



THE INFLUENCE OF ATTACHMENT STYLE AND NARCISSISTIC PERSONALITY DISORDER ON SATISFACTION IN THE COUPLE RELATIONSHIP

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Abstract

This research was started based on the general interest in narcissism and its influence in married life, insufficient quantitative research on narcissism and its influence in married life, and to complement them, since most of the research in the field has focused mainly on the theoretical part and on the analysis of some case studies, regarding the presence of narcissism criteria and their manifestation in married life. The research carried out focused on highlighting some relationships between attachment styles, the presence of some criteria of narcissistic personality disorder and the satisfaction felt by a person within the couple relationship, starting from the premises that there are certain links between attachment style and narcissism on the one hand, between narcissism and satisfaction within the couple relationship, and between attachment style and satisfaction within the couple relationship on the other hand. Both attachment types and narcissistic personality disorder generate behavior patterns that are extremely resistant to change, even when they cause the individuals some problems. However, understanding more about these aspects and their influence within the couple relationship, the results of this research are encouraging, with applications in both the theoretical and practical framework of couple and family psychotherapy, with the possibility of being used in explaining and possibly diminishing certain behaviors that act against the quality of life and the emotional or mental system.

Keywords: narcissistic personality disorder, attachment styles, couple satisfaction

1. INTRODUCTION

Benjamin Karney indicates in his studies that satisfaction in a couple is a complex and multidimensional phenomenon (Karney, 1995). Satisfaction in the couple is defined as an emotional state felt on a personal level, of being satisfied with the interactions within the life of the couple, with the experiences had and the expectations created. The problem of psychosexual identity, objectified in the area of couple relations, also belongs to couples and intimacy. The most important and

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most frequently cited components of satisfaction in a couple are respect, involvement, communication and the quality of sexual life.

Marital relationship satisfaction has been studied and researched in simple or complex research designs. A major reason for the strong scientific interest in relationship satisfaction is its importance to personal and family well-being. Evidence suggests that being married or cohabiting in a close relationship correlates with higher levels of personal well-being, and furthermore, relationship satisfaction is one of the most predictive factors for relationship continuation. Given that couples who experience declines in relationship satisfaction are more likely to dissolve the relationship in the future, it is important to identify factors that contribute to change in relationship satisfaction (Sciangula & Morry, 2009).

A key issue in the couple relationship is attachment—a concept that describes the relationship pattern (needs, strategies, and vulnerabilities) that is formed by the intersection of the individual's temperament and the temperaments, personalities, and attachment patterns of those who care for him. Attachment patterns are central to the development of core beliefs and values regarding fundamental issues of safety, trust, and survival (Lepore, 2010).

Relational patterning is the repetition of the same behaviors multiple times with new people in the individual's life. Repetition of patterns is not only within romantic relationships, as the same types of problems are encountered repeatedly in any type of relationship. Relationship patterns are also called relationship templates or relationship patterns, because they are almost formulas that the individual always uses, even without realizing it. People are prone to repeating certain patterns of unhealthy relationships, consciously or not. Thus, a pattern is reached from which the individual should escape, unless, consciously or not, he continues to go round in the same circles, endlessly. People usually repeat these patterns in the hope of getting a different result. Many of the individuals have comfort zones and return to them, because they are much more controllable than the unknown that a change brings, but instead these zones of conformity do not allow the growth and development of the person (Lelord & Andre, 2022).

Predominantly conditioned by the biological hereditary basis, as well as by the variability it supports within the interaction of individuals with the environment in which they develop, personality becomes a frame of reference that is characterized as having a continuous dimension, which varies simultaneously on several dimensions, so that, in order to create a description of an individual's personality, it is necessary to know the weight of each personality trait. Differences between individuals, known both psychologically and from a sociological perspective, reinforce the idea that individual behavior varies according to the existential context. Each individual has a different way of behaving in certain life situations, but doing it in a certain way, similar every time, a fact that exposes individual behavior as stable and supported by a certain predictability specific to each individual (Sîrbu, 2016).

