THE ROLE OF EARLY MALADAPTIVE SCHEMAS ON ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS: A REVIEW STUDY

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Abstract

Human beings are a social entity, and the relationships have an important role in the lives of people. Beliefs and patterns of behavior in relationships are shaped by early life experiences (Bartholomew & Shaver, 1998; Hazan & Shaver, 1994). Ainsworth and Bowlby (1991) have stated that babies can only feel safe when they can have parent figures that care for them and take responsibility for the consequences of their behavior. A similar view of object relations and attachment theories is that the individual develops schemas according to the level of meeting the needs of early childhood and reflects these schemas to current life events (Rafaeli, Bernstein & Young, 2013). There are 18 early maladaptive schemas (EMSs) that arise due to most of the relational needs, and they arise in distressed relational processes. In the relationship, if the partners are faced with situations that trigger their schemas, they may be insufficient to meet each other's needs, show sensitivity and cognitive distortion (Young, Klosko & Weishaar, 2013). As a result, the purpose of this study is to briefly introduce the EMSs, to provide some research on the role of EMSs on romantic relationships, and to suggest recommendations to mental health professionals on how to conceptualize and treat romantic relationship problems. Research conducted over the past two decades shows that attachment problems persist in adulthood and these problems have a strong influence on a large number of behaviors in relationships. Research on the role of EMSs on romantic relationships show that schemas play an active role in adult-related conflict (Messman Moore and Coates (2007), divorce process (Yousefi, Etemadi, Bahrami, Ahmadi & Sadat Fatehi

2010), inclinations of romantic relationship (Cihan Güngör, 2015), marital satisfaction (Kebritchi, & Mohammadkhani, 2016), couple satisfaction and individual mate value (Dumitrescu, & Rusu, 2012). Thus, it can be said that moving through EMSs in relational problems enables the systematic understanding of emotional, cognitive and behavioral structures.

Keywords:

Romantic Relationship, Early Maladaptive Schemas, Early Life Experiences, Adult Attachment

1. Introduction

A human being is a social entity and therefore needs other people to sustain his existence. In this sense, relationships have an important role in human life. When relationships are discussed, there is a variety of things ranging from parent-child relationships to peer relationships and romantic relationships. Klein (2014), stated that infant's initial relationship with his mother played a decisive role in the whole emotional life of the individual. Similarly, Heinz Kohut emphasizes that the individual develops selfhood by being influenced by others through interpersonal relationships (Corey, 2008). Sullivan has argued that personality cannot exist without a real or imagined interpersonal relationship and likewise Erikson cites the importance of people's interaction with others in each of the eight stages of development that he has included in his theory (Burger, 2006).

Relationships that have such an important place in the human life may not always be the cause of happiness and sometimes can create situations which individuals cannot reach any solution. Actually, the individual can experience relationships that cannot be maintained for one or several reasons throughout life. There are many underlying reasons for whether relationships maintain. As a result of the research on these reasons, ideas emerged that the relationships established by the individual during his or her life, his belief in these associations, and the behavioral patterns of these relationships are shaped by early life experiences (Bartholomew, & Shaver, 1998; Hazan, & Shaver, 1994).

In the early days of this view mooted, Neo Freudians indicated that the relationship of the individual with the romantic partner is a reflection of the parent-child relationship, and that the child's internalization of the parent's images will form the basis of his or her view on his or her partner in his future romantic relationship. In this sense, it can be said that the child's attachment to his or her parents influenced his or her ability to make meaningful relationships with others during his lifetime (Burger, 2006). Bowlby (1991) suggested the

theory of attachment in accordance with this view and defined bonding as the compassionate connection of the essential biological bonds to maintain the individual's life (Geldard, & Geldard, 2013). Ainsworth and Bowlby have stated that babies can only feel safe when they can have parent figures that care for them and take responsibility for the consequences of their behavior.

