indicate satisfaction. Spouses are the best of marital relations.

## Results

In this section, the findings are reported descriptively and inferentially. The results of Table 1 are presented in order to know the descriptive indices, average, standard deviation of the performance of the participants, as well as the elongation and skewness indices in order to check the normality of the data.

**Table 1.** Descriptive indices of research variables

Observed variables	Average	Standard deviation
Personal satisfaction	19.23	4.51
Marital relations	19.20	3.84
Resolve the conflict	18.21	4.16
Financial Management	19.64	3.75
Free time	18.39	4.13
Marriage and children	17.77	3.23
Relatives and friends	17.73	3.90
Religious orientation	20.48	4.53
Sexual relations	19.12	3.23
Marital satisfaction	169.58	26.27
Style intelligence	36.33	5.81
Normative style	29.75	5
Avoidant style	28.95	6.83
Obligation	37.63	7.13

As can be seen in Table 1, the values of skewness and elongation in all variables are between 1.5 and -1.5, which indicates the almost normal or normal distribution of all characteristics in the studied graph. The overall average marital satisfaction is 169.58, which is based on the soft table based on the standard T score equal to 48, which in the classification in the soft table of the questionnaire, shows that the average level of marital satisfaction in the entire study sample indicates relative satisfaction and It is average in the marital relations of spouses, therefore it has a negative skewness and

elongation. Also, the average score of informational identity processing style is 36.33 with a negative skew, the average score of normative identity processing style is 29.75 with a positive skew, the average score of avoidant identity processing style is 95.28 with a positive skew, and the average score of commitment in identity processing formed is equal to 63.37 with a negative skewness.

In this research, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was also used to check the normality of the distribution of scores, and the results and significance of the test are shown in Table 2.

**Table 2.** The results of data normality test based on Kolmogorov-Smirnov test

Variables	Z value of the Kolmogorov - Smirnov	Significant level
Marital Satisfaction	1.23	0.10
Information processing style	1.06	0.21
Normative processing style	0.97	0.29
Avoidant processing style	1.27	0.08
Commitment identity	1.61	0.06

The results of Table 2 show that the significance level of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test is greater than 0.05 in both marital satisfaction and identity processing styles. That is, there is no significant difference between the distribution of the scores of these two variables with the normal distribution. Based on this, it can be said that the distribution of scores of identity processing styles and marital satisfaction is almost normal.

Therefore, according to the normality of the distribution of scores and according to the fact that the scale was an interval in all indicators, parametric statistics can be used to test the research question. In the inferential statistics section, there are hypotheses that indicate the

relationships between variables, which have been investigated by performing the Pearson correlation test. Only the correlation coefficient between commitment in processed identity and marital satisfaction is directly significant with 99% confidence ( $r= 0.34$ ). That is, the higher the level of commitment of married people in the processed identity, the more satisfied they are in their marital relationship. In other words, the style of identity processing is not important, what is important is that the person is committed to the identity he has acquired and does not get confused, and if there is this level of commitment, there is more satisfaction between couples in marital relationships.

But in response to this research question, do identity research styles have the ability to predict marital satisfaction in married people? and how much is its contribution in forecasting? Multivariate regression analysis test was used in the simultaneous method.

To check the hypothesis of multiple collinearity, according to the correlation matrix of the predictors with each other and with the criterion variable, all the correlation coefficients between the predictor variables were smaller than 0.9, so the probability of collinearity between the predictor variables is low (26). In the following, the regression analysis model was used to determine the variance of marital satisfaction simultaneously through the entry of identity processing styles. Information processing styles explain approximately 12% of the variance of marital satisfaction, which is based on the values ( $P < 0.01$ ,  $F = 4.92$ ) which is the result of the

variance analysis test. It shows a significant relationship ( $P < 0.01$ ) between the predictor variable of identity processing styles and the criterion variable of marital satisfaction, which among the components of identity processing styles, the amount of commitment in identity had a significant relationship with marital satisfaction. That is, commitment in identity processing styles is associated with an increase in marital satisfaction, and through the amount of identity commitment in married people, their marital satisfaction can be predicted. Based on this result, the research hypothesis that it is possible to predict the marital satisfaction of married people through commitment in the processed identity ( $P < 0.01$ ).

