

Effect of teaching Self-differentiation on Dimensions of Attachment of Recently Married Couples

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of present study was to study the effect of teaching Self-differentiation on Dimensions of Attachment (Secure attachment, Avoidance attachment and Anxious attachment) of recently married couples in Lordegan. Sample of this study was 50 recently married couples (25 couples in the experimental group and 25 couples in the control group), that, They were selected based on random sampling. The scale used for this study was Revised Adult Attachment. The research design was pretest-post test control group with following-up phase. The experimental group received 10 session of Self-differentiation (90 minutes per session). Data were analyzed using covariance analysis (Mancova). The results indicated the effectiveness of Self-differentiation in modifying Dimensions of Attachment (Secure attachment, Avoidance attachment and Anxious attachment). The follow-up results indicated that the effect of the teaching was effective after 30 days. The level of significant difference was in this study ($p < 0/0001$).

KEY WORDS: Attachment, Self-differentiation, recently married couples

1. INTRODUCTION

Close and intimate relationships among people are of much importance. Such relationships influence people's physical and psychological welfare as well as their ability to perform effectively in various individual, family and career fields. Development and establishment of an intimate relationship could be invigorated by particular emotional ties. As healthy relationships bring about advantageous and positive outcomes, unsatisfactory relationships may endanger individuals' physical and psychological health. Intimacy is a feeling of proximity, similarity and sort of romantic or emotional relationship with another individual, and requires a deep understanding of the other individual to express the thoughts and feelings which are used as the origins of this similarity and proximity. Intimacy is an active process including some interrelated aspects. The axes of this process are cognition, understanding, acceptance, sympathy with the other one's emotions, gratitude and accordance with their attitudes. Intimacy is not just a desire or wish, but it is a basic and real need which enjoys a very broad sense including self-assertion, sexual relationship, and emotional, physical and intellectual proximity. A ring will be missing in the chain of marriage bond if it lacks intimacy [6]. Bagarozzi (2001) defined intimacy as including 9 aspects of emotional, psychological, intellectual, sexual, physical, kinesthetic, social, recreational and temporal proximity. Intensity of intimacy and its 9 aspects differs from person to person [24].

Parent-child relationship is one of the most prominent components of social life and has a very important role in psychological health and well-being of parents and children. The first emotional relationship develops between the child and his/her caregiver (usually the mother), which is reflected in subsequent behavioral patterns. Such an emotional relationship creates attachment in the child to the mother. Attachment means the child's desire to get closely related to particular individual and feel more secure with them. Attachment is an emotional tie formed between the child and his/her caregiver and identified by their seeking, embracing and desiring to be along with their caregivers. [1].

Nowadays one of the most important and effective theories to study interpersonal relationships is Theory of Attachment, according to which, individual differences in attachment styles originate from the individuals' previous close relationships starting from the attachment between the child and his/her caregivers [21]. Theory of Attachment

was first introduced by to describe why and how children get attached to their first caregivers and why they feel stressed out and nervous when they are parted from. Attachment means establishment of a deep emotional link with particular individuals in one's life, so that a feeling of delight and joy is created interacting with them and one gets relaxed being with them when he/she is stressed out [8].

Attachment includes three different patterns of Secure, Insecure Avoidant and Insecure Ambivalent. One with a secure pattern of attachment considers his caregiver as accessible and available, and has a positive experience of him. In avoidant style of attachment, the caregiver continually repulses the individual, so that he feels insecure, but he trusts him incumbently. Finally in ambivalent style of attachment, the individual experiences himself as a dependent and worthless entity, and regards his caregiver as an unstable responder.

According to Ainsworth (1989), all children get attached to their parents, but they feel different levels of security in their relationships with adults [23]. The degree of simplicity to which a frustrated child finds security with his caregiver is called Quality or Pattern of Attachment. Ainsworth and her team identified three patterns for attachment: Secure Attachment, Insecure Avoidant Attachment and Insecure Ambivalent-Mutual Attachment. Later studies also added a fourth pattern of Insecure Disorganized Attachment to the aforementioned. Bowlby (1982) believed that Theory of Attachment couldn't just be considered as a theory for childhood transformations, but rather it is a theory that works for "life-time" transformations, and attachment behaviors and their consequences are present throughout one's life

and aren't confined to childhood at all [28]. Although a reduction in intensity of attachment in adolescence is confirmed, the quality of attached relationships remains stable from early teens on. In terms of attachment, teens is a period of transition in whose beginning the teenager tries to reduce dependence on his early attachment figure, but he himself is likely to be an attachment figure for his own children some years later. However, teens is not a short and temporary age having the role of a connecting bridge between childhood and adolescence, but rather it is a period of deep transitions in one's behavioral, cognitive and emotional systems. In fact the teenager traverses the different phases of transformation from a "receiver of care from parents" to a "potential caregiver for his own children" [8].