Bowlby (1998) argued that in the ethological theory that he developed, babies were born with a repertoire of behaviors seeking intimacy and support from those who care them, for example crying to act on the person who cares for him is the most obvious of these behaviors (Ainsworth, 1989). From his point of view, the search for intimacy is a regulatory tool developed to protect the individual from physical and psychological threats and to alleviate discomfort. Successful implementation of these regulatory functions results in a sense of secure attachment where the world is a safe place, where one can rely on the supporting person, and therefore can safely explore the environment and interact effectively with other people (Bowlby, 1988).

Mary Ainsworth observed three types of attachment styles in children; secure, avoidant and ambivalent- anxious attachment styles. The classification is based mainly on the behaviors exhibited by the baby when it comes back together with the mother figure after separation. Babies with a secure attachment can reduce their exploratory behavior for their parents and disturbances, based on pre-separation situations. Babies who exhibit ambivalent-anxious attachment show a degree of anxiety even in pre-separation situations, experience intense discomfort with separation and exhibit a dual structure against the mother in the event of a meeting with the mother and they alternate between looking for intimacy with their mother and resisting against interaction. Babies with avoidant attachment rarely cry in separation situation and, in the event of a meeting with the mother, they avoid from the mother, alternate between proximity-seeking and avoidant behaviors or ignoring her completely (Ainsworth, 1979).

These styles of attachment show themselves when these children become adults and have romantic relations. Research based on this theoretical basis shows that adults with secure attachment style are happier in relationships than adults with other attachment styles. And adults with secure attachment style often match people with similar attachment style. On the other hand, while adults with avoidant attachment style try to deal with fear of intimidation and jealousy, adults with ambivalent- anxious attachment style often fall in love, but they are afraid of losing their partner too much, hopelessly looking for happiness and they do whatever their partners ask (Ainsworth, 1979). A similar view of object relations and attachment

theories is that the individual develops schemas according to the level of meeting the needs of early childhood and reflect these schemas to current life events (Rafaeli, Bernstein & Young, 2013).

Research conducted over the past two decades shows that attachment problems persist in adulthood and these problems have a strong influence on a large number of behaviors in relationships (Rafaeli, Bernstein, & Young, 2013). There are five schema domains includes 18 early maladaptive schemas that arise due to most of the relational needs, and they arise in distressed relational processes (Rafaeli, Bernstein & Young, 2013). In a 15-year longitudinal study conducted to examine the relation between early maladaptive schemas, and both child and adult attachment, it was concluded that there were more signs of EMS among young adults with either an insecure ambivalent child attachment, or an insecure preoccupied adult attachment style, compared to their peers with secure attachment style (Simard, Moss, & Pascuzzo, 2011). It is observed that most of the problems experienced in close relationships have emerged through the prism, which is formed by the needs of partners, the schemas, the ways of coping and modes (Rafaeli, & et al., 2013).

At each stage of the relationship, various challenges and development possibilities await us. Early maladaptive schemas seem to emerge mostly in relational processes. For this reason, moving through early maladaptive schemas in relational problems enables the systematic understanding of emotional, cognitive and behavioral structures. Thus it can be said that handling of romantic relationship problems through schemas seems beneficial in terms of solving problems and evaluating the possibilities of development. As a result, the purpose of this study is to briefly introduce the early maladaptive schemas, to provide some research on the role of early maladaptive schemas on romantic relationships, and to suggest recommendations to mental health professionals on how to conceptualize and treat romantic relationship problems.

2. Methodology

As a research method, the literature search was used. In accordance with the purpose of the research, firstly the concepts of early maladaptive schemas and romantic relationship have been explained. Then some research and theoretical information on the relationship between early maladaptive schemas and romantic relationships have been presented. Lastly, some suggestions on the subject have been presented to mental health professionals.

3. Theoretical Framework and Related Research

3.1. Early Maladaptive Schemas

Early maladaptive schemas are self-destructive emotional and cognitive patterns that occur due to recurrent negative associative experiences with important people in early stages of our development and persist throughout life (Young, Klosko & Weishaar, 2013). A schema which develops during childhood and adolescence is a very stable and durable negative structure has an impact on every area of the individual's life (Bricker, & Young, 2012). In the psychology and psychotherapy, a schema can be described as any principle that is generally regulated in order to make sense of an individual's life experience. Schemas that people have created to keep their view of the world and themselves stable may sometimes be called cognitive compatibility, but in reality, they are flawed and distorted (Young, Klosko & Weishaar, 2013).

