



Contents lists available at <https://civilica.com/search/paper/>

Journal Of Human Relations Studies

journal: <http://jhres.uma.ac.ir/>



## Prediction of Marital Intimacy based on the Quality of Thematic Relationships and Expression of Positive Emotion in Women

Razyhe Hajimoradi<sup>\*1</sup>, Amir Nabizadh<sup>2</sup> and Mohammad Narimani<sup>3</sup>

1. Department of Psychology, Faculty of Educational Science, University of Mohaghegh Ardabili, Ardabil, Iran.
2. M.A in Psychology, Bu-Ali Sina University, Faculty of Economics & Social Science, Department of Psychology, Hamadan, Iran.
3. Professor, Department of Psychology, Faculty of Educational Sciences and Psychology, University of Mohaghegh Ardabili, Ardabil, Iran.

Received: 2021/08/01

Accepted: 2021/09/30

### ARTICLE INFO:

#### Keywords:

Marital Intimacy,  
Quality of Thematic  
Relationships,  
Expression of Positive  
Emotion.

### ABSTRACT:

The present research is on the prediction of marital intimacy based on the quality of thematic relationships and expression of positive emotion in women. A descriptive-correlational method was used for this purpose. The statistical population of the present research consisted of all women referring to counseling centers in Hamedan in 2019, and 290 people were selected as the sample based on the available sampling method. The research means included King and Emmons Emotion Expression Questionnaire (1990), Bell Thematic Relationships Questionnaire (1995), and Bagarozzi Marital Intimacy Questionnaire (2001). Data were analyzed using a simple regression statistical test using the SPSS21 software test. Results: Results showed that positive emotion expression and thematic relationships can be predicted based on couple intimacy. There was a positive and significant relationship between marital intimacy and thematic relationships and a direct and significant relationship between marital intimacy and positive emotional expression. Conclusion: Based on the findings, it can be concluded that marital intimacy can predict thematic relationships and positive emotional - expression.

**Corresponding author:** Department of Psychology, Faculty of Educational Science, University of Mohaghegh Ardabili, Ardabil, Iran. Email: [r.hajimoradi92@gmail.com](mailto:r.hajimoradi92@gmail.com)

## Introduction:

The Holy Quran considers the parity (duality) to be the great verse of God, which is the center of the emergence and cultivation of peace and mercy (Roum, 2012). The main role of couples is to bring peace to each other, but sometimes a life that has begun with an agreement and peace leads to conflict after a while (Asghari Ganji and Navabi Nejad, 2014). concerning the fact that intimacy is a key part of a couple's relationship, there is no concrete definition yet despite such importance (Kelly, 2000; Scharff, 2014). Intimacy is a dynamic concept in human communications, especially couples' relationship with each other, which is defined as the ability to communicate with others while maintaining individuality and is a means of satisfying psychological and emotional needs such as attention, trust, care, and security and leads to increase in and improvement of couples content with each other (Ramachandra, 2012, Mohammadi, Salimi et al., 2016; Gholizadeh 2016). Intimacy includes spending time with another person, listening to each other, having an honest relationship and full of mutual trust, and in other words, it is revealing oneself verbally and non-verbally to another one (Nurhayati, Faturouchman and Fadilahmi, 2019; Sadeghifard Samawi and Mohebbi, 2015; Erlbaum et al., 2004). We will deal with stress more proficiently and will be more optimistic about life in such situations. Intimacy is one of the most valuable aspects of marriage and the basis of a couple's bond (relationship) (Prager, 1995) and couples apply their own relational and individual coping styles when they face difficulty in intimacy to maximize intimate relationship rewards and to minimize risks to be able to fulfill all their dreams, which originated from the family of origin, in the current life (Prager and Roberts, 2004)

Thematic relationships theory expresses one of the factors affecting marital intimacy by emphasizing the child's relationships with the mother or main caregiver and the impact on current and adulthood relationships and the life of the individual (Kulik and Kitachik, 2014). The most important advantage of thematic relationships is that they address subconscious desires and unrealistic expectations, which can lead couples to central cycles of conflict. By making aware of the fact that the problems are in part caused by their semi-completed tasks in the previous family, the thematic relationships expands the couple's insight and causes an increase in intimacy and

reduction of marital conflicts (Denevan, 2003; Ebrahimifar and Nameni, 2015). The individual's unresolved intra-psychological conflicts, derived from his/her original family, get repeated and ejected in the next intimate relationships with the individuals such as the spouse, leading to the formation of unrealistic and unhealthy communication patterns between the couples (Goldenberg, 2000). As mentioned earlier, thematic relationships include all these because they are the base and foundation of communication and affect the expression of emotions and expressions as well. The parent's emotional response to the child or the child's exposure to negative emotions is all formed from thematic relationships and are put back into a defect cycle and passed on to children. There are lot of evidence indicating that couples, who have an undesirable relationship, experience strong negative emotions, feelings, and responses such as criticism, hostility, anger, anxiety, jealousy, withdrawal, and defensive action (Gottman, 2006).