The concept of narcissistic personality was first published in 1925 by Robert Waelder, although as early as 1889 Paul Nacke and Havelock Ellis used the term narcissism in the field of psychiatry. The authors mentioned above described

individuals with a narcissistic personality as condescending, feeling superior to others, preoccupied with themselves and permanent admiration, while also showing a lack of empathy, often reflected in the sexuality of the investigated groups, which is based on purely physical pleasure, without no implication in emotional intimacy report (Bollas, 2022)

This trait, like any other, exists on a spectrum. At one end of the spectrum is what some call healthy narcissism. This is represented by a positive sense of self, associated with well-being or personal satisfaction. People with a healthy self-image can balance their self-esteem through prosocial behaviors that nurture a sense of reciprocity in relational dynamics. At the other end of the spectrum, narcissism can have a negative impact on how the person sees themselves and the style in which they interact with others. Thus, for narcissistic personality disorder to be present, symptoms must be present in most areas of a person's life and remain stable over time, whereas in narcissistic style, narcissistic traits may appear sometimes or only in certain contexts (Haller, 2018).

2. OBJECTIVE AND HYPOTHESES

2.1. OBJECTIVE

The research objectives focus on:

1. Identifying correlations between attachment style and narcissism.
2. Observing some correlations between narcissism and satisfaction within a couple (both with general satisfaction within a couple relationship and with its component elements: contentment within the couple, cohesion within the couple, understanding within the couple and emotional expression between the members of the couple).
3. The evaluation of specific correlations regarding the dyads, regarding the securing type attachment, the avoidant type attachment, respectively the anxious type attachment and the general satisfaction within the couple relationship.

2.2. HYPOTHESES

The research hypotheses are the following:

1. It is assumed the existence of some correlations between the factors of secure type attachment, avoidant type attachment, anxious type attachment and the presence of narcissism criteria.
2. It is assumed the existence of some correlations between the presence of narcissism criteria and the factors of general satisfaction within a couple, namely contentment within a couple, cohesion in the couple relationship, consensus within a couple and emotional expression between the members of the couple.
3. It is assumed the existence of some correlations between the factors of secure type attachment, avoidant type attachment, anxious type attachment and general satisfaction within a couple.

3. METHOD

3.1 GROUP OF PARTICIPANTS

The lot on which the research was carried out is composed of 120 respondents, with an average age of the respondents of 42 years, 60% being female respondents and 40% male respondents. From the point of view of completed studies, 95% have completed higher education and 5% secondary education. Within the studied group, 41% of the respondents are in a marital relationship, 31% are in a consensual partner relationship and 28% have left a couple relationship.

3.2 INSTRUMENTS

1. The attachment type scale was developed by Collins and Read (1990): AAS (Adult Attachment Scale) and is intended to measure attachment type and differentiate subjects accordingly.

2. The SCID II – DSM IV questionnaire, which consists of a set of questions that refer to the respondent's usual way of being, i.e. how he or she has usually felt or behaved in recent years. Only the items from no. 73 to 89 of the SCID II, which correspond to narcissistic personality disorder.

3. The DAS (Dyadic Adjustment Scale) couple satisfaction questionnaire which contains 32 items and includes 4 subscales: Satisfaction within a couple, Consensus within a couple, Cohesion within a couple, Affective expression between couple members.

3.3 THE PROCEDURE

The questionnaires were completed online by the respondents, specifying that both the code of ethics and the GDPR legislation were respected. All participants were instructed about the research and consented, being aware of their anonymous identity.

3.4 RESEARCH DESIGN.

For the design of the research, the following variables were taken into analysis:

1. Dependent variables: secure attachment, avoidant attachment, anxious attachment, presence of narcissism criteria, general satisfaction in the couple, contentment within the couple, cohesion within the couple, understanding within the couple and affective expression between the members of the couple.

2. The independent variables: gender of subjects, age, completed studies, type of couple relationship in which they are, duration of couple relationship (present or the last one they were in).

The design of the conducted research is of the following type:

N: X O1,2,3

Where: N – represents the non-randomized group (sample); X – represents the interventions (measurements) carried out on the respondents in the sample; O (1,2,3) – are the three measurements made with the help of the three tools used.

4. RESULTS

The analysis of the resulting data, after measuring the type of attachment and the presence of narcissism criteria, indicates that 37% of the respondents have a predominantly secure attachment type, 48% a predominantly avoidant attachment type and 15% report a predominantly anxious attachment type. Regarding the presence of the criteria that define narcissism (personality style and narcissistic personality disorder), 4% of respondents did not report any criteria, 37% fulfill 1-4 criteria (which corresponds to a narcissistic personality style) and 59 % met more than 5 criteria (according to SCID II – DSM IV) which indicates the presence of a narcissistic personality disorder. The statistical analysis of normality revealed that all the obtained dependent variables do not have a normal distribution, so non-parametric statistical tests were applied to verify the hypotheses.