Based on Bowlby's definition (1973), attachment refers to the emotional bond between the growing child and the caregiver which is of vital importance for healthy growth [27]. Attachment is a stable and constant emotional relationship which is characterized by the individual's desire to seek out and maintain proximity with a particular person, especially in stressful situations [25]. Attachment is a system of behavioral affection with a biological basis leading to making use of attachment figures as a "safe base" by the child. The infant relies on these safe bases to explore his environment. The attachment behavior that has existed since the beginning of the infant's life gradually takes variety, extends to particular figures, remains stable and constant throughout his life and is displayed in various forms [3]

Theory of attachment emphasizes that the responses which form and develop in the interaction between a newborn baby and his/her early caregiver last forever and remain stable; and therefore, the pattern of attachment doesn't undergo any changes with the passage of time [13]. In Bowlby's opinion, individuals achieve anticipations about their social relationships and ideas about the important figures in their lives through interacting with their childhood caregivers. These anticipations and ideas are prominent and essential in all phases and stages of their lives. They reflect the individuals' differences in three major domains: the individual's beliefs about themselves and others, interpersonal interactions and Affective regulation (Berry *et al.* 2007).

Attachment is the bond between the growing infant and the mother which develops at birth, but its effect is not limited to infancy. Rather, it affects all over one's life even his old age. According to Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991), attachment styles are classified into four categories, and these four styles could be defined by people's perception of their relationships with the others [29]. In particular, those who are secured are described as having positive perception of themselves (a valuable and loveable entity) and positive perception of the others (responsive and kind entities), anxious individuals are described as having negative perception of themselves and positive perception of the others, and those whose attachment style is avoidant are described as having positive perception of themselves and negative perception of the others, and finally those whose attachment style is ambivalent are described as having negative perception of themselves as well as the others. Thus, each and every attachment style is resulted from a unique combination of one's positive and negative perception of himself and the others [18].

The concept of "self" is an interesting one for human beings, and the reason why we use this term so easily is the universality of our experience and perception of "self". The experience whose first implication is associated to the body. Then, this implication goes beyond the body and transforms into a psychological entity involving one's thoughts, feelings and feedbacks evaluated in social terms. From analytical point of view, "self" is the method of investigation based on deep analyses. From this perspective, individual, internal and personal aspects of the experiences are more important and "self" equals the one's personality or his psychological being. In other words,

“self” plays the role of a mediator and moderator between instinctive desires which don’t know any limitations on the one hand, and the tendency to satisfy those instinctive desires according to limitations and prohibitions of the real world on the other hand [7]. The system of “self” (self-scrutiny, self-analysis and self-regulation) is an important aspect of personality which regulates human behavior in different cognitive and social conditions. Achieving such a system is necessary in early infancy to help the individual create a positive and real image of his “self” (Uzysnska-Jarmoc, 2008).

Self-differentiation as a psychological term is one of the basic concepts of Bowen’s Theory, which has also been translated to self-detachment or detachment of “I”. This concept implies how capable people are to detach their intellectual processes from their emotional ones. In other words, the degree to which the individual is capable to avoid following his emotions and instincts automatically shows the intensity of self-detachment. Bowen states that it’s not ideal to be a cold-blooded, intensively objective and apathetic person, but rather we are meant to seek balance and reach a self-definition. However, it shouldn’t be achieved at the cost of losing our capability to express our emotions and feelings extemporaneously and spontaneously. The main purpose of self-differentiation is to keep the balance between emotions and cognition. Detachment in Bowen’s point of view is more of a process rather than a reachable goal. Detachment is the course of life, not a state of existence [5]

