



Study of Women's Coping Styles With the Marital Challenges Based on Their Identity Style

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research was to study the women's coping style with the marital challenges based on their identity style. The research method was qualitative and phenomenological. Data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews. The sample included 13 married women who had been married for at least five years. Sampling was performed purposefully and interviews continued until adequate data were collected. Before the interview, participants were given Berzonsky's Identity Style Inventory (ISI-6G) and their scores were calculated for obtaining three identity styles. The method of data analysis was Colaizzi's seven-step method. Through asking questions about how participants coped with challenges, important themes were extracted and coded. The main themes of coping strategy for women with an informational identity style were: "dialogue", "problem-solving between the couple", "adapting to real conditions", "flexibility in solving problems", and "existential awareness". The main themes of coping strategy for women with a normative identity were: "relying on social capital", "following predetermined patterns", "gradual change" and "direct dialogue through messages". The main themes of coping strategy for women with Diffuse-avoidant identity style were: "passive solutions", "authoritative solution" and "feeling desperate in solving challenges". The results of this study enable counselors to offer pre-marriage advice to couples.

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Introduction

Formation of identity and achieving a coherent definition of self is one of the major developmental challenges during adolescence and adulthood and serves as the most important aspect of psychological development. To effectively organize and manage their lives, individuals need a stable and meaningful identity structure, which offers them a sense of uniqueness (McAdams and Olson, 2010), provides a feeling of continuity over time and space, and defines a framework for decision-making, problem-solving, and interpretation of experiences for the individual (Berzonsky, Ciecuch, Duriez & Soenens, 2011). Identity is a combination of how one and others perceive the individual and a known social status that is perceived by the individual and other people who are in contact with him (Hussain and Yaseen, 2019).

There are different perspectives on how identity is formed. Theorists such as Cattell (1943), Erickson (1950), and Freud (1961) believe that individuals function as a completely independent entity and that their identities are naturally formed individually and independent of others, whereas theorists such as Chodorow (1978), Gilligan (1982) and Josselson (1987) believe that the identity of individuals, and especially women, is formed in relation to others (Laney, Hall, Anderson & Willingham, 2015). Hull and Zacher (2007) also believe that a person's identity is formed in the course of their life and in relation to the identity of other important people in their life. In other words, identity formation is a process that sometimes takes place in contradiction with the identity of one's relatives and sometimes in harmony with it, but it is undoubtedly defined in a close connection with the identity of others.

There are two main approaches to the study of identity: structural approaches of Marcia (1966) and process approach of Berzonsky (1989, cited in RahimiNezhad and Mortezaee, 2016). Marcia (1966) believes identity is a combination of different beliefs, values, patterns, behaviors, and cognitive, moral, and practical skills. Berzonsky (2003) also considers identity styles as the basis for achieving identity and a coherent understanding of oneself. Identity process styles refer to how individuals process their identity information and how they discuss and make decisions about their identity issues (Zareinejad, 2011; cited in Reyhani, Soleimani, and Zarifi, 2016).

The first style is the 'informational' identity style in which individuals intentionally seek out new information and examine the situations, and then make independent decisions. People with this identity style are open to new

experiences. Individuals with a 'normative' identity style define their identity without scrutinizing alternative choices and rely on pre-determined guidelines set by authorities, standards, and community conventions. They have very low ambiguity tolerance and are in dire need of specific structures. Finally, people with the 'diffused-avoidant' identity style postpone their decisions, avoid personal problems and challenges. They prefer to make their identity decisions based on situational demands and immediate short-term needs (Berzonsky, 1989; Berzonsky, 2008).