Emotion expression is both a source of intimacy and a problem. Negative emotion, especially wrath, when not managed effectively and represented in an unmanaged way instead of responsibly, distracts the couple, damages the spouses' trust, and alienates them from each other (Johnson et al. Et al. 2004; Jacobson and Christensen, 1996). Recent researches show that it is not the occurrence of conflicts and tensions that lead improper marriages to divorce, but the decrease in the expression of positive emotional feelings, negative emotional connection, and sensitivity of couples to each other, which predicts the collapse of the relationship. Three levels of emotional expression include positive emotion expression, negative emotion expression, and intimacy expression. According to EFT couple therapy, the inability to express any of these three scales leads to marital conflicts, especially emotional and sexual conflicts. In addition, according to research on the subscales of thematic relationships, such as insecure attachment, it causes the formation of negative patterns of interaction and uncertainty in communication and incorrect coping with emotions (Johnson, 2014). Overall, thematic relationship theory provides a framework for understanding how a child's relationships with the mother or caregiver affect his/her life and adult relationships, including intimate marital relationships by emphasizing human's basic need for a relationship with others. Also, since what a person knows about his/her

emotions and the ability to recognize, describe and regulate his/her emotions is somewhat influenced by interaction with primary caregivers, so the person's initial emotional experiences are also important factors that play a decisive role in his/her later relationships in adulthood and affect all his/her future relationships, including marital intimacy. In addition, emotional expression has a significant role in maintaining interpersonal relationships (Watson, 2001).

In addition, according to the divorce statistics, from late March to August 10, 2020, 34,457 divorces have been registered in the population database of the National Registration Organization. Due to the research gap, an attempt was made in the present research to predict marital intimacy based on thematic relationships and negative emotion expression.

### Materials and Methods:

The present research was a descriptive-correlational one. The research population included women, who were referred or were referred through family courts, welfare centers or other organizations related to counseling and couple-therapy centers in Hamedan County. Thus, the population consisted of women, who were referred to counseling centers due to marital conflicts. 300 people of this population were selected by the available method. The condition for entering this research was the age over 18 years and being a woman and education higher than a diploma. There was- the Bell Thematic Relationships Questionnaire, Emotion Expression of King and Emmons and Bagarozzi Marital Intimacy Questionnaire after explaining the objectives of the research and preparing the subjects for their answers. Ten questionnaires were distorted and the analysis was performed on 290 people by SPSS software.

**A. Emotion Expression Quality Questionnaire:** King and Emmons (1990) developed the emotional expression questionnaire to investigate and evaluate the importance of the role of emotional expression in people's health. This questionnaire consists of 16 items and has three components. The components are positive emotion expression, intimacy expression and negative emotion expression. Positive emotion Expression includes 7 questions, intimacy expression includes 5 questions and negative emotion expression includes 4 questions. The questionnaire scoring based on the five-

degree Likert scale is strongly agreed (5), somewhat agree (4), neither agree nor disagree (3), somewhat disagree (2), disagree (1). Scores range from a minimum of 16 and a maximum of 80. The validity of this scale was investigated using the internal consistency method and the calculation of Cronbach's alpha coefficient and its value for the total scale was 68%. In addition, regarding the validity, the questionnaire had high and significant consistency between the subscales (Rafieinia, 2001).

**B. Thematic Relationship Questionnaire:** Thematic Relationship Questionnaire (BORRTI) was developed by Bell in 1995. 45 questions evaluate the thematic relationships and 45 questions measure the tested reality in this questionnaire and include a total of 90 questions. In researches, which aims to investigate the quality of thematic relationships, only 45 questions about the thematic relationships can be used. The Thematic Relationships Questionnaire includes 4 subscales of alienation, insecure attachment, self-centeredness and inadequacy. The scoring of this questionnaire is such that two options of yes and no are posed for each question. The option "No" will get a score of zero and the option "Yes" will get a score of 1. Bell has reported the reliability coefficient of the - scale- of - the - thematic – relationships with a time interval of 2 weeks between 0.58 to 0.90 and with a time interval of 13 weeks 0.65 to 0.81. In addition, Bell (1995) has reported a high correlation among thematic relationships scale and compact psychological rating scale, positive and negative signs scale and psychological measurements (Goldman & Anderson, 2007). Psychometric properties of the thematic relationships questionnaire's Persian version and Bell reality assessment were also investigated in Iranian samples and reliability was confirmed by Cronbach's alpha of subscales from 0.66 for social inadequacy to 0.88 for alienation (Hadinezhad et.al, 2013).