Bowen (1978) believed that individuals could be identified in a range of amalgamation of their emotional and intellectual performance. In one end of this range are those whose emotions and intellectual abilities are blended and whose lives are affected and manipulated by their emotional systems [26]. As a result, such individuals are less flexible and more emotionally dependent on the others. In the other end are those who most enjoy differentiation in whom their intellectual performance can reserve their independence. Such individuals are more flexible, more compatible and more independent of the emotional responses of the others in case of stressful occasions. Bowen also believed that individuals invest a portion of their energy into being together and reserve the rest to lead an independent life. When individuals spend a lot of energy in their relationships, such togetherness is described as highly non-differentiated in emotional terms. This harm causes us to be emotionally affected by the others and roots in our desperate need to other individuals. This is the basis and origin of our mutual interdependence, i. e. our need to appropriate reactions or interactions of the others to feel security at the bottom of our hearts. Following the mentioned harm to the intellectual performance in these individuals, their emotional performance increases. Therefore those who have low levels of self-differentiation live in an emotional world, and that’s the very world of mutual interdependence. A major part of their lives is devoted to maintaining their systems of relationships with the others and so, they feel fatigued. They make their basic decisions based on avoiding conflicts and whatever disturbs their lives (Donigian & Gibson, 2006).

Teaching self-differentiation is intended to help individuals control their emotions and thoughts independently and based on their own personality rather than the others’, and look for “clues” denoting how anxiety and various tensions show themselves and how the individual can effectively adapt with the anxiety (Whiffen, 2012).

According to Bowen, self-differentiation is a concept which is applied to describe the interactive patterns in families in order to regulate the distance between family members and set a proper balance between individuality and intimacy regarding their age differences. Self-differentiation causes the self-reflective patterns to improve so that we can recognize “who we are”, “who we are not” and “what life is”. As Bowen stated, the concept of self-differentiation has always been considered as a bad treatment in the family literature and known the same as independence or individuality. Though similar in some aspects, individuality differs from self-differentiation. Bowen believes that self-differentiation is the ability to reduce one’s emotional responses to the important figures so that the one can express his thoughts and beliefs disregarding the social pressures. Bowen himself considers self-differentiation as a concept which is applied to describe the interactive patterns in families in order to regulate the distance between family members and set a proper balance between individuality and intimacy regarding their age differences (Yoo ya, 2007).

Self-differentiation involves two aspects of intra-psyche and interpersonal. The intra-psyche aspect of self-differentiation means the individual’s ability to think reasonably about emotion-rich family affairs and causes the self-reflective patterns to grow in order for us to recognize “who we are”, “who we are not” and “what life is”. The interpersonal aspect of self-differentiation means one’s ability to take over his emotions and meanwhile stay in the intense emotional family atmosphere [17].

Based on Bowen’s theory, there are at least for factors affecting the individual’s level of self-differentiation: 1. Emotional Response, 2. Emotional Breakage, 3. Blending with the others and 4. the Ability to Locate the “I”. A less self-differentiated or more emotional individual is reactive and has concentrated a major portion of his energy on his experiences and intensity of his emotions. Probably it would be difficult for such a person to keep calm and stay cool in response to the emotions of the others. He is sort of trapped in such an emotional world (Peleg, 2004).

When the interpersonal interactions are intense, those less self-differentiated individuals might respond in the form of emotional breakage. They isolate themselves from the others as well as their emotions. Whereas more self-differentiated individuals don't feel the need to isolate themselves. Those who get emotionally parted from the others find intimacy seriously threatening and so, they often tend to separate themselves from the others and their emotions. They deny the importance of family and show an extreme perspective of independence. Based on Bowen's theory, the most fundamental problem in families is emotional blending and its final solution is self-differentiation. Less self-differentiated people are too involved and blended with the others in their close relationships. Bowen pays special attention to being aware of the emotions and thoughts and distinguishing them from one another. When the thoughts and emotions aren't distinguished, a fusion occurs. Individuals with higher self-differentiation are well aware of their thoughts and have a sense of individuality. Those who distinguish between their emotions and wisdom in family conflicts can defend their rights and manage not to be trapped by their emotions, while fusion of emotions and thoughts causes them to express their false "self" instead of bringing up their genuine values and beliefs. As a result, such an individual loses part of his entity or mutates his "self" in a way that rather makes the wishes and dreams of the others come true. (Wei *et. al.* 2006).