Women play an important role in the intellectual, religious, emotional, and social guidance of the family and the society (Akhavan Gholami, Hayati, Rajabi Sorkhani and Roozi, 2017). From the identity style point of view, psychological life challenges inflict more pressure on women compared to men. The sources of women's identity are in many cases derived from the societal class of their husbands and are related to sources that point to a male identity direction (Mohammadpour and Bahmani, 2010). Women are influenced by three factors in the process of finding an identity. These factors influence each other and include (1) Gender (biological differences); 2. Role in the family; and (3) Dominant structures in the society (Patriarchy, masculism, humanistic) (Khojasteh, 2007). Education and employment as the most important empirical contexts of the new identity provide a context for cultural and identity development, and women choose new identities to adapt and define their identity differentiation from others in order to adjust to their social environment. This is while the society's individual, family, and traditional expectations have defined them more in mother and wife roles and the new contexts have added different expectations to the new roles (Tayebinia, Rahmani, 2017).

In addition to playing a supportive role, the family institution also instills traditional gender stereotypes in girls. So, we can assume for today's Iranian society that the family institution plays an influential role in the formation of the identity of young women and girls. This role is performed both by providing support and by trying to reproduce traditional gender stereotypes in order to maintain the existing social order (Ebadollahi Chanzanegh, Madadi, & Moradi, 2014). Therefore, it seems that since men in Iran have not yet been accustomed to the changes in women's roles, even if girls are supported by their parental family in changing their traditional roles, they may face challenges after the marriage as the traditional expectations of women have not yet changed significantly. This problem is especially aggravated during the transition of women to the maternal stage.

In their research on the characteristics of identity and related issues in contemporary women, Asefi and Imani (2016) concluded that there is a source of identity both in the struggle between tradition and modernity and the conflicting values regarding the role of women in the family and society. One outcome of these issues is that even educated women face identity challenges and are forced to seek independent identity only in their social roles and especially in employment. The lack of social, legal, and financial support, as well as the prevalence of values such as individualism and materialism, often have negative consequences most of all for women, the family, and subsequently for society as a whole. Tayebinia and Rahmani (2017) also found that women are more inclined to flexible and controllable interactions during processes known as a second thought. Therefore, caring for others stemming from ethics is considered along with restorative interactions as pillars of a successful strategy in women's lives. Webber (2015) studied how academic education affects identity changes in married women and concluded that higher education leads to changes in women's identity and their perception of self. In other words, women define their identity based on being a wife and a mother before entering the educational environment; However, they develop a new definition of their identity during and after education. Based on this finding, people with an informational style are more likely to face such challenges.

Various studies have addressed the issue of identity changes and challenges in employed, educated, or women who have experienced motherhood. However, there were no studies that directly examine women's post-marital challenges and propose some solutions based on their identity style. Several studies have examined the relationship between different identity styles and variables such as marital commitment and marital instability. For example, Reyhani et al. (2016) showed that the informational and normative identity styles have a significant negative correlation with instability in marriage while the diffuse-avoidant identity style has a significant positive relationship with instability in marriage. Heidari, Karimian, and Salari (2015) also found that the informational identity style can predict a couple's marital commitment. Despite these findings, previous studies have often ignored the role of women's identity styles in their post-marital challenges and conflicts. Women may face different challenges and resolve them differently depending on the characteristics of each style. Therefore, the present study aims to study how women deal with post-marital challenges based on their identity style.

Methods

This is a qualitative phenomenological study. An in-depth semi-structured interview was used as the data collection method. In these interviews, several open-ended questions were asked, and after receiving the answers, some other questions were asked to resolve any ambiguity. In the next step, the answers were transcribed and the target concepts were extracted from the answers and categorized. The study population was married women who had been married for at least five years. Purposive sampling was used in which the inclusion criteria were being a woman, volunteering for the interview, being married and living with a husband, and being married for at least five years. Before each interview, the Berzonsky Identity Style Questionnaire (ISI-6G) was given to the participants to determine the scores of their identity styles. Sampling was continued until adequate data were collected. The sample size in this study was 13.