4.1. TABLES AND FIGURES

H1: The existence of some correlations between the factors of secure type attachment (AS), avoidant type attachment (AE), anxious type attachment (AA) and the presence of narcissism criteria (N) is assumed. In order to verify this first hypothesis, the Spearman correlation coefficient was calculated. Table 1 shows the results of this analysis.

Table no. 1 – Results of the Spearman correlation test for H1

Correlations						
Spearman's rho	AS	Correlation Coefficient	AS	AE	AA	N
			1.00	0	0	0
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.529**	.180*	.537**	
		N	120	120	120	120
	AE	Correlation Coefficient	-.529**	1.000	.155	.737*
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.092	.000	
		N	120	120	120	120
	A	Correlation Coefficient	-.180*	.155	1.000	.184*
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.049	.092	.044	
		N	120	120	120	120
	N	Correlation Coefficient	-.537**	.737*	.184*	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.044	
		N	120	120	120	120

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The results reject the null hypothesis and confirm that there is a significant correlation between secure attachment and narcissism criteria ($p < .001$). The correlation coefficient is negative, according to the sign of the correlation coefficient ($r = -0.537$), which indicates that when the first variable (secure attachment) increases, the second variable (narcissism) decreases. The correlation coefficient is in the range (0.4 - 0.6), which means a good, reasonable intensity correlation. The effect size (R-Square) is 0.288 – mean effect value, indicating that the effect obtained is unlikely to have occurred by chance. Being statistically significant, the effect appears to be important from a practical point of view as well.

Also, the results reject the null hypothesis and confirm that there is a significant correlation between avoidant attachment and narcissism criteria ($p < .001$). The correlation coefficient is positive, according to the sign of the correlation coefficient ($r = 0.737$), which indicates that when the first variable (avoidant attachment) increases, the second variable (narcissism) also increases. The correlation coefficient is in the range (0.6 - 0.8), which means a high intensity correlation. The effect size (R-Square) is 0.543 – the effect value of the large effect, which indicates that the effect obtained is significant, statistically and practically.

Similarly, the results reject the null hypothesis and confirm that there is a significant correlation between anxious attachment and narcissism criteria ($p < .05$). The correlation coefficient is positive according to the sign of the correlation coefficient ($r = 0.184$), which indicates that when the first variable (anxious attachment) increases, the second variable (narcissism) also increases. The correlation coefficient is in the range (0 - 0.2), which means a fairly weak intensity correlation. The size of the effect (R-Square) is 0.033 – small effect value, which indicates that the effect obtained although statistically significant, the results do not prove an important relevant practice, it is possible that the effect detected actually does not exist (being present only a power high stat).

It is concluded that there is a negative correlation of medium intensity between secure attachment and the presence of narcissism criteria, which means that in people with strong secure attachment, the presence of narcissism criteria is diminished. Also, between avoidant type attachment and the presence of narcissism criteria there is a positive correlation of high intensity, which means that in people with high avoidant type attachment, the presence of narcissism criteria is also at a high level. It is also concluded that there is a positive correlation of low intensity between anxious attachment and the presence of narcissism criteria, which means that in people with a high level of anxious attachment, the presence of narcissism criteria is also high.

H2: It is assumed the existence of some correlations between the presence of narcissism criteria (N) and the factors of general satisfaction within a couple (DAS), namely contentment within a couple (DS), cohesion within the couple relationship (DCOH), consensus within a couple (DCON) and emotional expression (EA) between the members of the couple.

In order to verify the second hypothesis, the Spearman correlation coefficient was calculated. Table 2 presents the results of this analysis.

Table no. 2 – Spearman correlation test results for H2

		Correlations						
Spearman's rho	N	Correlation Coefficient	N	DS	DCO H	DCO N	EA	DAS
			1.000	-	-	-	-	-
			Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	120	120	120	120	120	120	
	DS	Correlation Coefficient	-	1.000	.835**	.850**	.746*	.942**
			.681**	.	.000	.000	.000	.000
			Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.	.000	.000	.000
	N	120	120	120	120	120	120	
	DCO H	Correlation Coefficient	-	.835*	1.000	.828**	.766*	.901**
			.626**	.000	.000	.	.000	.000
Sig. (2-tailed)			.000	.000	.	.000	.000	.000
N	120	120	120	120	120	120		
DCO N	Correlation Coefficient	-	.850*	.828**	1.000	.776*	.959**	
		.661**	.000	.000	.	.000	.000	
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.	.000	.000	.000
N	120	120	120	120	120	120		
EA	Correlation Coefficient	-	.746*	.766**	.776**	1.000	.833**	
		.476**	.000	.000	.000	.	.000	
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.	.000
N	120	120	120	120	120	120		
DAS	Correlation Coefficient	-	.942*	.901**	.959**	.833*	1.000	
		.669**	.000	.000	.000	.000	.	
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.
N	120	120	120	120	120	120		