People tend to perceive the others as they learn in an unconscious process from people they have previously been in social relationships with. For example, an older brother who sees both his colleagues at work, as well as other drivers in traffic as a competitor like his younger brother whom he has control above, reflects that tendency. From here it can be said that, in order to make room for new forms of behavior, first of all, spontaneous behavioral patterns must be blocked (Roediger, 2015).

Schemas are self-destructive patterns, and people see these patterns as a part they cannot imagine changing (Young, Klosko & Weishaar, 2013). Young and his colleagues distinguished 18 schemas, which were gathered in five areas and appeared as a result of obstructing five essential childhood needs: secure attachment, autonomy, realistic limits, self-gratification and play (Rafaeli, & et al., 2011; Young, Klosko, & Weishaar, 2013). The important point is that schemas fight for its own survival and because of that prevent similar needs from being fulfilled in adulthood (Bricker, & Young, 2012).

3.1.1. Disconnection and Rejection Schema Domain

People with schemas in disconnection and rejection domain believe that their stability, security, care, love and belonging needs will never be met because these needs hadn't met in their childhood. For this reason, they cannot create a secure and satisfying connection with others. They may experience serious difficulties in maintaining the relationship or tend to avoid it entirely. A family form that is unstable, abusive, refusing, cold or isolated from the outside world has an important role in the formation of this schema domain. Emotional deprivation, abandonment, mistrust, social isolation and defectiveness are the schemas contained in this domain (Young, & et al. 2013).

3.1.2. Impaired Autonomy and Performance Schema Domain

People with schemas in impaired autonomy domain have a sense of inability to act as independent as their peers and to be separated from their families because these people were protected too much in their childhood or had not been given the necessary attention. For this reason, they cannot create their own identities and are unable to live their own lives. Failure, dependence, vulnerability, and enmeshment are schemas in the context of this schema domain (Young, & et al. 2013).

3.1.3. Impaired Limits Schema Domain

People with schemas in impaired limits domain are often those who cannot develop enough inner limits about self-discipline or reciprocity, showing selfishness, pertness, irresponsibility, and narcissism. Parents who are overly fond of their children and who are not bordering on socially inappropriate behavior play an important role in the development of this schema (Young, & et al. 2013).

3.1.4. Other Directness Schema Domain

People with schemas in other directness domain focus too much on the reactions of other people than their own needs in order to be approved, maintain emotional connection or avoid a negative reaction. This situation leads to an absence of awareness towards their preferences and feeling of anger. This schema can be seen in people who do not feel unconditional love and acceptance in their childhood (Young, & et al. 2013).

3.1.5. Over Vigilance and Inhibition Schema Domain

People with schemas in inhibition schema domain usually try to subdue their spontaneous emotions and drives and follow strictly and internalized rules about their own lives at the cost of happiness, self-expression, relaxation, close relationships or health. Hard, repressive and prescriptive parents play an important role in the development of this schema domain (Young, & et al. 2013).

Considering the origins of the schema domains, it is observed that schemas mostly occur depending on the extent of relational needs met and one of the areas that facilitate these needs to be met during adulthood is a romantic relationship. Robert (2017) refers that happy, healthy and stable relationship as an adult is one of the best ways to heal the wounds of childhood.

3.2. Romantic Relationships

Our relationship development is the result of interaction between biological origins, such as the attachment system and experiences of early age such as reflections from our

parents (Roediger, Behary, & Zarbock, 2016). Close relationships that can be in various shapes, sizes and forms are essential for human existence and experience a variety of interpersonal processes, undergo a number of crises and threats, and can be examined in several different ways (Hendrick,& Hendrick, 2000). The terms of close relationship and love are sometimes used to indicate a personal relationship, sometimes a specific item or characteristic of personal relationships, or sometimes a certain emotion that people feel (Atak, & Taştan, 2012). Romantic relationships as a kind of close relationships are continuing voluntary interactions that are mutually acknowledged and have a peculiar intensity which can be marked by expressions of affection including physical ones (Collins,& Van Dulmen, 2015).