The Berzonsky Identity Style Questionnaire (1992, 1998) is a 40-item scale designed to understand the cognitive processes involved in coping and problem-solving in different stages of the identity crisis. The questionnaire consists of 11 questions related to the informational scale, 9 questions related to the normative scale, and 10 questions related to the diffuse-avoidance scale. The remaining 10 questions are related to the commitment scale which is not part of identity style and is used for secondary analysis and was not used in this study. Answering the questionnaire is in the form of a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). Three scores are obtained for an individual's identity style based on which the participants are ranked in an identity category with the highest score. Individuals who are classified with an informational identity style demonstrate a high level of exploration. Individuals categorized in the normative identity style have a high tendency to align with the views and aspirations of important people and internalize the values and coping styles introduced by such people. Finally, individuals who have a diffuse / avoidant style identity tend to procrastinate and avoid facing their personal problems (Ghazanfari, 2004). In the present study, individuals were placed in one of the informational and normative styles based on the highest score, and individuals who had a diffuse / avoidant identity style were excluded from the research due to not providing answers to the interview questions. However, because each participant scores in three styles, some individuals who were placed in one category demonstrated ways of solving challenges pertaining to other styles,

albeit to a lower extent. Therefore, in addition to being affected by an individual's main personality style, methods of handling challenges may include elements used in other styles as well.

White et al. (1998) reported Cronbach's alpha coefficient for informational, normative, and diffuse-avoidant style identity subscales of .59, .64, and .78, respectively (cited in Ghazanfari, 2004). Farsinejad (2004) also reported Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the subscales of informational, normative, and diffuse-avoidant identity subscale as .77, .60, and .66, respectively. In addition, White et al. (1998) examined the convergent validity of the agreement between the original ISI form and the current form (ISI-6G). They found the raw scores of both scales very similar and the correlation coefficients of these two forms were as .81 for the informational style, .85 for the normative style, and .85 for the diffuse-avoidant style (cited in Ghazanfari, 2004).

To analyze the collected data, the seven-step method proposed by Colaizzi (1978) was used. In this method, after interviewing the research participants, their statements were first transcribed verbatim on paper and reviewed multiple times to fully understand the participants' experiences and challenges. In the second stage, after studying all the descriptions of the participants, meaningful information and statements related to the study subject were identified. The third stage consisted of formulating meanings and extracting the concepts from the data, in which a concept was extracted from each phrase that expressed a meaning related to the individual's way of thinking through identifying important phrases of each interview. After obtaining the formulated concepts, the relevance of the formulated meaning with the main and initial sentences was examined to ensure the validity of the relationship between them. In the fourth stage, the developed concepts were carefully studied and categories were formed based on the similarity of the concepts. In the fifth stage of the Colaizzi method, which is the stage of formulating an analytical description of the participant's feelings and perspectives on the themes, the results were combined to produce a comprehensive description of the phenomenon studied and the general categories were formed. In the sixth stage, a comprehensive description of the studied phenomenon was presented in clear and unambiguous language. In the final stage, validation was done by referring to each sample and presenting a descriptive structure of the meanings of experiences (Colaizzi, 1978, cited in Shaterian, 2017). To do this, statements and codes assigned to each section were provided to the interviewees allowing them to change the codes or add items to their statements as needed.

Results

Table 1
Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Participant Number	Age	Age difference with husband (year/month)	Duration of marriage	Informational style score	Normative style score	Diffuse-avoidant style score	Number of children
1	31	0/3	6	3.63	3.44	2.2	1
2	23	3/0	5	3.27	3.88	2.8	-
3	27	10/0	10	3.5	3.7	2.3	1
4	32	5/7	6	3.6	3.5	2.3	-
5	23	7/0	5	3.5	3.9	4.3	1
6	33	1/0	8	4.09	4.22	2.2	1
7	29	4/0	6	2.63	2.55	2.4	2
8	29	0/0	7	3.64	3.56	2.4	1
9	35	6/0	6	4.54	4.44	1.2	2
10	29	0/5	6	4.27	3.44	4	-
11	27	5/0	5	4.09	3.77	2.8	-
12	34	6/0	8	4	3.22	1.6	-
13	30	2/6	5	3.5	4.1	2.9	-
Mean	29	3/9	6/5	3.71	3.67	2.56	