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The results reject the null hypothesis and confirm that there is a significant correlation between the criteria of narcissism and satisfaction within a person's couple ($p < .001$). The correlation coefficient is negative, according to the sign of the correlation coefficient ($r = -0.669$), which indicates that when the first variable increases, the second variable decreases. The correlation coefficient is in the range (0.6 - 0.8), which means a high intensity correlation. The effect size (R-Square) is 0.447 – signifying a medium to large effect size, indicating that the effect obtained is unlikely to have occurred by chance and appears to be practically important.

Also, the results reject the null hypothesis and confirm that there is a significant correlation between the criteria of narcissism and satisfaction within a person's couple ($p < .001$). The correlation coefficient is negative, according to the sign of

the correlation coefficient ($r = -0.681$), which indicates that when the first variable increases, the second variable decreases. The correlation coefficient is in the range (0.6 - 0.8), which means a high intensity correlation. The effect size (R-Square) is 0.463 – signifying a medium to large effect size, indicating that the effect obtained is unlikely to have occurred by chance and appears to be practically important.

Similarly, the results reject the null hypothesis and confirm that there is a significant correlation between narcissism criteria and consensus within a person's couple ($p < .001$). The correlation coefficient is negative, according to the sign of the correlation coefficient ($r = -0.626$), which indicates that when the first variable increases, the second variable decreases. The correlation coefficient is in the range (0.6 - 0.8), which means a high intensity correlation. The effect size (R-Square) is 0.391 – signifying a medium to large effect size, indicating that the effect obtained is unlikely to have occurred by chance and appears to be practically important.

It is also noted that the results reject the null hypothesis and confirm that there is a significant correlation between the criteria of narcissism and the cohesion of a person's couple relationship ($p < .001$). The correlation coefficient is negative, according to the sign of the correlation coefficient ($r = -0.661$), which indicates that when the first variable increases, the second variable decreases. The correlation coefficient is in the range (0.6 - 0.8), which means a high intensity correlation. The effect size (R-Square) is 0.436 – signifying a medium to large effect size, indicating that the effect obtained is unlikely to have occurred by chance and appears to be practically important.

Also, the results reject the null hypothesis and confirm that there is a significant correlation between the criteria of narcissism and affective expression between the members of a person's couple ($p < .001$). The correlation coefficient is negative, according to the sign of the correlation coefficient ($r = -0.476$), which indicates that when the first variable increases, the second variable decreases. The correlation coefficient is in the range (0.4 - 0.6), which means a good, reasonable intensity correlation. The effect size (R-Square) is 0.226 – which signifies a small to medium effect size, indicating that the effect obtained is unlikely to have occurred by chance.

It is concluded that between the criteria of narcissism and the satisfaction within a person's couple there is a negative correlation of medium intensity, which means that in people in whom the presence of the criteria of narcissism is high, the satisfaction within a couple of a person is low. Also, between the criteria of narcissism and satisfaction within a person's couple there is a negative correlation of medium intensity, which means that in people in whom the presence of criteria of narcissism is high, the satisfaction within a person's couple is low. It is also concluded that between the criteria of narcissism and the consensus within a person's couple there is a negative correlation of medium intensity, which means that in people in whom the presence of narcissism criteria is high, the consensus within a person's couple is low. Similarly, between the narcissism criteria and the cohesion of a person's couple relationship there is a negative correlation of medium intensity, which means that in people in whom the presence of the criteria of narcissism is high, the cohesion of a person's couple relationship is low. Finally, it is concluded that between the criteria of narcissism and the cohesion of a person's couple

relationship there is a negative correlation of low to medium intensity, which means that in people with a high presence of the criteria of narcissism, the emotional expression between the members of the couple of a people is low.

H3: The existence of correlations between the factors of secure type attachment (AS), avoidant type attachment (AE), anxious type attachment (AA) and general satisfaction within a couple (DAS) is assumed. In order to verify the third hypothesis, the Spearman correlation coefficient was calculated. Table 3 presents the results of this analysis.