Marquardt (2009) emphasizes on the fact that maturity and self-florescence requires that the individual sets himself free from the binding emotional bonds to his early family. He has done some research about divorce and found out that the children whose parents get divorced are more seriously exposed to psychological problems, since they grow up along with their emotional ties to their parents. He concluded that binding emotional ties to one's early family causes such children to be more and more anxious.

Pineo (2011) states that more self-differentiated people aren't simply affected by the others to share anxieties and don't show clues of any harms. Instead, they have a clear-cut understanding of partnership and current addictive and non-differentiated emotional processes which causes them to get sick and disgraced and demoralized. In particular, those who are less emotionally reactive and have lower emotional blending with the others and are able to defend their ideas experience lower levels of anxiety. Also research has shown that the degree of self-differentiation in the families in which a divorce has taken place is far lower than other families (Lee, 2011; Whiffen, 2012). This shows the importance of teaching self-differentiation in reducing the degree of anxiety which is particularly higher among the children in the families that have experienced a divorce.

Generally speaking, the more blended family members, the higher the possibility of their anxiety and instability, and the more their tendency to find the solution for their problems through struggles and conflicts, separation and functional disturbance (Steinberg & Silverberg, 2012). The more they feel insecurity, the more they tend to blend. In other words, the more they feel stressed out or sad, the more they seek the unique security which is resulted from blending with the family. For instance, the members of a well-differentiated family can help each other tolerate the death of the most important family member; whereas the members of a less-differentiated family may need to respond to some emotional clues or different types of social misbehaviors. Chronic sorrow could make individuals emotionally disoriented so that they can't distinguish and detach themselves from their families [16].

Marriage is one of the most important and commonly accepted social traditions to meet one's emotional, psychological and security needs. It's the first emotional and legal obligation taken by individuals in adulthood. choosing a spouse and getting married is a milestone in growth and improvement of one's personality. Choosing a life-time partner is undoubtedly one of the most important decisions in one's life. Nowadays the reasons and motives of marriage have considerably changed. In today's societies, the reasons of marriage are mainly love and affection, finding a life-time partner and companion, satisfying emotional-psychological anticipations and increasing happiness and well-being. Marriage and starting a family can provide a safe base to bring up healthy and well-grown generations and a safe and protective environment for members, in addition to satisfying their emotional, psychological, security, sexual and other needs, providing that the relationship between the spouses and the institution of family is healthy, warm, friendly and free from tensions and conflicts.

Findings of the work of Teymouri Asefichi and his team (2011) showed that the individuals who had the secure style of attachment enjoyed more marital satisfaction compared with the ones with avoidant and ambivalent styles of attachment [9]. They also indicated that those who had higher self-differentiation enjoyed more marital satisfaction. There was no difference between men and women in terms of differentiation, however the level of marital satisfaction was higher among men, and those who had secure style of attachment enjoyed more self-differentiation.

Findings of a study by Jahanbakhsh and his team (2009) supported the theory of attachment. Moreover, they showed the importance of mother-child interaction. Mothers' avoidant attachment can be an important predictor that causes attachment-related problems for their daughters. Attachment-based treatments could be useful to help solve such problems [11].

According to the findings of Hafezi's research (2009), there is a positive and significant association between secure attachment and marital satisfaction, however there is a negative and significant association between avoidant-mutual attachment and marital satisfaction [12].

Findings of a research by Akbari and his colleagues (2009) showed a significant association between secure style of attachment and the level of resilience, while there is a significant negative relationship between insecure avoidant attachment and the level of resilience. There isn't a significant association between insecure ambivalent attachment and the level of resilience. This means the spouses who have a secure attachment style are more resilient, and the ones with insecure avoidant style are less resilient. [2]

Findings of a work by Sepah Mansour and his team (2008) showed a negative association between secure and avoidant attachment styles and the child's perception of his/her parents, and a positive significant association between mutual attachment style and the child's perception of his/her parents. The strategies of settling the conflicts including the parents' verbal and physical aggression have a significant negative association with secure attachment style, but a significant positive association with mutual attachment style [15].