To find a response to the research question, women's coping strategies were classified based on the identity style. For the informational style, 5 main themes and 16 sub-themes were coded for managing challenge. These themes were: "Conversation" (with 3 sub-themes of listening and respecting other side's opinion, direct conversation on the subject of the dispute until reaching an agreement, and consultation and dialogue with each other), "Resolving problems within the boundaries of the marriage" (with 3 sub-themes of avoiding family interference in marital issues, prioritizing tasks, and consulting), "Adapting to the real situation" (with two sub-themes of facing the reality and accepting it, and adjusting one's expectations and accepting parallel roles), "Flexibility in problem solving" (with 5 sub-themes of obtaining valid information and expanding horizons of one's perspective, understanding, forgiveness and mutual acceptance, paying attention to positives and accepting the reality, and comparative analysis of one's behaviors with those of their parents and changing the adopted behavioral procedures), and "existential awareness" (with 3 sub-themes of increasing the quality of each other's

presence, accepting responsibility for one's behavior and thoughts, and understanding and accepting the phenomenology and logic of men in handling differences).

In handling challenges with a normative style, 4 main themes and 11 sub-themes were coded. These themes were: "relying on social capital" (with 3 sub-themes: consultation and reaching consensus with others, seeking social approval to restore self-esteem, and accepting the norms of the reference group (e.g. the religion) with minor changes), "following pre-existing patterns" (with 6 sub-themes: trying for peace and reconciliation, division of duties and accepting complementary roles, minor changes in management methods, forced obedience towards the spouse without solving the problem, alignment of self with the spouse's family and passive acceptance), "gradual changes" (with 2 sub-themes of allowing time to pass and gaining experience in life), and indirect conversation through sending a message.

In solving the challenge with a diffuse-avoidant style, 3 main themes and 6 sub-themes were coded. These themes were: "passive solutions" (with 2 sub-themes of creating physical distance and taking medicine), "authoritarian solution" (with 1 sub-theme of pointing out the right way to deal the issue), "feeling helpless in solving the challenge" (with 3 sub-themes of loss of control and feeling of guilt, cessation of daily functioning when faced with a problem, and preoccupation with and focusing on the spouse's wishes rather than solving the problem).

In the following table, demographic information and detailed research findings are reported including the main and secondary themes along with summaries of the participants' statements and the number of interviews from which the themes were extracted. The presence of an asterisk next to the number of some interviews means that the problem-solving strategy used by the participant does not match his or her original identity style.

Table 2

Problem-solving methods by participants with the informational identity style

Main theme	Sub-theme	Example Quote
Conversations (1-6-9-10-11-13-14)	Listening and respecting other side's opinion (10)	"We listen to and respect each other's opinions." (10, age 29)
	Direct conversation on the subject of dispute until coming to a conclusion (1)	"We put together everything that upset us to talk directly about them to reach a result." (1, age 31)
	Consulting and talking to each other (1, 7, 9, and 10)	"The conversation was to convince him that it is not his job to manage financial problems alone when I go to work, and that there is no need for personal savings." (1, age 31) / "We talked about it directly and came to the conclusion that I should wear more covered dresses there." (10, age 29)
Resolving problems within the marriage boundaries (1-3-6-7-9-11-13-14)	Preventing family interference in marital issues (1, 6, 7, 10, 11, 13, 14)	"We solve most of our problems and do not involve the families." (7, age 29) / "As we figured out that getting help from them would make the problem worse, we cut it off." (11, age 27) / "We agreed that our challenges do not go beyond the boundaries of our home." (13, age 30)
	Prioritizing tasks (1)	"At the beginning of my life it was very difficult to manage and schedule, but I was able to solve it by prioritizing the plans." (1, age 31)
	Referring to a counselor (3 and 11)	"I agree with getting help from a counselor very much." (11, age 27)
Adapting oneself to real situations (9&10)	Facing the reality and accepting it (9)	"I was beginning to realized that the reality of life is something else, for example, I was sensitive about shopping and getting out, which was not worth it at all." "I also lowered my expectations and managed the financial issues." (9, age 35) / "Because, for example, if the food was not ready, we would go to my mother's home and eat with them and not take it hard, or if the house was dirty, Milad would clean it." (10, age 29)
	Adjusting expectations and accepting parallel roles (9 and 10)	
Flexibility in problem-solving (1-2-3-4-6-7-9-14)	Obtaining valid information and expanding the horizon (3* and 9):	"When I went to the university, I became much more flexible, I gained a lot more information, and I tried to solve my problems, for example, by reading books, or for example, I discussed them with a counselor rather than with my friends." (3, age 27) "I started coming to terms with these differences and solved them ... I tried to use reliable sources and good experiences." (9, age 35)
	Understanding, forgiveness, and acceptance (1, 6, and 7)	"I realized that life commands its own politics, and you can solve your problems gradually by knowing each other's sensitivities and mutual understanding and patience," (1, age 31)
		"We do not compare our families." (6, age 33)