Table 3 shows the coefficients and the significance of the coefficients obtained from simultaneous regression analysis, marital satisfaction based on identity processing styles.

**Table 3.** The regression analysis of marital satisfaction based on identity processing styles

Model	Predictor	Co-efficient	SE	Standard coefficient beta	t	P
1	Constant	127.84	21.42	-	5.97	0.001
	Informational Style	-0.134	0.37	-0.03	0.36	0.72
	Normative style	-0.22	0.49	-0.04	-0.45	0.65
	Avoidant style	0.06	0.33	0.01	0.17	0.86
	Obligation	1.37	0.36	0.37	3.79	0.001

Based on the standardized values of  $\beta$  and the significance of the coefficients, which was checked with the statistical t test. It shows that only the amount of commitment in the processed identity enters the equation of the regression line as a predictor variable. Therefore, the equation of the standard regression line for predicting marital satisfaction based on identity processing styles in married couples is written as follows: commitment - 0.37 marital satisfaction in married couples.

**Discussion**

The results of the present study showed that identity styles cannot significantly predict marital satisfaction. But identity commitment can be used as a predictor variable. In other words, the identity commitment variable has a decisive role in various aspects of marital satisfaction.

The point that needs to be investigated first is the lack of significant relationship between identity styles and marital satisfaction. This result is consistent with the result of Allder's research

(18). At the same time, it contradicts the results of some other researches (15,17). The reason for this lack of communication can be interpreted according to two points: First, it is possible that the couples participating in this research had different identity styles. This problem may have affected the result of the research because the similarity or difference of styles was not controlled in this research. What makes this issue more complicated is that marital satisfaction may be influenced by gender. This means that marital satisfaction in women is more influenced by similarity in identity styles than in men (14). If this point is correct, not controlling the role of gender in this research may have caused the non-significance of the relationship between identity styles and marital satisfaction. The second point in explaining the lack of relationship between identity styles and marital satisfaction may go back to the complexity and multidimensionality of the concept of marital satisfaction. By definition, marital satisfaction is a state of mind

that reflects the advantages and disadvantages of marriage in a person's mind. From the definition, it is clear that this state is influenced by many variables, which may be wider and more complex than it can be predicted only by identity styles. In other words, marital satisfaction is a multi-factor concept that includes cognitive, physical, communication, sexual, and personality components that may not be predictable with a cognitive construct such as identity processing styles. This reason may be one of the causal factors of the non-significance of the relationship between identity styles and marital satisfaction.

Another point that needs to be investigated is the significance of the relationship between identity commitment and marital satisfaction. This result is in line with the results of other researches that investigated the explanatory role of identity commitment in the adaptation of people and their satisfaction (27).

When a person reaches the commitment of identity when he has taken decisive decisions in different areas of his life such as job, marriage, adherence to certain political or ideological views and has considered certain strategies to achieve personal goals and determine the path of life. For this reason, having a commitment can help a person to balance personal needs and social demands and adapt to the environment and conditions in a sufficient way. Kaminski's research (28) has also shown that identity

commitment has a decisive role in adaptation and can be effective in reducing or increasing it. In other words, having a commitment works like a plan that helps a person to concentrate his abilities and efforts in a specific direction and avoid scattering.

In this regard, Erikson believes that not acquiring an identity and not having a commitment can cause a disturbance in the perception of time, excessive preoccupation with oneself and a negative identity, which disrupts the adequate and adaptive functioning of the individual and, as a result, the relationship and marital satisfaction. Slow (29).

Identity commitment has a decisive role in marital satisfaction. An important point that should be paid attention to in future researches is controlling the difference and similarity of couples' identity styles and controlling the role of gender in marital satisfaction.

### Conclusion

Overall, the research results showed that identity commitment has a decisive role in marital satisfaction. Given that increasing awareness of the factors involved in marital satisfaction plays an effective role in interventions to prevent divorce, therefore, it is necessary for researchers and practitioners to pay attention to issues related to family mental health.

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