In a work investigating the association between the attachment style, fear of intimacy and self-differentiation, the findings showed that there is an association between avoidant attachment and fear of higher intimacy with lower self-differentiation. Fear of intimacy means lack of ability to make intimate relationships with the others, and avoidant attachment style means to feel insecure in your relationships and seek a safe base for comfort. As it can be noticed, the common point in all three variables theoretically is the ability or inability to hold a healthy relationship, in fact even the self-differentiated individual gives sense to this characteristic in his relationships with the others. On the other hand, investigating the quality of relationship process shows that the biggest transformations in the individual's relationships occur in his teens. These transformations are important in that they reflect one's transition from childhood to adolescence. In fact, seeking independence and more relationships with the peers are the clues that distinguish the teens from the other phases of life in terms of relationships.

Findings of the research by Shakibaei and his team (2006) showed that teaching self-differentiation has been effective in reducing the signs of anxiety. He concluded that teaching self-differentiation has managed to reduce individuals' anxiety through instructing them how to distinguish their thoughts from their feelings [19].

Maria (2008) also found out that social support and secure style of attachment are determinant factors for psychological health and marital reconciliation.

Keskin (2008) found out in a study that there is a positive association between insecure attachment style and one's negative perception of his parents; meaning the higher the degree of insecure attachment, the more negative the one's perception of his parents and vice versa. Generally speaking, parents who deal with secure attachment are characterized as being warm, supportive and lenient. They talk gently while guiding their children and admire their behavior at suitable occasions with tender words. Therefore, children with secure attachment are expected to have a more positive perception of their parents.

A study by Crawford and Novak (2008) showed that the teenagers who have insecure attachment to their parents are more likely to commit deviant behaviors.

Another work by Cassidy & Shaver (2008) indicated that attachment has an important role in helping teenagers to deal with the challenges of their age, so that unhealthy and wrong attachment patterns taken in infancy cause teenage behavioral problems and delinquencies.

Research has shown that about %33 to %50 of people take insecure styles of attachment (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007).

A longitudinal research conducted by Simpson, Colins, Tran and Haydon indicated that the participants who were securely attached in their infancy enjoy higher social competence and decency among peers in their childhood.

According to Sharma (2007) those with insecure attachment have more unreasonable relationship beliefs compared with the ones with secure attachment.

Moller, Hwang, and Wickberg (2006) examined the association between the attachment styles and the couple's relationships after they've become parents. The results showed that the mothers and fathers who had reported higher ambivalent attachment had lower levels of marriage satisfaction, therefore, ambivalent style of attachment can significantly predict marital dissatisfaction in the couples after having become parents.

Feeney's research (2005) showed that insecure attachment is accompanied by intense emotional control, less positive and more negative emotions. A secure individual who has been engaged in a particular negative relationship may turn into an insecure person as well as the result of this experience. However his internal and influential pattern might change when he achieves a better understanding and perception of his past experiences, especially the ones related to his attachments.

Also Heene, Buysse and Van Oost (2005) found out that there is a negative association between secure style of attachment and depression, and the former is positively associated with marital reconciliation. On the other hand,

insecure styles of attachment are negatively associated with marital reconciliation and positively associated with depression.

Research has indicated that the symptoms of depression are associated with ambivalent (insecure) attachment, and the intermediaries of this association are the self-improvement ability and the need to be admitted by the others. The self-improvement ability makes a connection between the symptoms of depression and ambivalent attachment. Data analysis indicated that %54 of depression symptoms variance was interpreted by ambivalent attachment, self-improvement and the need to be admitted by the others. Thus, admission of the others prevents the symptoms of the disease via increasing one's self-esteem. Those with avoidant or mutual attachment styles are more likely to get psychological illnesses compared with the ones with secure attachment due to their relationships which are based on emotional insecurity or deprivation of approval and improvement by the others (Wei & Mallinckroad, 2005). Srivastava and Beer (2005) investigated the association between self-evaluation and likeability by the others which is affected by the attachment style. The findings showed that likeability leads the individual to a positive self-evaluation, and those with ambivalent and avoidant styles of attachment don't have a high opinion of themselves, and the ones with avoidant attachment style respond more intensively to the interests of the others. Thus the attachment styles can predict the processes of interpersonal interactive relationships and individual differences.

Pelege (2004) also found out in a study that the level of family detachment predicts one's fears, worries, hidden and apparent anxieties.

Knauth and Skoworn found out a reverse and significant association between high levels of differentiation and chronic anxiety.