		"Forgiveness and understanding between my husband and I were very effective in improving our relationship." (7, age 29)
	Paying attention to the positive and accepting the reality (2*, 7, and 3)	"In marriage, there is a feeling of peace, growth, and perfection, that makes me see how different I am from my singlehood. I think better about my problems now and make more patient decisions." (2, age 23)
	Analyzing the behaviors of myself and my parents (4)	"So, I began to think a little bit about our problems and tried not to react like before. Not that I deny how I used to react in the past, but see myself as a person who has gained some experience and has become more aware of the problem and now positively, I want it not to be like in the past." (4, age 32)
	Changing the learned behavioral procedures (3* and 7)	"Girls and boys, when they leave the family, naturally 90% of their behaviors come from the family in which they were raised in. But in general, we try to improve ourselves compared to our family practices ... And for example, there are a series of behaviors that we practice which were not practiced by our family of origin." (3, age 27)
Existential awareness (9-13)	Improving the quality of presence (9)	"I try to be energetic during the time I am with them and spend time playing and going out and watching movies together so that my absence is less felt." (9, age 35)
	Accepting responsibility for our behavior and thoughts and self-analysis (13)	"First, in order to recognize the things between us that cause conflicts, we accepted the responsibility of our behavior and thoughts." (13, age 30)
	Understanding and accepting men's phenomenological world and logic in handling differences (13)	"I finally chose to be closer to what my husband prefers because although his reasons are not 100% acceptable to me, his logic was acceptable and I understood and knew that what he says is of value and priority to him and he didn't mean to limit me." (13, age 30)

Table 3

– Problem-solving methods by participants with the normative identity styles

Main theme	Sub-theme	Example Quote
Relying on social capital (2 and 3)	Consulting and thinking with others (2)	"I get help from my friends and family as much as possible to solve my problems as they possess distinguished thoughts and intelligence which can be a great help to me." (2, age 23)
	Seeking social approval to regain self-esteem (3)	During those 4 years that our differences became intense, I completely lost my self-confidence. Going to university helped me a lot to regain my self-confidence." (3, age 27)