According to Moss and Schwebel (1993), romantic relationships consist of five components: commitment, emotional closeness, cognitive closeness, physical closeness, and reciprocity. Commitment, a precondition for the development of other dimensions of romantic relationships, expresses the desire to be with romantic partners. Emotional closeness, which allows individuals to share their feelings internally, can be expressed as the partners' awareness of each other's emotional worlds. The third element, cognitive closeness, indicates that partners have a deep awareness of each other's cognitive worlds. Physical proximity emphasizes the physical interaction between partners, and finally, the reciprocity factor represents the effort that partners have made to maintain the relationship.

Snell, Schicke and Arbeiter (2002) have found that there are twelve inclinations of relationship which are relationship esteem, relationship preoccupation, internal relationship control, relationship consciousness, relationship motivation, relationship anxiety, relationship assertiveness, relationship depression, external relationship control, relationship monitoring, fear of relationship and relationship satisfaction. Relational esteem refers to positive evaluation on tendency of own skills in close relationships; relationship preoccupation refers to continuously thinking about close relationships; internal relationship control refers to close relationships are derived from self-control; relational consciousness refers to perception capacity of in all of the aspects of close relationships; relational motivation refers to desire for close relationships; relationship anxiety refers to concern about sentimental relationship; relationship assertiveness refers to initiative towards close relationships; relationship depression refers to discourage, unhappiness, disappointment, and despair about close relationships; external relational control refers to believe that close relationships are controlled by chance or fate; relationship monitoring refers to considering external evaluation as important; fear of relationship refers to fear of building up a close relationship and

relationship satisfaction refers to being happy and feeling joy about close relationship (Büyükşahin, 2005).

As with all other social relationships, romantic relationships are also progressing in typical stages. Forming is the phase of being in love and defining yourself as a couple. Storming is the stage in which power struggles over rules, roles and values are experienced. Norming is the phase in which the rules of the game are accepted together and performing stage refers to being a well-functioning couple (Roediger, Behary, & Zarbock, 2016). Early maladaptive schemas may be obstacles to progress in these stages. Because of that, people have to aware of what their schemas are and how these schemas affect their relationship quality.

3.3. Romantic Relationships and Early Maladaptive Schemas

In the research conducted in recent years, researchers are trying to explain the role of early maladaptive schemas in interpersonal relationships and it is seen that schema therapy applications have positive results in relationship problems (Hayes & Parsonnet, 2016). Moving from this finding, in this section, romantic relationships discussed within the context of early maladaptive schemas.

Early maladaptive schemas are basically interpersonal by nature and according to Schema Therapy, schemas reflect early adverse interactions and lead to difficulties in later life (Bernstein, 2005; Thimm, 2013). Thus, interpersonal problems can represent interpersonal maladaptive strategies used to manage the painful emotions accompanying the activation of early maladaptive schemas. A schema is the inner trace of the previous relationship experiences. After the activation of schema people behave schematically in the direction of this schema. And this situation limits their freedom. They stay in schema trap. So when they look for a new partner, they search on impulse in the light of their previous relationship experiences (Roediger, Behary & Zarbock, 2016). Because there is a tendency to be attracted by what is known and it is called as relationship chemistry (Young & Klosko, 2016). But, as with parent-like people, an intensive relationship can also change the activated schemas to wellness (Roediger, Behary & Zarbock, 2016). Dysfunctional schemas can be perpetuated by unhealthy, relationships or healed and transformed by healthy and satisfying ones (Hayes & Parsonnet, 2016).

For example, people with schemas in disconnection domain believe that their stability, security, care, love and belonging needs will never be met because of these needs hadn't met in their childhood. Another example is that people with the abandonment schema can be extremely cautious about the signs of rejection in relationships, because of their fundamental

belief that people will leave them and they will be emotionally alone forever (Rafaeli, & et al., 2013; Young, & Klosko, 2016). In this sense, schema therapy tells us about the concept of chemistry.