Skoworn, Stanley and Shapiro (2008) in a study entitled "A longitudinal perspective on differentiation of Self, interpersonal and psychological well-being in young adulthood" concluded that higher levels of differentiation predicts lower interpersonal discomfort and higher psychological well-being.

According to the basic presupposition of Bowen's theory that "uncontrolled anxiety leads to functional disorders in the family", the necessity of teaching self-differentiation to the couples who were brought up in different family cultures is more and more felt. The self-differentiation process requires that one learns to think independently of the pressures within groups (Williamson, 2007). Therefore we have concentrated on teaching it to the couples in this article and tried to provide the grounds for their growth and advancement through this educational process. Bowen believed that adults are able to distinguish their emotions from their thoughts (Smith, 2006).

2. METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted in quasi-experimental design in the form of pre-test / post-test with a control group accompanied by the follow-up phase. The sample of the study included newly-wed couples in Lordegan in 2013-2014. To select the sample, 50 individuals were picked on a random basis, and they were classified into two groups (25 individuals in the experimental group and 25 individual in the control group). Having answered to Revised Adult Attachment Scale, Collins and Reed Paternity test (1996), the couples were drawn into the two groups. Data analysis was done using descriptive statistics methods such as frequency distribution, mean and standard deviation, and also inferential statistics methods like multivariate analysis of covariance (Mancova), so that the adjusted means of the data from the two groups could be compared and contrasted. Data analysis in the follow-up phase was conducted multivariate analysis of covariance. The final coefficients were calculated using Crombach's Alpha reliability statistics and bisection method.

Table 1. Distribution of testees in terms of age (years)

Age (Years)	Group					
	Experimental		Control		Total	
	Distribution	Percentage	Distribution	Percentage	Distribution	Percentage
Up to 20 years old	4	%16	4	%16	8	%16
21 - 25 years old	18	%72	17	%68	35	%70
26 - 30 years old	3	%12	4	%16	7	%14
Total	25	%100	25	%100	50	%100

As it is clear in table 1, the testees who were between 21 and 25 years old had the higher distribution in the experimental group with about %72, and the testees who were between 30 and 36 years had the lowest distribution with about %12. In the control group, the testees who were between 21 and 25 years old had the highest distribution with about %68 and those who were up to 20 and between 26 and 30 years old had the lowest distribution with about %16 of the sample. The mean and the standard deviation were 23 and 2.38 years for the experimental group and 23.08 and 2.56 years for the control group respectively.

Table 2, Distribution of testees based on their studies

Studies	Group					
	Experimental		Control		Total	
	Distribution	Percentage	Distribution	Percentage	Distribution	Percentage
Below diploma	4	%16	5	%20	9	%18
Diploma	16	%64	14	%56	30	%60
Academic	5	%20	6	%24	11	%22
Total	25	%100	25	%100	50	%100

As you can see in table 2, in the experimental group the testees with a diploma had the highest distribution with about %64 and the ones who didn't have a diploma had the lowest distribution with about %16 of the sample. In the control group, those with a diploma had the highest distribution with about %56 and the ones who didn't have a diploma had the lowest distribution with about %20 of sample.

The experimental group was given 30 sessions of self-differentiation training using Bowen's method (each session for 90 minutes), but the control group didn't get any treatments. The training sessions could be summarized as what follows [19]:

First session: welcome and introduction, identifying the purpose of holding the training session, confidentiality, making the members familiar with the concept of self-differentiation, giving realistic hope for the outcome of training, educating the family trees and how to draw it.

Second session: Examining the members' family trees, their marital conditions, their relationship patterns with their early families and comparing them with the ones in their married life.

Third session: Explaining and examining how the spouses were sympathetic and affected by each other's thoughts and emotions.

Fourth session: Identifying the emotional responding of the spouses to each other and their ability to distinguish their thoughts from their emotions.

Fifth session: Explaining the different attachment styles and their association with consequent growth of social relationships, the role of cultural and family background and also individual priorities to choose spouses.

Sixth session: Examining how to understand realities or interpret incidents and events and their destructive effects, and the role of the society in imposing values, and the way to make value-based relationships with the others.

Seventh session: Examining the basic functions of thinking, and the role of thinking and reasoning in controlling the emotions of the spouses.

Eighth session: Recognizing different kinds of defensive mechanisms and how to inherit them from previous generations.