Table no. 3 – Spearman correlation test results for H3

Correlations						
Spearman's rho	AS	Correlation Coefficient	AS	AE	AA	DAS
			1.000	-.529**	-.180*	.465**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000	.049	.000
		N	120	120	120	120
	AE	Correlation Coefficient	-.529**	1.000	.155	-.669**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.	.092	.000
		N	120	120	120	120
	AA	Correlation Coefficient	-.180*	.155	1.000	-.157
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.049	.092	.	.087
		N	120	120	120	120
	DAS	Correlation Coefficient	.465**	-.669**	-.157	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.087	.
		N	120	120	120	120

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The results reject the null hypothesis and confirm that there is a significant correlation between secure attachment and satisfaction within a person's couple ($p < .001$). The correlation coefficient is positive, according to the sign of the correlation coefficient ($r = 0.465$), which indicates that when the first variable increases, the second variable also increases. The correlation coefficient is in the range (0.4 - 0.6), which means a good, reasonable intensity correlation. The effect size (R-Square) is 0.216 – which signifies a medium effect size, indicating that the effect obtained is unlikely to have occurred by chance. Being statistically significant, the effect appears to be important from a practical point of view as well.

The results also reject the null hypothesis and confirm that there is a significant correlation between avoidant attachment and satisfaction within a person's couple ($p < .001$). The correlation coefficient is negative, according to the sign of the correlation coefficient ($r = -0.669$), which indicates that when the first variable

increases, the second variable decreases. The correlation coefficient is in the range (0.6 - 0.8), which means a high intensity correlation. The effect size (R-Square) is 0.447 – signifying a medium to large effect size, indicating that the effect obtained is unlikely to have occurred by chance and appears to be practically important.

The results retain the null hypothesis and conclude that there is no significant correlation between anxious attachment and satisfaction within a person's couple ($p > .05$).

It is concluded that between the attachment of the secure type and the satisfaction within a couple of a person there is a positive correlation of medium intensity, which means that in people in whom the attachment of the secure type is at a high level, the satisfaction within a couple of a persons is raised. Also, there is a moderate to high negative correlation between avoidant attachment and a person's marital satisfaction, which means that for individuals high in avoidant attachment, marital satisfaction of a person is low. Regarding anxious attachment type, it is concluded that there is no significant correlation between anxious attachment type and satisfaction within a person's couple.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Despite the relationship of narcissism to interpersonal dysfunction, surprisingly little empirical research has been devoted to understanding the effect of narcissism on intimate relationships in general or marital relationships in particular. Mainly, this research in the field has highlighted the fact that narcissism is associated with a number of behaviors and actions, which affect both sexual and relational satisfaction. However, research on the association between personality and behavior demonstrates that personality traits such as narcissism only predict behavior in domains that activate components of the personality system (McNulty & Widman, 2013).

The conclusions of this research focus on a triangulation link between the type of attachment, the presence of the criteria that describe the narcissistic personality traits and the elements of satisfaction in the couple, these being a basis from which further research can be started, to complete the area of quantitative research regarding the influence of narcissism in interpersonal relations in contemporary society.

The results obtained after conducting this research indicate that there is a negative correlation between secure attachment and narcissism, and between non-secure attachment (avoidant or anxious) and narcissism there is a positive correlation, so the more the predominant attachment is secure, with both the possibility of manifesting some traits of the narcissistic personality is reduced. It was also observed that between narcissism and satisfaction within a person's couple, there is a negative correlation, which indicates that when narcissistic personality traits are manifested, satisfaction within the couple, consensus with the other member of the couple, couple cohesion, emotional expression within the couple as well as general satisfaction in the couple are at a low level.

Last but not least, the third important conclusion of the research highlights the fact that there is a positive correlation between secure attachment and satisfaction within a person's couple, and between non-secure attachment (avoidant or anxious) and satisfaction within to a person's couple there is a negative correlation, so the more the predominant attachment is of a secure type, the greater the possibility of general satisfaction within a couple.

Studies have shown that the type of attachment is also highlighted within the couple relationship, when one or both partners in dysfunctional relationships that reproduce family patterns manifest a pattern of behavior within the relationship that is, in essence, a remnant of what they have learned early, and which became a reactionary and relational pattern.

The conclusions of this study can have applicative effects, starting from the premise that through psychotherapy requested within a dysfunctional couple relationship, the manifestation of the characteristic elements of narcissistic personality disorder can also be improved, aiming towards a healthy type of narcissism, represented by a feeling of positive self can be associated with a state of well-being, generating a healthy self-image, high self-esteem and manifesting prosocial behaviors that nurture the feeling of reciprocity in relational dynamics.

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