When we interact with people according to our beliefs and mindscapes, our schemas can be triggered and that triggering cause to constitute chemistry of schema (Karaosmanoğlu, Şaşıoğlu & Azizlerli, 2016). Chemistry is healthy and necessary to have been able to maintain a meaningful relationship up to a certain level. (Rafaeli, & et al., 2013). The factors that make up the chemistry are passion, instant influence, idealization of partner and likelihood that the desired partner is not suitable. This chemistry can also emerge with the activation of the schemas that emerged during childhood. In fact, people often choose each other based on their existing schemas. In this case, chemistry can lead to serious problems in relationships because it emerges while the basic schemas of one or both of the partners are triggered (Rafaeli, & et al., 2013; Stevens, & Roediger, 2017).

In the relationships, if the partners are faced with situations that trigger their schemas, they may be insufficient to meet each other's needs, show overly sensitivity and cognitive distortions (Youn, Klosko & Weishaar, 2013). As a consequence, it can be seen that even small disagreements are transformed into a gap and that schemas cause insensitive and even abusive behaviors towards partners (Rafaeli, & et al., 2013). Considering all this, it can be said that the early experiences and the beliefs we have acquired through experiences have a very important role in the close relationships we have established in our adult years.

3.4. Related Research

In this section, some research within the context of early maladaptive schemas and romantic relationships will be presented.

Messman Moore and Coates (2007) investigated the mediating role of early maladaptive schemas in the relationship between early childhood emotional abuse and interpersonal conflicts among adults. The sample of the research has consisted of 382 university students. The research findings show that there are three early maladaptive schemas which are Mistrust and Abuse, Abandonment and Defectiveness and Shame have the mediating role in relationships between early childhood emotional abuse and interpersonal conflicts. Findings support the long-term effects of childhood psychological abuse and show that the effects of psychological abuse continue through early maladaptive schemas.

Dumitrescu and Rusu (2012) investigated the association between early maladaptive schemas, the level of couple satisfaction and the mate value of individuals involved in stable relationships. The research was conducted on a sample of 182 Romanian participants (174

females and 8 males, average age = 23.99 years). Results indicate that an increased level of early maladaptive schemas predicts a decreased level of couple satisfaction and that the level of early maladaptive schemas negatively correlates with the individual mate value.

A research conducted with 408 university students shows that; the relationship satisfaction was predicted by disconnection schema domain as negative; impaired limits as positive. The fear of relationship was predicted by impaired autonomy, disconnection and unrelenting standards schema domains as positive; impaired limits as negative. Relational esteem was predicted by impaired limits and unrelenting standards schema domains as positive; disconnection as negative. External relational control was predicted by impaired autonomy and unrelenting standards schema domains as positive. Relational assertiveness was predicted by disconnection schema domain as negative; impaired limits as positive. Internal relational control was predicted by impaired limits as positive; impaired autonomy as negative (Cihan Güngör, 2015).

Hatamii and Fadayi (2015) suggested that the intimacy related problems, marital conflict, and early maladaptive schemas seemed to be the main reason for the divorce of couples so that the couples' problems could be improved and the divorce could be reduced with an effective therapy. In this regard, the research conducted with women who want to divorce to measure the effectiveness of Schema Therapy on early maladaptive schemas, intimacy related problems and marital conflict. In the research, a single-sample research model was used and three women who filed for divorce and were directed to family courts were selected. As measurement tools Young Schema Questionnaire- Long Form, Marital Conflict Inventory, and Intimacy in Marriage Questionnaire were used. The findings of the research show that Schema Therapy is effective in increasing the intimacy between spouses, and decreasing the conflict of marriage and diminishing early maladaptive schemas.

Hasseini, Rahimi, and Nouri (2016) conducted a study with female students with romantic relationships to investigate the effects of social support and early maladaptive schemas on mental health levels. The research sample consisted of 170 female university students who have at least three months' romantic relationship. As measurement tools, General Health Inventory, Social Support Inventory, and Young Schema Scale were used. Descriptive statistics, Pearson Correlation Coefficient and stepwise regression methods were used as the analysis method. The research findings show that there is a significant relationship between the Mistrust and Abuse schema and male friend support as negative; Unrelenting Standards and female friend support as positive; and family support and depression as negative. In conclusion, the Undeveloped Self, Defectiveness and Shame, Emotional

Deprivation and Abandonment schemas seem to explain the mental health of women with a romantic relationship by 32 percent.