Ninth session: Explaining the way an individual can set himself free from the "intellectual entity phenomenon" and distinguish his thoughts from his emotions, explaining the role of memory in the status of the intellectual entity.

Tenth session: Concluding and expressing how differentiated the members had become, examining the individuals' general evaluations and conducting the post-test.

The participants also answered the questions of the Revised Adult Attachment Scale in the follow-up phase after one month.

3. Tools

Adult Attachment Scale was first introduced by Collins and Reed in 1990, and later in 1996 it was revised. The theoretical basis of this scale is Theory of Attachment. Examining the individual's evaluation of his relationship skills and his intimate relationship style, this scale includes 18 questions, and the participants state the degree of their agreement and disagreement with each and every question on a five-point Likert Scale, with (1) meaning "strongly disagree" and (5) indicating "strongly agree". Thus, each question could be of a score between 1 and 5, the scores are added up and the mean is calculated for each subscale. This questionnaire includes three subscales of Dependence (that shows the degree to which a testee trusts and relies on the others), Closeness (that measures his/her level of emotional intimacy and closeness to the others), and Anxiety (that evaluates the degree to which he/she gets anxious in isolation). 6 questions are dedicated to each subscale [14].

The final coefficient of this test for the three subscales of Closeness, Dependence and Anxiety was 0.68, 0.71 and 0.52 respectively. Collins and Reed (1990) showed that the subscales of Closeness (C), Dependence (D) and Anxiety (A) were stable and fixed in a time interval of 2 months up to even 8 months. According to the fact that the value of Cronbach's alpha is equal to or higher than 0.80, the test reliability is quite high. Collins and Reed have designed their questionnaire based on the descriptions of Hasen & Shaver's Adult attachment Questionnaire about the mentioned three main attachment styles. The subscale (A) matches Ambivalent-Mutual attachment (AM), and

the subscale (C) is of a bipolar dimension which basically places the secure style against avoidant style of attachment. So, Closeness subscale (C) matches Secure Attachment (S), and Dependence subscale (D) could be placed against Avoidant Attachment (AV) [14].

In the current study, the final coefficients of the attachment styles questionnaire were calculated through Cronbach's alpha and bisection of data, and the results were 0.55 , 0.58 respectively.

Table 3. Final Coefficients of the Attachment Styles Questionnaire

Statistical Index Scale	Final Coefficients	
	Chronbach's Alpha	Bisection
Questionnaire	0.55	0.58
Closeness Subscale	0.53	0.55
Dependence Subscale	0.55	0.46
Anxious Subscale	0.67	0.63

As it is noticed in table 3, final coefficients of the attachment styles questionnaire fluctuate between 0.46 and 0.67.

4. Findings

In the following descriptive table (Table 4), the values related to attachment styles before and after training self-differentiation using Bowen's Method and also after conducting the follow-up phase in the experimental and control groups are displayed.

Table 4. Mean and Standard Deviation of Attachment styles (Secure, Avoidant, Ambivalent) in Pre-test, Post-test and Follow-up Phases According to the Two Groups Under Study.

Subscales	Experimental Group						Control Group			
	Pre-test		Post-test		Follow-up		Pre-test		Post-test	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Secure	3.1	0.04	4.76	0.227	4.77	0.220	3.54	0.248	3.44	0.248
Avoidant	2.69	0.228	3.87	0.184	3.85	0.183	2.60	0.222	2.62	0.237
Ambivalent	3.14	0.172	2.21	0.125	2.22	0.177	2.99	0.166	3.01	0.216

The results displayed in table 4 show that the mean of attachment factors (secure and avoidant styles) in the experimental group is higher than the mean in the control group in the post-test stage. About ambivalent style of attachment, the mean in the experimental group is lower than the mean in the control group in the post-test stage. Thus, the factors of attachment (secure and avoidant styles) have improved after training self-differentiation using Bowen's method. In the follow-up phase no difference is observed in the mean of these factors compared with the post-test phase. Multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) was applied to examine the significance of differences and the effect of training self-differentiation using Bowen's Method (Table 5)

Table 5. Summary of covariance analysis of the effect of training self-differentiation using Bowen's method