**C. Marital Intimacy Questionnaire:** This questionnaire was developed by Bagarozzi (2001) and has 41 questions. This scale aims to evaluate the aspects of marital intimacy (emotional intimacy, psychological intimacy, rational intimacy, sexual intimacy, physical intimacy, spiritual intimacy, aesthetic intimacy, social-recreational intimacy). Its response spectrum in each question is specified from 1 to 10, and therefore, there is

no need to calculate the score of each option. Subjects respond to each need in a ranked way from 1 meaning "there is no such thing at all" to 10 meaning "there is a great need". The highest score in each aspect is 50 and it is 60 in the aspect of spiritual intimacy. The sum of the scores in each aspect (except the emotional intimacy aspect) will be a score from 5 to 50. This score will be from 6 to 60 in emotional intimacy aspect. Higher scores in an aspect indicate the responder's greater need to it after the intimacy on the part of her spouse, and vice versa. Etemadi (2005) obtained the reliability of the questionnaire with Cronbach's alpha test as 0.94 and concurrent validity as 0.58. Khamseh and Hosseinian (2007) in a study calculated the reliability of each aspect of intimacy by test-retest method, which were obtained 89%, 82%, 81%, .91%, .80%, .65%, .76% and 51%, respectively for emotional, psychological, intellectual, sexual, physical, spiritual, spiritual, aesthetic and social-recreational intimacy, indicating the acceptable reliability of this scale.

## Findings:

Statistical methods were used at two inferential and descriptive levels to analyze the research data.

**Table 1. Descriptive statistics of thematic relationships quality, positive emotion expression, and marital intimacy components**

Variables	Mean	Standard deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
<b>Thematic relations</b>	70.70	9.09	- 0.32	- 0.54
<b>Expression of positive emotion</b>	12.94	4.05	- 0.47	- 0.46
<b>Marital intimacy</b>	128.35	12.26	0.01	- 0/48

The results of Table 1 showed that the mean and standard deviation of the quality of the thematic relationships were 70.70 and 9.09, respectively and the mean and standard deviation of positive emotion were 12.94 and 4.05, respectively, and the mean and standard deviation of marital intimacy were 128.35 and 12.26, respectively.

**Table 2. Correlation coefficient of thematic relationships quality, positive emotion expression, and marital intimacy**

Variable	Quality of thematic relationships	Expression of positive emotion	marital intimacy
<b>Quality of thematic relationships</b>	1		
<b>Expression of positive emotion</b>	-0.121	1	
<b>Marital intimacy</b>	0.165	0.271	1

The results of Table 2 show that the thematic relationships quality variable had a negative and insignificant correlation with the positive emotion expression variable. In addition, there was a positive and significant correlation between the thematic relationships variable and marital intimacy at the level of 0.05, and there was a positive and significant correlation between the positive emotion expression variable and marital intimacy at the level of 0.01.

A simple regression model was used to predict marital intimacy based on the thematic relationships quality and positive emotional expression. The results were presented below.

**Table 3. Regression model results (prediction of marital intimacy based on thematic relationships quality)**

Index	R	R <sup>2</sup>	F	P
<b>Model No.1</b>	0.104	0.011	2.48	0.013

According to the results of Table 3 and the obtained values ( $P < 0.013$ ,  $F = 2.48$ ), it can be said that the model is meaningful meaning that The quality of the thematic relationships can predict the degree of marital intimacy up to 2.48%.

**Table 4. Regression model coefficients based on thematic relationships and marital intimacy variables**

Concurrent method model	Non-standardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients	T	Sig
	B	Standard error	Beta		
<b>Fixed amount</b>	42.15	4.258	-	9.86	0.000
<b>Thematic relationships quality</b>	0.90	0.60	0.104	1.49	0.013

Table 4 shows that the thematic relationships quality with a beta coefficient of 0.104 has played a significant role in explaining marital intimacy.

**Table 5. Regression model results (Prediction of marital intimacy based on positive emotion expression)**

Index	R	R <sup>2</sup>	F	P
Model No.1	0.669	0.447	227.369	0.000

According to the results of Table 5 and the obtained values ( $F = 227.369$ ,  $P < 0.00$ ), it can be said that the model is significant meaning that positive emotion expression can predict the level of marital intimacy up to 227.369%.