	Acceptance of the norms of the reference group (religion) with minor changes (3)	"My dress was in harmony with my husband's preferences. My husband's family did not have a problem with this because they know their son and his thoughts, but I tried very hard to wear the hijab and at the same time as a newlywed of an open family, have all of the beauty any bride would have. To be satisfied with this feeling in me first, and in my husband so that he does not think if I go out with hijab, I may be inferior to others in appearance."(3, age 27)
	Trying for peace and compromise and reconciliation (3, 4*)	"I tried less than him, and he might have very much liked housekeeper housewife, but I may not have been as successful as he wished, but we did not have much of an issue because we tried to work it out with each other and to solve our problems by compromise."(3, age 27) "Finally, some way of making compromises came about."(4, age 32)
	Division of duties and acceptance of supplementary roles (3)	"From the first day, my husband demanded that handling financial issues the economic helm of life and the economic management of the household to be with him. I do not interfere much in the financial field, but offer comments or consultation in issues such as buying or selling a house or furniture, but only my husband handles the details." (3, age 27)
Following the pre-existing patterns	Minor changes in management practices (3)	"We ran into problems which made us decide that there should be a change in our handling of payments." (3, age 27)
	Compulsory obedience to my husband without solving the problem (4* and 7)	"I could not cope, but I just lowered my expectations from my husband and thought I would not allow such arguments, albeit being of importance, create challenges in my life. For example, whenever he says let's go out, I agree, but whenever I suggest that we go out if he agrees so be it, but I do not expect him to agree with everything I suggest and have come over this although with dissatisfaction, but I am gradually accepting this" (4, age 32)
	Harmony with my husband's family (9* and 10*)	"I did not become religious, but I tried to appear more dressed in front of them." (10, age 29)
	Giving in without acceptance (13)	"I talked about it a lot with my husband, but this was not one of those things that could bother me or challenge me, and I finally accepted it for many reasons." (13, age 30)
Gradual change (3-4-11-13)	The passage of time (4*, 11 and, 13)	"They put a lot of energy into this issue, and I was hardly able to deal with it and it was very difficult for me to solve it. It took them a long time, maybe 3 to 4 years, to realize that this was just due to my personality and not because I hated them." (4, age 32).

	Gaining experience in life (3 and 4*)	"Now we have both moved away from them and also realized the problem, and so some changes have come along and finally some reconciliation has taken place." (4, age 32)
Indirect conversation by sending a message (6)	Indirect conversation by sending a message (6)	"Before talking to him directly, I would send him messages related to these issues." (6, age 33)

Table 4

Problem-solving methods by participants with the diffuse / avoidant identity style

Main theme	Sub-theme	Example Quotes
Passive solutions (4&8)	Creating a physical distance (4*)	"I was also incapable of solving it and I only counted the days to come to Tehran from Isfahan so that I didn't have to visit them as often." (4, age 32)
	Taking medicine (8*)	"Sometimes, when I have a problem with my husband or my son makes me frustrated, I use low-dose sedatives under my doctor's supervision." (8, age 29)
Authoritarian solution (8)	Pointing out the right way to deal with the issue (8*)	"Remind him how to behave properly." (8, age 29)
Feeling frustrated in handling the challenge (3-4-6)	Loss of control and feeling of guilt (3*)	"Sometimes I feel guilty about myself, but when I get angry, I lose control of the situation." (3, age 27)
	Impairing daily functions after facing the problem and mental predicament (4*)	"I often think a lot when a problem arises that I may not be able to do my main tasks well for three or four days, especially if it is a major issue." (4, age 32)
	Focus on the husband's wishes not on solving the problem (6*)	"To solve problems, early on in our married life I made a full biography of my husband listing the things he likes or dislikes, and I kept adding to it. During my marriage, I studied the subjects of personality and psychology to better know what would make my husband happy or sad."

Discussion

In the present study, the women's ways of coping with challenges were classified based on their identity styles. Families have different developmental stages and face different challenges in each stage. Women, as one of the main pillars of family life, use different methods to handle these challenges, which may differ in terms of effectiveness. One of the characteristics that can affect a woman's choice of a strategy for solving challenges is their identity style because individuals develop different views about challenges and possible methods to solve them according to their identity styles. The purpose of this

research is to study how women cope with the challenges of marital life with a focus on the role of their identity style.

According to the findings, women with an informational identity style act in five ways to resolve the challenges of marital life. One of these methods is "dialogue" which has 3 sub-themes. This finding is consistent with the results reported by Rajabi et al. (2018). They found that the best marital relationship is the one in which everyone can express their feelings and ideas. Also, couples who discussed the problems reported fewer conflicts and were more satisfied with their life. Rajabi, Hamidi, Amanollahi Fard and Aslani (2018) concluded that successful couples stayed together peacefully through effective communication, dialogue, and expression of their wishes and opinions as well as respecting the other side. In accordance to this finding and to further explain it, we can say that people with an informational identity style actively use the available information in dealing with everyday issues and life challenges and then make informed decisions. Since people with an informational identity style are receptive to new information and open to it, they use methods such as conversation and respecting the other side's opinions.