Subscales	Sources of difference	df	SS	MS	F	η^2
Secure	Pre-test	1	0.166	0.166	3.06	0.06
	Group	1	16.06	16.06	296.41	0.868*
	Error	45	2.43	0.054		
Avoidant	Pre-test	1	0.661	0.661	20.26	0.31
	Group	1	13.59	13.59	428.22	0.9 *
	Error	45	1.46	0.033		
Ambivalent	Pre-test	1	0.171	0.171	6.00	0.12
	Group	1	7.36	7.36	258.88	0.85 *
	Error	45	1.28	0.028		

•p< 0.0001

Based on the results of covariance analysis in all constituent factors of attachment, the value of F was significant at 0.0001 (Table 5). Therefore it can be concluded that training self-differentiation using Bowen's method is effective on attachment styles of the spouses. Since the means of attachment in the post-test phase were higher than the pre-test phase in secure and avoidant styles and lower than that in ambivalent style (Table 5), it is concluded that training self-differentiation via Bowen's method increases secure style and decreases avoidant and ambivalent styles of attachment.

Table 6. Results of covariance analysis to compare differences in the means of attachment factors in the experimental group in pre-test and follow-up phases

Subscales	Sources of difference	df	SS	MS	F	η^2
Secure	Pre-test	1	0.142	0.142	2.76	0.06
	Group	1	16.62	16.62	325.22	0.87 *
	Error	45	2.30	2.30		
Avoidant	Pre-test	1	0.758	0.758	26624	0.35
	Group	1	13.67	13.67	444.94	0.9 *
	Error	45	1.38	1.38		
Ambivalent	Pre-test	1	0.171	0.171	4.56	0.09
	Group	1	7.57	7.57	202.52	0.81 *
	Error	45	1.68	0.037		

P < 0.0001

The results of table 6 denote a difference of the attachment constituent factor scores in pre-test and follow-up phases. Therefore, it could be realized that the effect of training self-differentiation using Bowen’s method on attachment styles is properly constant.

5. DISCUSSION

The findings of the current study pointed out that training self-differentiation via Bowen’s method could alter the levels of attachment in spouses (in all three styles of secure, avoidant and ambivalent). Moreover, the effect of this training turned out to be continuous and constant in long term. Admitting the effectiveness of self-differentiation on alteration and improvement of attachment styles (secure styles with emphasis on intimacy and emotional closeness) was in accordance with the work of Asefichi and his team (2012) who came to this finding that the individuals with secure attachment style had higher levels of self-differentiation, and also with the work of Skoworn and his team (2008) who showed that higher levels of self-differentiation predict lower intrapersonal discomfort and higher psychological well-being. So, secure attachment is influenced by training self-differentiation via Bowen’s method.

By the same token, Peleg (2004) found out in a study that the degree of family detachment predicts an individual’s levels of fears, worries, hidden and apparent anxieties. The findings of a work by Shakibaei (2006) also indicated that training self-differentiation is effective in reducing the symptoms of stress. He also found out that training self-differentiation can reduce individuals’ anxieties via teaching them how to distinguish their thoughts from their emotions. The results of the work by Knauth and Skowron (2004) showed a significant negative association between higher levels of self-differentiation and chronic stress and its symptoms. According to Keskin (2008), there is a positive association between insecure styles of attachment and one’s negative perception of their parents, i. e. the higher the insecure attachment, the more negative their perception of their parents and vice versa. Generally, the parents who deal with secure attachment are characterized as being warm, supportive and lenient. They talk gently to their children while guiding them and admire their behaviors with tender words at proper occasions. Therefore those securely attached children are expected to have a positive perception of their parents. The findings of these studies all support the current research.

Although the findings of the current research shows that training self-differentiation via Bowen’s method is an effective approach to improve and boost the spouses’ attachment styles, implementing this method is of some limitations. Lack of simple and convenient access to couples to conduct the training program, sampling limitations causing problems in generalization of data, temporal examination of variables, narrowing the study down to the newly-wed couples and confining the sample just to Dehdasht are the limitations that make it difficult to generalize the findings of the research to the society. According to these limitations, examining performance of the couples in their interpersonal and intrapersonal relationships to help solve marital issues, predicting incompatibility of the couples in re-marriage consultations through identifying their attachment styles, conducting nation-wide instructional programs to improve couples’ awareness of how to interact properly, revising and implementing preventive and therapeutic strategies within the framework of Theory of Attachment, longitudinally investigating the variables and conducting the study in other regions of the country seem necessary.

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