**Table 6. Regression model coefficients based on the variables of positive emotion expression and marital intimacy**

Concurrent method model	Non-standardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients	T	Sig
	B	Standard error	Beta		
Fixed amount	27.911	1.379	-	20.234	0.000
Positive emotion expression	1.485	0.098	0.669	15.079	0.000

Table 6 shows that the negative emotion expression with a beta coefficient of 0.669, has played a significant role in explaining marital intimacy.

### Discussion and Conclusion:

This research aimed was - to explain marital intimacy based on thematic relationships and how to express positive emotions in women referring to counseling centers. There was a positive relationship between marital intimacy with thematic relationships and negative emotion expression based on the research results and their significance was confirmed according to the results obtained. The Findings of this research were consistent with the results of Noorhayati et al. 2019, Mohammadi et al. 2016, Sadeghifard et al., 2014, Johnson 2014, Kulik and Kitachik 2014, Erlbaum et al. 2004, and Ramachandra et al (2014).

In explaining the results of this hypothesis according to Johnson et al. (2013), it can be said that marital life is the source of one of the deepest positive and negative emotions such as love, happiness, hatred, anger, fear,

sadness and pleasure and the fact that how much the couples can understand such strong emotions, converse about and manage them, plays an important role in reducing the marital conflicts. The means of emotions and its management play a major role in the continuation of marital life. People, who have positive emotional expression, are more likely to be able to effectively solve the problems and odds through verbal and emotional methods of emotional expression, show more empathy for each other, and are more sensitive to each other's feelings and this method causes the reduction of the conflicts between them. When couples use negative emotions more often, they will have difficulty in establishing the relationship, and emotional expression in a negative way adds to the conflicts between them. For example, when couples feel that their spouse is unresponsive, critical, or rejecting, they often use emotional strategies that continue or exacerbate the disorder in the relationship inadvertently. when each couple is unsure of his/her spouse's emotional response during a relationship or in times of stress or crisis or is confronted with a negative way of emotional expression, they feel insecure and are challenged in establishing the relationships. Accordingly, emotional expression in a negative way can affect the relationships between couples and thus aggravate their sexual and emotional conflicts.

From another viewpoint, in explaining these findings, it can be said that thematic relationships go back to the past and the individual's relationships with relatives if individuals enter into cohabitation with distorted objects and projected non-emotional and emotional data from the family of origin. This content causes the orientations in the interpretation of events that may arise in the form of misunderstandings, distorted attitudes, incorrect assumptions, unrealistic expectations and goals in spouses and affect the understanding of emotional relationships and subsequent evaluations. When a person grows up with distorted and falsified expectations of other individuals and forces loved ones subconsciously to conform to these internal patterns of roles. For example the main source of marital conflict is because of the spouses that project their own rejected aspects to the opponent and then fight the mentioned characteristics in their spouse. Thematic relationships or objects persist in the course of life. Even most of the time, the person attempts to maintain it and this has a great impact on interpersonal relationships quality and the way emotions are expressed and interacted, especially with the partner (Goldenberg and Goldenberg, 2009).

In total, the results of the present research showed that there is a significant and positive relationship between marital intimacy, thematic relationships and positive emotional expression. In addition, the thematic relationship and positive emotion expression can predict marital intimacy. One of the limitations of the present research was the available sampling that can affect the results. According to the results, it is suggested that the importance and necessity of the way of emotional expression and its effect on children and their future life should be mentioned in pre-marriage courses. In addition, couple-therapists should pay more attention to the impact of the couples' thematic relationships in the investigation into marital conflict.

Finally, all the participants, who collaborated with us in this research, are appreciated.