"Problem-solving within the boundaries of couples" with 3 sub-themes is another challenge solving method employed by people with an informational identity style. Balvardi, Balvardi, and Aghajani (2016) showed that the more relationships a couple may have with different people and with influential people in their life, the more the stable and healthy trend of their lives will be affected by the crisis. Bryant, Congar, and Meehan (2001) stated that establishing the right relationship and setting up proper boundaries between the newly formed family and the extended family is one of the most important tasks of a couple in early marriage. Also, Hatami-Varzaneh, Ismaili, Farahbakhsh, and Borjali (2016) showed that the divorcing couples have had a serious shortcoming in defining a clear and distinct boundary with their parental families. In explaining this finding, it can be said that since people with an informational identity style make their decisions based on examining different aspects of issues and independent of the involvement and opinion of others, they prefer to manage their issues between themselves. In fact, people with an informational identity style are more likely to possess the ability to maintain the functionality and independence of their marital life and to create a clear boundary between themselves and their extended families, and if seeking advice from others becomes necessary, they prefer to consult with a person who is both expert and impartial.

"Adapting to the real situation" with two sub-themes is another method used by women having an informational identity style. Rowshani, Naeeni, and Bastani (2016) considered recognizing the reality of marital life and having a correct attitude towards it as comforting factors in marital life, which is in line with the sub-theme of "knowing the reality and accepting it". Fathi, Parvin, and Javadian (2016) found in their research that women do not complain about anything in life due to shame or excessive feeling of devotion towards their husbands, and sometimes even hide their personal opinions and show satisfaction with the existing conditions. Overlooking a wife's wishes by a husband makes her feel bad. These unpleasant feelings accumulate over time and may outbreak suddenly and cause discomfort for the other side (Sabbaghi, Salehi, & Moghaddamzadeh, 2017). To offer an explanation based on our findings, it can be said that due to the high openness of people with an informational identity style to new information and experiences, they are able to adapt to a different setting in their marital life and have a high level of ability to turn challenges into opportunities. Therefore, it seems that adapting to the real situation by women does not necessarily mean shyness or reducing intimacy, because in people with an informational style, this adaptation takes place along with engaging in conversations.

"Flexibility in problem-solving" also has 5 sub-themes. Rajabi et al. (2018) proposed that if in the family environment, instead of stubbornness and selfishness, understanding and attendance are practiced along with love in couples, the quality of the marital life undoubtedly will be enhanced, and moreover, the couple, and particularly, women mentioned a great increase in expressing emotions, empathy, and interest. Yousefi and Karimnejhad (2018) stated that forgiveness and letting go are effective in reducing marital conflicts. These findings are consistent with the sub-theme of "understanding, forgiveness and acceptance" in the present study. Also, Rajabi et al. (2018) emphasized the need for flexibility in couples, especially in dealing with cultural differences. Naji Esfahani, Jahangiri, and Lahsaeizadeh (2018) confirmed that one of the strategies couples use in resolving conflict is rethinking about themselves, meaning contemplating on their thoughts and behavior, and seeking to resolve the problem through self-evaluation. This is consistent with the sub-theme of "analysis of their own and their parents' behaviors". In explaining this finding, it can be said that women with an informational identity style approach issues rationally and logically, and are less likely to use emotion-based reactions such as stubbornness and Silent treatment. In other words, women with an

informational identity style have more mature interpersonal skills and when faced with problems, they try to analyze them and develop the most appropriate approach to the solution.

"Existential awareness" with 3 sub-themes was another method employed by women with informational identity. This finding is consistent with the research of Koraei, KhojastehMehr, Sudani, and Aslani (2017) who consider personality traits and responsibility as one of the determinants of the permanence of marriage. Nazari (2010) believes that in a successful marriage, couples take responsibility for their behavior and do not expect their partner to be responsible for keeping them happy. To explain this finding, it can be said that people with an informational identity style are actively looking for information and have a high level of openness and flexibility in dealing with new information about themselves and others, hence when facing challenging differences with others try to understand the other side's phenomenological context.