Kebritchi and Mohammadkhani (2016) conducted a study which aimed to investigate the role of burnout, early maladaptive schemas, and style in marital satisfaction among young couples. The sample consisted of 100 couples (100 females and 100 males, couples) aged 20 to 35 years. Results showed that there was a significant negative correlation between marital burnout and all other subscales and marital satisfaction, and a significant positive correlation between marital burnout and all maladaptive schemas except emotional deprivation schema.

A study which aimed to investigate the effectiveness of schema therapy on alleviates symptoms of emotional breakdown after the end of the relationship conducted with three women of college students who refer to college counseling centers to release of their emotional breakdown symptoms. The release of their emotional breakdown symptoms. The samples were selected by Purposeful sampling method to take part in16 individual sessions of schema therapy. The findings showed that schema therapy has been effective in reducing symptoms of emotional breakdown (Mouchan, Bahmani & Askari, 2016).

Karami (2017) conducted a study to investigate the relationship between expectations of married students' to marital conflict, and early maladaptive schemas. As measurement tools Young Schema Questionnaire and Kansas Marital Conflict Questionnaire were used. The research sample is comprised of 300 married university students selected by multistage random sampling. As a result of multiple regression analyzes findings shows that schemas are predictions of marital conflict.

As a result, it seems that the attachment style, thought patterns and schemas that the individual has acquired from his early life experiences have played an effective role in the relationships he or she has established in adulthood.

4. Conclusion and Recommendation

More recently, the complex interaction between two people and their history has become a focus of Schema Therapy Model which suggests ways to explain, improve and resolve some of the obstacles to successful relationships, through its focus on meeting basic human needs which are to feel safe, secure, connected and cared about (Hayes & Parsonnet, 2016). Each and every human has these needs, even if the individual is too fractured to see it. The therapist works to rally the partner's recognition of these needs and demonstrates a model of expressing loving understanding towards their past lack of fulfillment, with expressions of a current sharpened focus towards them (Simeone- DiFrancesco, 2016).

In romantic relationships, there are some important situations which appear when schemas are triggered or schema chemistry cause to intensive emotions. Schema Therapy considers such moments as an intervention point to reduce the schema intensity and create a mutually conscious relationship. At this point of intervention, the person starts to interrogate the existence of a specific role he or she always takes in relationships, the active schemas which he or she has, the schema-driven interactions, and the secondary gains that this match provides for both himself or herself and his partner. The schema awareness that is gained through these interrogations allows the person to better understand the factors that are effective in their relationship (Stevens, & Roediger, 2017).

Schema Therapy can help the therapist to understand and possibly find some resources to deal with relationship challenges in couple counseling (Stevens, 2016). For example, affairs are often part of the breakdown of a relationship and it seems that few people have much psychological insight into what happened or are wiser after the event. But schema therapy by focusing the basic needs and the schemas which h emerge through these needs aim to provide an understanding where client's feelings and needs come from and that information allows the therapist to help the client to be more effective in healthy adult mode (Stevens, 2016). Therapists should teach to clients to recognize schemas and to realize when falling into a schema activation (Roediger, Behary, & Zarbock, 2016).

The important thing in therapy is to monitoring physical and emotional reactions and modifying the activations when noticing shifts that ignite an internal adrenaline reaction signaling a schema eruption that may lead to coping mode. Additionally, the therapist attunes to each partner, focusing attention on clear perceptions so that each partner "feels felt." When the therapist senses a schema or mode activation internally, he or she applies modifying techniques that include the meditative tools of breathing and focusing (Atkinson, 2016).

As a consequence, early maladaptive schemas cause the individual not to meet the need for emotional support, and the individual is unable to find a healthy solution as long as he or she is not aware of their schemas. Thus, from the information provided, it can be said that moving through early maladaptive schemas in relational problems enables the systematic understanding of emotional, cognitive and behavioral structures and it is thought that the use of Schema Therapy in the conceptualization and treatment of romantic relationship problems will be beneficial.

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