## ORCID

**Raziye Hajimoradi:** <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1462-7456>

## References:

- Asghari Ganji, Askari; Navabi Nejad, Shokoo (2014). The effectiveness of couple therapy based on the internal control psychological model in increasing marital satisfaction. *Family and Research Quarterly*, 23, 50-32.  
doi: 20.1001.1.26766728.1393.11.2.3.5
- Bagarozzi, D.A. (2001). intimacy needs questionnaire. Atlanta, human resources Consultants. 5, 15.
- Ramachandran VS. Encyclopedia of human behavior. Oxford: Elsevier/Academic Press; 2012.  
<https://www.elsevier.com/books/encyclopedia-of-human-behavior/ramachandran/978-0-12-375000-6>
- Bell, M. (1995). Bell Object Relations and Reality Testing Inventory (BORRTI). By Western Psychological Services.  
[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/242282903\\_Bell\\_Object\\_Relations\\_and\\_Reality\\_Testing\\_Inventory](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/242282903_Bell_Object_Relations_and_Reality_Testing_Inventory)
- Denevan, J .(2003). Couple Therapy object relations. Translation, Tabriz, Mostafayi Tehran: Publishers faravan.( 1392).
- Ebrahimifar, Mojgan and Nameni, Ebrahim, 2015. An investigation into the role of primary thematic relationships and emotional nagging in the prediction of marital intimacy. Second International Conference of New Researches in Management, Economics, and Humanities.  
<https://civilica.com/doc/493789/>
- Etemadi, A; Navabi Nejad, Sh; Ahmadi, S. A; Farzad, V. (2005). An investigation into the impact of couple-therapy in imago (relationship) therapy on increasing intimacy between couples. *Scientific-Research Journal of Consultation Researches and New Trends*, 5 (19): 9-22.  
<https://www.sid.ir/fa/journal/ViewPaper.aspx?id=65273>
- Gholizadeh, Fatemeh (2016), Love and intimacy in marital life. Tehran: Kadivar Publications.  
<https://www.gisoom.com/book>
- Goldenberg, I. Goldenberg, H. (2009). Family Therapy. In *Current Psychotherapies* Edited by R Corsini and D. Wedding Itasca Illinois: F.E Peacock Pub.  
<https://www.adinehbook.com/gp/product/9648345058>
- Gottman, J. M., & Gottman, J. S. (2006). Gottman method couple therapy. In A. S. Gurman (Ed.), *Clinical handbook of couple therapy*, 4th ed. (pp. 138-164). New York: Guilford Press.  
<https://psycnet.apa.org/record/2008-09621-005>
- Jacobson, N. S. (1996). Toward a behavioral profile of marital distress. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*. 48. 696-703
- Kelly AB, Halford WK, Young RM. Maritally distressed women with alcohol problems: the impact of a short-term alcohol-focused intervention on drinking behavior and marital satisfaction. *Addiction*. 2000 Oct;95(10):1537-49.  
doi: 10.1046/j.1360-0443.2000.951015378.x
- Khamseh, A; Hosseinian, S. (2008). A study of gender differences between different aspects of intimacy in married students. *Women's Studies*, 6 (1): 35-52.  
doi: 10.22051/JWSPS.2008.1287
- King, L. A., Emmons, R. A. (1990). Conflict over emotional expression psychological and physical correlates *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*. 58(5), 864- 877.  
doi: 10.1037/0022-3514.58.5.864
- Kulik, L., Kitaichik, D. (2014). Marital intimacy and selected correlates of gender roles: A comparative analysis of Israeli husbands and wives. *Women's Studies*, 43(6): 823-42.  
doi: 10.1080/00497878.2014.921509

- Laurenceau J-P, Rivera LM, Schaffer AR, Pietromonaco PR. Intimacy as an Interpersonal Process: Current Status and Future Directions. *Handbook of closeness and intimacy*. Mahwah, NJ, US: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers; 2004. p. 61-78.  
<http://www.scopus.com/inward/record.url?scp=22544435290&partnerID=8YFLogxK>
- Mohammadi, Salimi, Zaharakar, Davarnia, Shokrami. An investigation into relationship enhancement program (REP) performance in reduction of burnout in couples – Cypers, Science Club, IJPN 2016, January 1, 4 (3):8-16.  
doi: 10.21859/ijpn-04032
- Nurhayati, S. R., Faturochman., & Fadilla-Helmi, A. (2019). Marital Quality: A Conceptual Review. *Buletin Psikologi*. 27(2): 109 – 124.  
doi:10.22146/buletinpsikologi.37691
- Prager, K. J. (1995). *The Psychology of Intimacy*. New York: Guilford Press. doi: 10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199791064.003.0002
- Rafieinia, P (2001). The relationship between emotion expression styles and general health in students. Master thesis in psychology, Trabant Modarres University.  
<https://www.sid.ir/en/journal/ViewPaper.aspx?id=50172>
- SadeghiFard, M., Samavi, S. A., & Mohebbi, S. (2015). The Relationship between Problem-Solving Skills and Conflict Resolution Styles with Marital Intimacy and Compatibility among Couples. *Academic Journal of Psychological Studies*. 5(1): 67-76.  
<https://en.civilica.com/doc/1004200/>
- Scharff DE. *Psychoanalytic Couple Therapy Foundations of Theory and Practice*. Karnac Books; 2014; Available from <https://psycnet.apa.org/record/2015-22883-000>