Women with a normative identity style rely on "social capital" for dealing with the challenges of married life which had three sub-themes in our study. Tayebinia and Rahmani (2017) have suggested that some women seek support from the family and trusted individuals to resolve their challenges. To explain this finding, it can be said that people with a normative identity style are highly dependent on the values and decisions of important people in their lives and have little tolerance in dealing with challenging and ambiguous situations. When dealing with challenges of marital life, they also seek approval and help from others because they are not fully able to solve their problems on their own. In addition, since they have acquired their values and behavior patterns based on complete obedience to others, they are not able to change these values, or content to minor and superficial changes when necessary.

"Following the pre-existing patterns" with 6 sub-themes was another way for women with a normative identity style in dealing with challenges. Tayebinia and Rahmani (2017) stated that women tend to adapt in order to change their living conditions. Also, Berzonsky (1990) concluded that the normative identity style has a significant negative relationship with openness to different values and behaviors. To explain this finding, it can be said that since people with a normative identity style exert little effort to search for information and resolve problems when faced with challenges and contradictions, they show little flexibility and try to resolve the problem through complete and unquestioned obedience of others.

"Gradual change" with 3 sub-themes was another method employed by women with a normative identity style in dealing with problems. The current study did not reach a conclusion similar to existing reports for this theme. This result can be explained by noting that people with a normative identity style do not show openness to new information and hence do not make fundamental changes. They may implement gradual change over time and only within the norms as they gain experience.

For women with a diffuse-avoidant identity style, the theme of "passive solutions" with two sub-themes and the theme of "authoritarian solutions" with one sub-theme, and "feeling helpless in solving the challenge" with 3 sub-themes were the methods that these women use to face challenges. Tayebinia and Rahmani (2017) concluded in their study that some women use methods such as justification, indifference, retaliation, and silence to resolve their challenges. Hatami Varzaneh et al. (2016) also found that one of the problems of separating couples is the lack of consultation, neglecting the other side's recommendations, and dysfunctional communication, meaning that there is either no dialogue or it is in the form of insulting and criticizing each other. Naji Esfahani, Jahangiri, and Lhasaeizadeh (2018) proposed that one of the strategies of couples in the face of trouble is to remain silent. Berzonsky (1992) also found that people with a diffuse-avoidant style resorted to fantasizing, distancing from the situation, and tension-reduction tactics when faced with problems. To explain these findings, we can note that since people with a diffuse-avoidant identity styles avoid solving problems and challenges in the individual and interpersonal domains and are more likely to resort to external control sources when faced with problems they lose control and feel helpless.

In explaining other findings of our study, we can mention that in addition to the methods used based on their identity style, participants also use methods related to other styles. In other words, in some cases, participants with the informational identity style also used methods related to the normative identity style. In fact, it seems that when women face challenges that they do not have sufficient resources to resolve (such as social support, expertise, knowledge, time, etc.), they employ methods that mainly belong to other identity styles. In addition, given the rather small difference in the scores of most participants in different identity styles, applying methods associated with identity styles other than their own identity styles is in fact not an unlikely approach.

Limitations of research

Due to the lack of cooperation by women with a diffuse-avoidant style, we had difficulty in finding the problem-solving styles of these participants, and hence the themes associated with this style were extracted from the interviews of participants whose second or third identity style was diffuse-avoidant.

Suggestions for further research and application

Considering the need to use effective problem-solving methods by women for handling post-marital challenges, it is suggested that training courses be held for women and their husbands with an emphasis on problem-solving and decision-making skills, and especially informational problem-solving sessions be held for participants with a diffuse-avoidant identity style.

It is suggested that premarital and family counselors pay attention to the unique style of the referring couples and their characteristics related to these styles and, if necessary, inform the couple about these attributes.

It is suggested that a similar study be conducted on men to examine their phenomenological perception.

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